

Anything Goes Game Changer

Story: Anything Goes Game Changer

Storylink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11701126/1/>

Category: Ranma + Sekirei Crossover

Genre: Humor/Adventure

Author: Vimesenthusiast

Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/4785338/>

Last updated: 08/12/2020

Words: 345037

Rating: M

Status: Complete

Content: Chapter 1 to 16 of 16 chapters

Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: Using a sensor technique Ranma finds Miya, recently married woman who has more ki than anyone he has ever seen. After a Ranma style meeting, the two become sparring partners in return for Ranma's help in repairing Izumo house. Years later, Ranma seeks her out after arriving at the Tendo dojo, soon realizing that there is something big going on in Tokyo, and decides to get involved

Chapter 1: Chapter 1

I don't own Sekirei or Ranma. Can't draw that well, and don't think that arguing with someone means your romantically involved with them.

Since my HOTOH muse has not been fed enough to come up with a real plot for my Wizard of the Dead notion, here is the story idea that garnered the most votes after that one. This chapter is sort of like the first version of *Herd in Space* chapter 1 I put out. If I take this story up full time, I would probably go back and add another 5,000 words or so to it, and makes some changes possibly, especially in the few combat scenes, adding more detail. But it should still give you all an idea of where I am going with this concept. Hope you all enjoy, and Happy New Years!

Anything Goes Game Changer (Temp title)

Ranma scowled, kicking the ground irritably. His lunchtime matches with his sort-of-friend Ryoga were fun, interesting, and often times the only real exercise he got these days. His old man was usually busy with his job, despite always pontificating that true martial artists should only care about the martial arts and be willing to make do with the clothing on their back. *Funny how that stops the moment he ran out of sake money and I ran into a truant officer.*

Of course the fact that Ranma had sort of accidentally knocked out said truant officer and then been given a rather stern talking to by the police had nothing to do with it. How was Ranma supposed to know that he was supposed to be in school anyway? *They did say something about it only being for another two years, but it's so boring! Why the heck would anyone want to sit inside for so long and listen ta boring teachers drone on about boring subjects when ya could be learning martial arts? Still, at least the teachers at the school they sent me ta are understanding.*

The teachers at Fujimori Correctional School knew that fighting was simply a part of what they had to deal with given the students sent to their school, though Ranma and Ryoga's fights were at a far higher skill level than most. So they had made a deal with Ranma. In order to keep their 'play fights' from being interrupted, Ranma had agreed to show Ryoga to each class, and of course to school and back.

At first Ranma thought it was a joke, but that was before he watched Ryoga walk around a corner in the school's second floor hallway only to disappear from sight despite Ranma being just a few steps behind him. Ryoga didn't show up for a week after that then when he did, he had a tan and sand in his boots.

At first Ranma had wanted to make fun of the boy and would have if one of the teachers hadn't told him that both Ryoga's parents had the same directional curse. No one knew why, but it certainly was a real affliction. Ranma didn't know what it was like to have a mother, whenever he asked his Oyaji about it Ranma was simply told she was gone, and not to worry about it. But having to deal with a father who could disappear the moment he left your room, that would've been weird and very sad too. It also gave Ranma more respect for Ryoga on many levels.

So he had agreed to the conditions, and for over two months now had walked Ryoga around the school and to and from the other boy's home. Today however it seemed as if that wasn't going to happen. *Ryoga knows he's not supposed ta leave the house without me here! What the hell man, I know you're prideful and all but face reality!*

"You must be Ranma, my son's notes have mentioned you a time or two. I'm Toro Hibiki." Said a deep voice as Ranma made to turn away from the back door to the house.

He turned, seeing the door opening and then looking up and then up again at the monster of a man who was slowly moving out of the doorway holding onto it for a moment as if afraid it would disappear if he let go. He had kind features, a full head of hair, and a long, twirling sort of mustache that looked like it was supposed to be from some Disney villain or other. He wore dust stained clothing, a T-shirt and jeans, which did nothing to hide the man's monstrous physique.

I know my Oyaji's strong, but even he might look at this guy and back off. Still, if he's as slow as his son, maybe all that strength wouldn't matter. Ranma knew he was a little bit weaker than Ryoga, but he was so much faster that it didn't matter. "Er yeah, I'm the student assigned ta make sure Ryoga gets ta class. But I think he tried to leave before I got here today..."

"Yes, he left a note saying that we were out of food and he was just going to hop down to the store." The man rolled his eyes and Ranma groaned. "Hold on a moment, let me see if he's anywhere nearby." Ranma cocked his head

quizzically watching as the man closed his eyes bringing his hands together in front of his face for moment as if he was praying. A moment later Ranma felt something waft over him like a warm breeze, but the breeze kept going on as whatever it was spread out.

A moment later the older man opened his eyes shaking his head sadly. "No, I can't sense him or my wife anywhere." Toro looked to the side muttering under his breath. "Probably just as well, I could've sworn I heard movement in our bedroom, and my wife's got a very shrill tongue on her when faced with little surprises like that."

"What was that thing you just did?" Ranma asked, his brows furrowed as he looked around. "What do ya mean 'sense'?"

The older man's eyes went up in surprise. "You actually felt that, that's very impressive for your age. That was a sort of 'echolocation' I suppose you could say. It's a ki technique that my family developed to allow us to sense other sources of life energy in the area, which can let us hunt each other down if we're close enough. I can tell who it is by understanding the reading, sort of like a sonar analyst, though that takes more practice."

Ranma's face brightened up. "Ki, I've been learning about that lately, though I haven't heard 'bout anything like that!" His Oyaji had begun to teach what ki was, and had told him that some martial artists could take their own life energy and use it to attack or defend, but that it would take decades for Ranma to be able to do the same thing.

What Genma didn't say was that Ranma had been doing the former for years. Genma had never held back against Ranma, which forced Ranma to develop the ability to toughen his body up physically as well as via his ki. But that wasn't a conscious use on his part, simply something Ranma's body did automatically.

"This is a sort of family specialty, though Ryoga hasn't learned it yet. It would be normally be years, possibly ten or more before he's got enough ki to make it." Toro frowned looking down at Ranma, his eyes speculative. "Tell you what kid, if you know what ki is, you think you can learn it?"

"I'd love to give it a try!" said Ranma practically hopping up on his feet excitement at learning anything about ki.

"Good." the Hibiki patriarch gestured him inside. "Remember though this is a family technique, I expect you to try and teach it to Ryoga when you see him. It's be nice if he could finish Junior High on time, something my wife and I couldn't do. And you're not to teach it to anyone else without my permission. I'm trusting on your word of honor for this."

Ranma nodded quickly, understanding his point. Of course family techniques were important, stealing them outside a fight was dishonorable in the extreme. Nor did he have any issue with teaching Ryoga, since it might help get the baka to stick around if he could learn it.

"Come on then, let's do this now before I find myself somewhere else again. Stupid family curse." He shook his head, before smirking. "Still, we wouldn't be nearly as rich as we are if we didn't have it."

Ranma shrugged. Not having his father's predilection towards drink, Ranma didn't really care about money per-se. It was nice he supposed, but his Oyaji had taught him how to live off the land, even if that land wasn't wilderness but cities, and where to steal food and everything else. One thing Genma had passed on to Ranma was that food wasn't something anyone could own if you were hungry. Some of his other lessons Ranma was beginning to question during this long stay in one place though.

Looking around, Ranma smiled slightly. The inside of the house was an odd affair with several dozen different interior designs shown, including a Greek pillar in one corner, a picture of the American Wild West, and a pair of sofas the origin of which Ranma couldn't guess at. When he'd first seen it Ranma had been surprised by it, but since then he'd simply seen it as a sign of the Hibiki's turning their curse to their advantage in a way, which Ranma respected.

"Wait there, I'll find something to drink." The Oyaji said, moving in the direction of what Ranma saw was the stairs up to the second floor rather than the kitchen.

"I'll get it," Ranma said quickly moving past the man. "Don't worry, I know where everything is."

A few moments later Ranma had made them some tea, and sat down across from the man in one of the sofas. After taking a sip appreciatively, Toro looked at Ranma closely. "So, do you do any meditation?"

Ranma nodded. "Some, concentration and mental organization stuff."

"Good, that will give us a starting point. Mind you I doubt you'll be able to learn this all in one go, but I'll give you the

general gist of it and you can see how far you get on your own time."

The basic premise of the technique was simple. You basically took your ki, and pushed it out in a very thin wave in every direction around you. The wave could go as far as you had energy to power it. But the mental control over your ki was the most important part. Especially to Ranma since he understood it was the start of learning to do a lot more with his internal ki than just this one technique.

Ranma was able to visualize the act that first day, something which surprised Toro. But it took Ranma over two weeks to actually produce a wave, and even then it took him longer to figure out how to understand what he was seeing. Since Toru had unfortunately escaped his house at some point and disappeared, Ranma had done this through trial and error, helped by the fact that Ryoga came back.

"What do you mean you know one of my family's techniques?!" Ryoga growled angrily his hands clenching and unclenching as if to reach forward and grab the slightly less built youth in front of him.

"Easy Ryoga!" Ranma said holding up his hand specifically, having just told Ryoga about the technique as the two of them waited for homeroom to start. "Your father was at home a few weeks ago when I stopped by to get you and he taught me it so I can find you. He wants you to graduate on time you know, and apparently you can't do that if you keep on missing large chunks of the school year." Ranma shrugged. "I don't get the point of graduatin' really, but it seemed important to yer father, so I suppose you should probably look into it."

Ryoga rolled his eyes. "You know, there's more to life than just martial arts."

"Sure there are." Ranma said with a shrug. "It's just all of that craps boring, that's all. Anyway, you want to learn it or not?"

From there the two of them fell into a pattern, with each lunch starting with Ryoga trying to learn the technique for half the lunch period. But he had a lot more trouble with the visualization aspect than Ranma did. For one thing, he hadn't had any meditation training, something Ranma had surprisingly learned from Genma, as well as a few monks during stays in monasteries while they were on the road. For another, Ryoga had yet to develop the admittedly meager ki reserves Ranma had already. Angry at his failing, Ryoga would try to take it out on Ranma, starting their lunch fight.

This sequence of events continued over the next few weeks, though Ryoga insisted on paying Ranma back for the trouble of making certain he got to school and to all his classes by helping Ranma bring his own grades up. Ranma found himself actually enjoying history, though obviously more about the wars than about anything else, but still it was interesting stuff. Ranma also proved to be good at reading and writing with enough incentive. Foreign languages as well, which both of them excelled in, so much they were near to the college level in English, with Ryoga knowing several more languages, and Ranma knowing a smattering of a few Asian languages.

One day this cycle was interrupted however. Ranma showed up at Ryoga's house, knocking on the front door, but did not receive a reply, nor did he hear any sound of movement from within. "Oh, you've gotta..." Groaning aloud, Ranma moved to the back yard, jumping over the fence easily with a wave to a neighbor, an elderly woman who lived there with her equally elderly husband.

She waved back shaking her head sadly. "I don't think they're home, any of them."

Ranma paused flipping to grab the top of the fence and holding himself there in midair with an ease even Olympic-caliber gymnasts would have found hard to credit. "Do you know when Ryoga left?"

The woman's equally elderly husband came out of the house behind her, shaking his head sadly. "He apparently had a book out from the local library, and the library is just down that way." He pointed down the road. "Only a few blocks away, he must have wanted to try to get there on his own." The old man shrugged.

"I get it, thanks." Ranma nodded shaking his head sadly. He'd actually come to respect Ryoga's unwillingness to give into his directional curse. But frankly whatever his willpower, there was just some things Ryoga couldn't overcome, which was depressing when Ranma thought about it.

Damn it, and I thought he'd be here, I was lookin' forward to our fight damnit! Well I suppose I can see if he's still in the area. Ranma thought without much hope as he flipped back off the fence. He'd learned that the more time that passed between when Ryoga disappeared and when Ranma found him, the greater the area Ryoga could cover.

After a moment Ranma shook his head letting his hands fall back to his sides. *Nope, though my pulse can't cover that much territory, about four blocks or so in every direction, so he could still be somewhere in the city.* Ranma didn't

know, but that range was actually remarkable for someone so young. Then Ranma suddenly smiled. *The teachers're always angry when I show up without him, and I do have a method to search for him if he's within the city somewhere...* With that Ranma 'reluctantly' decided it was his duty to skip class for the day to see if he could find his friend.

An hour later he'd decided to give up, it was obvious that Ryoga was nowhere within the city. But Ranma was in no rush to head back to school just yet either. Pausing on a roof, he frowned thoughtfully. *I wonder how far I can push that technique now, I've just been using it over the same area I used the first time, but can I push it out further now that I've practiced it so much?* Thinking that, Ranma found a handy rooftop and sat down on the top of it, crossing his hands in front of his face.

Breathing in deeply he then let it out slowly expelling ki from his body out in the echolocation maneuver at the same time. A few minutes later he gasped, not only feeling it go much further than the first time, but also because he had gotten a huge reading from it. It was like the first time he'd felt his Oyaji's ki signature, only a million times more! *Wow, I didn't know there was a martial arts master of that level nearby! hell I didn't know anyone could have a ki signature that powerful!* Ranma grinned suddenly. *I wonder if he'd be up for a spar? I'll probably get my ass kicked, but meh, wouldn't be the first time.*

Ranma had been feeling a little antsy lately. He and Ryoga hadn't done nearly as much sparing as they used to and his Oyaji wasn't around to give a challenge. *This person though, if they're as good as that energy says they are, they'll give me all I can handle and then some!* The thought was a cheerful one, and Ranma bounded to his feet, moving off over the rooftops towards the north of Tokyo proper.

OOOOOO

Miya Asama, newlywed wife to Takehito Asama, sighed looking down at the list that she had compiled, going through Takehito's old property. It had been left to him by his parents, but he had been away at college at the time. Then he'd moved on with his then-friend Minaka and others, traveling out to Kamikura Island where they eventually met. He stayed there for several years before coming back and living in the bachelor's quarters of the new tower that was being built in central Tokyo until he and Miya married.

For all these reasons no one had lived in the old inn for years, save his friend Seo occasionally when he was in town, and that just wasn't enough. A lot of problems had piled up in that time, hence her sigh. *Half the floor boards need repair, if not outright replacement, two of the doors are broken, we might have an infestation of rats on the second floor. The water and electricity are working, but the kitchen appliances could all be replaced.*

She sighed again. *I've studied how to cook extensively, but I didn't realize I should also be studying carpentry, plumbing and all the rest. Darn it, this means that we'll have to rely on Seo.*

She scowled at the very idea, disliking the other man intensely. He was a layabout, a pervert, and an all-around horrible individual, whose only saving grace was that he could pretty much turn his hand to any menial task that was on the offer. *I dread having him nearby when Take-chan and I are going to start sleeping together, ugh, that makes me feel dirty just thinking about it.*

Suddenly Miya's eyes narrowed, a feeling coming over her as if a sensor Sekirei was practicing her powers. It wasn't the first time she'd felt that, though the epicenter of this one was much closer than the other few times. *I wonder what's causing that? I thought there were only the Disciplinary Squad free of the tower at this point, did Yume add a sensor type? She'd be very young, but still a useful addition.*

With a sigh Miya turned away from that problem going back to her original one. *I suppose I should also check the backyard.*

There she added a few more items to her list. One tree needed trimming desperately and several of the shingles on the roof and the surrounding wall at the back of the property needed replacing. Weeds had also conquered the grass throughout the garden, though some of the vines growing along the walls were rather pretty.

She was just about to turn and go inside when a loud boisterous voice said "Whoa, this place is really run down, there's a martial arts master here, really? Dammit I sure as hell hope he ain't like my Oyaji."

Miya turned quickly, surprised at where the voice had come from because it had come from the roof of a nearby building. There stood a young boy, around 12 or so perhaps, standing there on the edge of the rooftop without a care in the world. From his expression though he looked a little irritated.

Before she could say anything the boy leaped off the edge of the roof. Gasping in horror at what she assumed was a suicide attempt, Miya made to dash forward but stopped in midstride as he bounced off the outer wall of the garden and landed neatly on his feet by the tree. He stared at her, then around before asking hopefully "I don't suppose you'd know if there's a martial arts master here?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about." Miya said, frowning. "And has anyone ever told you shouldn't suddenly jump into someone else's property?"

"Yeah lot's a people, but if there was a martial artist here, well, that kind of thing'd be normal." He frowned staring at her than around. "Coulda sworn the signal was comin' from this area..."

He closed his eyes bringing his hands together and a second later Miya felt it again. *It's coming from the boy! But, but he's human, isn't he? There were those other ships that should've been sent out, I suppose he could be a descendent of one of the other ships, though even so, he's a bit young.*

She watched as the boy's eyes widened and locked on her. "Riiiiight..." he said drawling the words. "No martial artist master here, suuuure."

Feeling a sudden urge to tease Miya held up one hand delicately to her mouth covering her mouth as she chuckled. "Hohoho, I have no idea what you're talking about, I am just a normal newlywed wife."

"Pull the other one lady. You're the first female martial arts master I've met, but..." He shrugged. "That technique doesn't lie. My name's Ranma, and I'd like a match with ya please?" the boy said actually bowing his head, one fist clasped against his other palm formally below his chest as he did so.

"As I said I don't know what you're talking about." Miya said, narrowing her eyes of the boy. "Could you please leave now?"

Ranma frowned, moving forward quickly and getting in her face. A hand flashed out, and Miya automatically moved aside, her other hand coming up as if holding a sword but thankfully for the youth she wasn't. Even so her palm caught the boy in the forearm and he laughed, moving with the blow easily twisting away to come to a stop a few feet from her. "A normal newlywed, hah! Now, I have been nice so far, but I've been bored out of my gourd for weeks, and I want a match!"

"You are a rude little boy aren't you?" Miya said shaking her head sadly, but her brown eyes were glinting dangerously at his 'attack' on her. A probing attack true, but still technically an attack. It had absolutely nothing due to the fact Ranma wasn't treating her respectfully, nothing at all...

"I've been called worse." Ranma said with a laugh. "My Oyaji says that you have to continually strive to be the best, but he's so busy lately, and my only other sparring partner's been busy too, and just went missing today. Stupid Ryoga and his stupid pride." He muttered under his breath before turning his attention back to Miya. "Frankly I'm goin' stir crazy, and I want to challenge you! How am I supposed to get better with no one around ta spar with?"

Oh I'll give you a challenge, I'll give you all you can handle you rude little twerp! She thought angrily, irritated at the boy his attitude, the fact he was so persistent, yet could feel her ki and still thought he had a chance against her. "Wait here." She said abruptly, pointing at the ground underneath him. "I will be right back."

A moment later she returned, holding a sheathed blade. Ranma frowned at it. "Hoh?" Miya laughed. "Someone doesn't look as confident anymore."

Ranma shrugged. "Whatever, fighting someone who uses weapons is good exercise too." With that he cracked his knuckles and assumed a stance across from the woman. "Ready, set, go!" With that he tapped his feet hard on the ground, launching himself forward into the air. A kick flashed out, but Miya blocked it easily, moving far quicker than Ranma had expected. His pivot leg was grabbed, and suddenly Ranma found himself flying through the air.

To Miya's surprise however the boy actually used that to his advantage, bouncing off the trunk of the garden's tree and coming back on the attack swiftly. Even so, he was moving in slow motion to her senses and she batted his attack away easily.

She riposting swiftly, bringing up her sheathed sword for the first time smacking the boy's outstretched hand then quickly stepping into his guard bringing Herb but up into his chest. The boy grunted, yet somehow was able to get a hand in between his chest and the point of her sheathed sword pushing off it at the same time as she struck. He also for some reason stayed in the air, moving here there and everywhere around Miya using the power of Miya's strikes

to remain there.

He's surprisingly good, Miya thought after a few moments of this. I'm limiting myself tremendously here, after all I don't want to kill him but even so this is surprising, especially for one so young. He's almost as good as some of the higher numbers. "Tell me," she said conversationally, not showing any sign of exertion, despite the last few moments of hectic combat. "Who trained you?"

"My Oyaji for the most part." Ranma said grunting between each word and trying desperately not to lose control of his anger. The fact that the woman was handling him so easily was a blow to his pride. *I knew she had a lot of energy, but come on, even my Oyaji works to beat me!*

"Interesting." Miya said then suddenly her hand flashed up faster than she had previously moved, grabbing Ranma's arm behind the wrist and pulling Ranma out of position before her sheath smacked into the side of his head sending him crashing to the ground.

She pressed the advantage and Ranma desperately backpedaled, trying to get back into the air where his mobility was more of an advantage. Very few opponents were able to handle aerial styles, which negated grappling and take downs for the most part as well as kicks. Kicks were almost impossible to aim properly with enough power against someone who was moving around in the air, especially against someone like Ranma who could easily redirect your strikes, using your own power against you to remain in the air.

Yet Miya didn't seem to be using kicks at all, instead she mostly used her sheathed blade with an occasional grab or palm thrust tossed in. Being handled so easily was actually disconcerting for Ranma. He'd sort of expected it given her ki, but it was **bizarre** to feel it actually happening. Yet Ranma still didn't give up, coming back and trying different moves to try and get an advantage.

All the while Miya handled him with kid gloves. She began to actually enjoy it, it was odd but fun to fight someone who was obviously enjoying the challenge but not taking it personally or out to really kill her.

And is it just me, or is he getting better as this battle goes along? He seems to be anticipating my attacks slightly now. He still nowhere close enough to my speed let alone my strength to be able to do anything about them, yet even so, it is interesting. Quite an extreme learning curve the youth has. Though honestly, I probably should've expected that given his age and that sensor technique he used. He really must be related to a Sekirei, though I wonder how far back. He's certainly well beyond human norm.

In fact Miya estimated that young Ranma could have easily defeated most of the soldiers that Miya had interacted with in the past. He was far faster, far stronger than his build suggested and durable. Miya was still holding back tremendously of course, but at least in speed she had been forced to step it up slightly several times. *His speed seems to be adapting far faster than his strength or durability, but his style is even odd. It's almost as if he was trained for midair combat, but why?*

Several moments into the fight Miya realized the answer to this, and gave a very, **very** grudging nod of approval in the direction of whoever had trained him. *Of course it does not make up for his general attitude, he is far too pushy and disrespectful! Hmmpf, the nerve of him, making a newlywed wife get out her blade once more.*

With a faint hum Miya smacked Ranma back once again. This time he landed harder than normal since his foot tripped on a root, and he leaned against the trunk of the tree for a moment, knowing now that Miya wouldn't come after him, instead simply standing there like an immovable mountain.

Before he could attack again a voice from the doorway into the inn spoke up. "Miya-chan, can I ask what's going on here?"

Miya turned quickly, her head flying up to her mouth as she pouted, embarrassed at having completely lost track of time. "Dana-sama, I'm sorry I didn't hear you, that is, this boy, he..."

"My fault!" Ranma said with a laugh, flipping himself to his feet with ease, cracking his neck explosively before looking down at his body with a wince at the welts that covered both on his forearms. Those continued underneath his shirt and along one side in particular. "I got this new technique ya' know, and it allowed me to find your wife's ki, which is really monstrous, so I came and I sort of forced her to fight me."

"Really?" Takehito asked looking over at Miya in shock.

Miya shrugged her shoulders but nodded, indicating that the boy had pretty much told the truth but that she still

understood she was at fault as the adult here. "He was rather rude, jumping into the backyard as he did, and well, I felt it necessary to chastise him somewhat, though I think that simply gave him what he wanted."

For a moment Takehito didn't know what to think about that really. A young child, a normal human by all appearances, able to not only feel what Miya was but actually challenging her? That was beyond bizarre in his opinion. He almost visibly set that aside for a moment, to return to something he could understand. "I see, well did you at least finish going through the house?"

"I did, and I'm not exactly happy with its condition husband." Miya replied, slipping into wife mode quickly. "Living here is a fantastic idea on many levels, but we have a lot of work ahead of us to make this place actually livable."

For a moment Ranma was forgotten as the two went over the list Miya had made, but both of the adults realized he was still there when he spoke up again. "Ya know, I could help out with a lot o' that."

"What do you mean young man? And what's your name?" asked Takehito.

Miya blushed a little realizing that she should've introduced the two of them. She stepped forward to do so but Ranma spoke up quickly. "I'm Ranma Saotome, and I've learned a lot of different martial arts, Martial Arts Construction is one of 'em. Can't say I'm a master at it, but I'm good enough ta do most jobs."

Takehito laughed, thinking it a joke. "Martial Arts Construction? Where in the world did you get an idea like that?"

"It's a real school man, I studied it at this place down on Kyushu somewhere. I heard they were going to be opening a branch here in Tokyo in a few years, but I'm not surprised you haven't heard of it." Ranma said with a shrug, not realizing that no one but another martial artist would've even considered so esoteric a style as anything **but** a joke. He grinned pointing at Miya. "I'll make you a deal lady."

He winced suddenly as Miya's thankfully still sheathed sword came up smacking him upside the head. "That is Asama-san, or if you must Miya-san."

"Just because you are a martial artist does not mean you should forget your manners young man." said Takehito nodding his head.

Ranma blanched a little. "What're manners good for in a fight? I'd rather learn more techniques than spend time on that kind of stuff."

"Yes, but being able to relate to people might keep you from having actual enemies rather than sparring partners." Takehito said quickly, shaping the reality of the world to fit Ranma's apparent worldview with ease. The youth didn't seem mean-spirited or stupid, just too concentrated on one thing, and his manners were atrocious.

"Take now for instance. From what you and Miya said you basically had to irritate Miya-chan enough for her to agree to fight you. But if you had opened with the offer to help around the house maybe you could've gotten a free spar without irritating her so much that she went out of her way to leave some permanent reminders on your person."

Ranma shrugged looking down at his injuries again, laughing. "These are just part of the price ya gotta pay to be better. Still I can see what ya mean about gettin' off on the wrong foot an' all. How about I show you that I really do know about construction, and then you two can decide if Miya wants to continue ta spar with me."

"Teach." Miya said firmly, her brown eyes narrowing. "If you really do know anything about construction I will teach you. There is quite obviously much I have to teach you, not just about martial arts."

Ranma scoffed at that but nodded, willing to take the good with the bad while Takehito looked at her in surprise. While Ranma raced into the inn, He looked at his wife quizzically. "Are you sure about this Miya? I thought you wanted to leave violence behind entirely."

"I wanted to leave the Disciplinary Squad behind, it and your employer." she said her lips thinning as she mentioned that man. She suspected that he was not going to prove as trustworthy as she had hoped when she had woken up. But as yet she had nothing to base that feeling on, save for a certain uneasiness that had begun to develop within her whenever she was within the tower.

"Yes. The boy is a natural Take-chan, and judging by his strength and speed I believe he has some Sekirei heritage in his background. If that is the case, then in a way he is my responsibility as a Pillar."

Takehito rolled his eyes. "You know that's not true Miya, even before you stepped down as the Pillar it wouldn't have

been true. Still, I suppose if he's as good as his word it'll be cheap at the price. Seo got back to me about working here, and we'd have to both put him up, feed him and pay him a stipend for his work. My friend's recently had a run of bad luck at the casinos unfortunately."

Miya stiffened and he held up a hand. "I know, I know you don't want him here. I don't particularly want anyone here either, at least for, oh, a week or so..." he said giving her a very direct stare that set her to blushing. "Though I would say that this place isn't exactly set up for the honeymoon I had hoped to give you."

Before Miya could formulate a response Ranma was back. "Okay, I fixed a bit of the floor in the living room and the table, just to show ya what I can do."

Dubiously the two adults followed him in, only to stop and stare. Where before the table set into the sitting area looked like it was about to fall apart, three of its four legs had been fixed while the fourth was being reinforced by several small loose pieces of wood. Several of the floor boards which had looked almost rotted had been replaced, and more than one loose floorboard had been repaired. "You did all that in just, what 10 minutes?" Takehito asked incredulously.

Ranma shrugged, waving his hand in the air swiftly, so fast Takehito had trouble tracking it. "I'm very fast." he said dryly.

For a moment the young couple shared a glance then Takehito turned to Ranma and nodded. "You're hired."

OOOOOO

Two weeks passed. Every morning Ranma would check and see if Ryoga was back, then go to school. Much to his irritation Miya refused to let allow him on the Inn's property during the normal school day, and somehow figured out how to tell when he had skipped but not come over.

Actually there was nothing mystic about it. Takehito had looked him up on his home computer, then called and talked with Ranma's homeroom teacher. The man had been grateful for any aid in controlling Ranma's wayward attitude, and leaped at the chance to ally with someone else equally determined to make the young man, who despite his attitude was obviously very intelligent, to stick with school.

At lunch and after Ranma dropped Ryoga off at home however was fair game. During the lunch period Ranma would come over to work on the house, making plans for what he'd do after school and buying anything he'd need for it thanks to a stipend from Takehito. For his first job he took apart the floor, replacing most of the floorboards that had rotted on the first floor. This was well beyond what Miya had found, since she didn't know how to test the flooring except by stepping on the boards and listening to the noises.

And after school, Ranma would continue on that until around four then train with Miya until around eight before breaking for dinner, which Miya set for then since it was the time Takehito came home. Over dinner Takehito would ply Ranma with questions about his education, the places he'd been and the esoteric martial arts schools he'd learned. The youth was bright, observant and quick, but getting him interested in anything but martial arts was like pulling teeth.

Ranma's training normally began with Ranma and Miya sparring, then with Miya showing Ranma several katas. Many of these were for a swordsman, but Ranma was more than willing to learn them, since, while he hadn't trained on weapons much, he did have some grounding in them. It was just that using weapons upped the ante in a fight that made him leery of becoming dependent on them. Miya also began to train Ranma in several strength and durability exercises.

The results of this training began to influence Ranma's skill almost immediately, to the point where Ryoga confronted him barely two days after returning from his latest lost trip. "Damn it Ranma, what the hell have you been doing lately?" He growled, punching Ranma on the shoulder while the two of them were making their way between classes. "And where the hell do you keep disappearing to during lunch anyway?"

"Yeah, sorry I've not been around for our daily fights man, but look at it this way, at least now yer able ta get the last melon bread." Ranma smirked as Ryoga scowled at him, but it was kind of true. Ranma always used his aerial ability to snag the last bread roll after the lunch lady threw it into the air. That had been the way they'd first met, and Ranma's habit hadn't gone away since.

"I got a job usin' my Martial Arts Construction skills at this Inn, and the owner's wife is a master swordswoman. She's been trainin' me, and as you can tell, it's made a major impact. Her husband, Takehito, he's also been helpin' me with

my schoolwork."

"Huh." Ryoga grunted, then smirked. "Well, I suppose you need all the help you can get there." He was almost tempted to ask if the woman would be willing to train him as well, but he didn't know any Martial Arts Construction techniques. He knew some cooking and far more weapons skills than Ranma, but not those. And Ryoga was far too proud to go to the same teacher as his rival. *I'll have to open up my parent's room and get out some of their training scrolls if I want to keep up with Ranma. I just hope that raccoon family which moved in a few years ago hasn't eaten them...*

Ranma showed up at the inn later that day, bounding over the wall like a grasshopper, grinning as he saw Miya putting out some of the linens. "My sparring partner's started ta notice how much my skill's advanced under yer training Miya-nee! After only a few weeks too, that's incredible!"

Cocking her head, Miya narrowed her eyes. "What did you just call me?"

"Miya-nee." Ranma grinned at her. "Yer too young and pretty ta be a ba-san, and yer not my ka-san, so nee-san."

"Hmmfff, I think I'd remember having a younger brother as disrespectful as you." Miya huffed, thought behind her hand she was smiling slightly. Ranma grew on you sort of like the vines on the outer wall, as she had put it to her husband the other day. And his skills in martial arts was inspiring in one so young.

Although if I ever meet his father he and I will have... words. Miya thought grimly. Ranma had shared several tales of his training under his 'Oyaji' while on the road, and Takehito had briefly contemplated calling in the authorities on the man for child abuse. Ranma however simply saw it as good training, so the newlyweds had reluctantly decided to leave it be. But if Genma ever showed up here, he would be fair game for Miya.

"Now, I believe you will be completing the second floor today, correct?"

"Yep, two walls need ta be repaired, then a few of the electrical outlets, and two of the hallway lights need ta be replaced. After that, there's the roof and the outer wall ta work on, plus the garden if ya want me to."

"Sounds very good indeed Ranma, though can I ask you to not come by this weekend, or even until next Wednesday?" Miya smiled, her eyes gleaming with something that Ranma didn't have words for just yet. "My husband and I wish to have a few days to ourselves."

Seeing Ranma's blank look, Miya sighed. "He and I are newly married Ranma, and we haven't had much time to ourselves since."

Ranma shrugged. "Don't see the point, but whatever, sure. If ya can give me some exercises ta do on my own that'd be great. Heck, if I try I might be able ta finish everythin' but the garden before Friday."

"That sounds lovely, thank you." Miya said smiling and ushering him inside to where his supplies for the day had been placed.

Another few weeks passed, and with the work on the inn completed, Ranma's training under Miya began in earnest, producing even more results quickly. More than that, her cooking for him every night had a marked effect on his body. Ranma grew like a weed, adding several inches to his height, becoming as tall as Ryoga, amongst the tallest in their age group. Even his shoulders began to expand, and his previously wiry muscles began to grow as well. He would never be as heavily muscled as Ryoga, but he would be close.

Even though he wasn't home very often, Genma began to notice these changes in his son. At first he put it down to having a rival his own age to contend with daily, but after a time, Genma realized Ranma's skill was growing too quickly for that to be the true reason. And worse, in their last spar the boy had come close to actually winning! That wasn't supposed to happen for years yet!

The very next day instead of heading to work, Genma staked out his son's school from a nearby rooftop, then followed Ranma while he dropped off Ryoga and then went deeper into Tokyo proper.

Genma blinked in shock. *The boy's fighting some, some kind of landlady? NO, no way can that be the reason he's gotten so good lately.* His shock increased as the woman with purple hair dealt with his son with seeming ease, calling out corrections and instructions as she did so. *Who, who is this woman? I've never heard of a woman that was this good at martial arts! Damn it, this messes up the Plan entirely! If the boy decides to follow her style rather than our own, the Plan to unite the schools could be ruined!*

Worse Genma thought, while the two below continued their spar. *My authority over the boy is almost entirely based off my being his teacher, ever since the neko-ken incident he's stopped looking at me as a real father. I need to step up my game, and maybe get him away from here quickly if I'm to retain my position of authority over the youth. Damn it, those truant officers said they would send out an order for my arrest if the boy didn't finish the next two years of school, that would mean stopping somewhere else quickly, too quickly to get far enough away for the boy to not make his way back here. But there needs to be some kind of solution...*

He continued to watch the two spar and train, feeling a very grudging respect for the woman's strength and skill. *Hmmm... I wonder who would win in a battle between her and the Dreaded Master?* He had a feeling it would not be the diminutive grandmaster of Anything Goes.

Miya frowned suddenly, looking away from Ranma and up at a roof nearby. Then she turned back to dueling with Ranma for a few moments until she trapped Ranma's arm under her own, smacking him along the side of the neck with her sheathed sword in what would have been a killing blow. "That is enough for the moment, I think. Could you look at the sink for me Ranma? The water doesn't seem to be heating as well as it should."

"Sure Miya-nee, but after that, I want ta keep sparring okay?" Ranma asked.

"Ufufufu, perhaps, or perhaps we will come back to it after another lesson on manners and how to speak properly, himm?" Miya laughed, and Ranma blanched before going inside, his head held low and a pout on his face.

Miya laughed again at his overacting. But the moment Ranma was out of sight, Miya turned, leaping the distance between where she had been standing in the center of the backyard to the roof where she had spotted something shining. She landed in front of an older, rather rotund man dressed in a dirty white gi, with a bandana on his head and small circular glasses.

She glared at the man. "I was thinking you were some unusual sort of pervert, but your son describes you rather well. Genma Saotome I presume? Might I ask why you are here?"

Genma scowled at her, getting to his feet from where he had fallen on his rear in shock at her sudden arrival. He tried to loom over the woman intimidatingly but the slight, purple-haired woman stared at him unflinchingly. "Yes, I'm his father and sensei, and as his sensei I order you to cease training the boy. He's already got a primary style, he doesn't need you and your soft teachings!"

"Soft?" Miya mused aloud, her brown eyes glinting dangerously. "Really, soft? Is that why he has already become faster, stronger, more dexterous? Or are you talking about my husband and I teaching him those things you should have, like the need for manners, the need to speak properly, to understand another person's point of view, the importance of anything outside the martial arts!? And don't think my husband and I haven't made Ranma share some of your training methods!"

A aura of dread and terror had begun to spread out from the woman, a black sort of miasma visible in the air, reminding Genma of a similar technique his master had used one time when his 'precious pretties' had been damaged. Only this technique wasn't done.

As Miya continued to speak, a hanya mask materialized alongside her head. It had black hair, seemed to be made of white porcelain, and its fangs and horns gleamed menacingly. It's eyes were deep pits carved out of the halls of hell, and they seemed to suck Genma in as the mask solidified.

"Now, you listen to me, you miserable excuse for a human being, it is only my wish to not alienate your son after making such progress with him that keeps you from dying on the point of my sword or at best in jail! You will leave, and not try to keep your son from coming to see my husband and I, or I will hunt you down, kill you and make your corpse into some kind of tasteless piece of furniture. Do we understand one another?"

OOOOOO

At a small cafe a few blocks away from where MBI tower was being built, Takehito suddenly smiled, looking off into the distance. "Ah... I sense that Miya-chan has finally used the Hanya Technique properly. Exxxceeeillent...."

Across from him his long time friend and confidant Seo Kaoru twitched. "Yay, great, whoopie, remind me to not come over for dinner for a few days. Maybe she'll forget how to use it."

"Not likely." Takehito said brightly, before taking a sip of coffee as Seo slumped in his seat.

OOOOOO

Genma trembled, using all his self-control to not run away screaming like a little girl or piss himself where he stood. "I, I understand... I, I'll stay away from this place, I promise."

Miya smiled coldly. "See that you do." With that, the hanya mask disappeared, and she blinked as Genma disappeared, fleeing away from her with a speed well beyond even Sekirei norm. "Oh my." She smiled faintly, falling into her role as housewife easily, though a certain gleam in her eyes gave her role the lie. "You'd think something had scared him, the poor man."

OOO Eight months later OOO

Unfortunately, while Genma had been utterly terrified by Miya, and remained so for far longer than even his master had ever accomplished, eventually Genma overcame it enough to realize he had to get Ranma away from Miya's influence. He took his time however, training himself back up to his peak, and even adding a few new skills to his repertoire in order to keep ahead of Ranma. And then, as Ranma was waiting for Ryoga outside his house for a challenge match during the summer., ambushed him, dragging Ranma away and back on the road.

Ranma scowled as he came back from sending off a postcard at the local post office, feeling the fact he had no cash left in his pocket rather keenly. *Calling back to Ryoga's house and leaving a message cost me all the cash I had left on my phone card, and sendin' a postcard to Miya-nee . Stupid long distance calls, still with that and with the message I left before my Oyaji cold-cocked me Ryoga shouldn't worry.* With a sigh he moved over to where Genma was leaning against the wall waiting for him scowling irritably at the necessity. "Well Oyaji, where do we go from here?"

"We'll follow the shore for now, hit up a few of the port cities and see if any of their dojo's have anything worth learning, before heading into Vietnam and then up to Tibet. You've come a long way in your ki manipulation, so maybe we can find someone to give us some instruction there. Then we'll head back into China through the Bayakala range before turning back to Japan. Now come on boy, you've gotten soft this past few months, so we're going to push the pace!" Genma growled, then raced off, causing Ranma to scowl but follow him.

OOOOOOO

Xian Pu raised one of her chui in victory over her head, listening to the adulation of the crowd. This marked the third time she had won the coveted young adult competition among her people. Wining three times would allow Xian Pu to start challenging those older than her, even blooded warriors which would normally not be allowed. *It will be good to start challenging people who can give me a challenge without taking it personally or treating me like a youngster like grandmother always does.* Xian Pu thought sardonically, pulling her dark purple hair out of its ponytail and letting it fall loose down her back as she leaped off the challenge log.

She was met by a few of her friends, who congratulated her for yet another victory. Her rival Cot Ton did not of course, though she nodded in Xian Pu's direction. Xian Pu nodded back, reflecting that Luck often played a part in combat. Cot Ton had been done in by Luck, her sandal's straps coming undone and throwing off her footing just enough for Do-Wel to land one of her monstrously powerful but slow blows.

Even Xian Pu couldn't stand to take a punch from the monstrously powerful Do-Wel, and Cot Ton had been knocked straight off the challenge log. Even so Cot Ton had tried to regain control of her body midair, and had almost but not quite managed to catch at the log's end. *When next we meet in combat it should prove interesting, it's obvious that she's been practicing some new styles.*

Suddenly there was a commotion to the side and one of her friend's voice shouted and angrily "Stop that panda! It's eating Xian Pu's prize!"

Xian Pu turned in that direction along with her other friends, quickly moving towards the victory table. There sitting as calmly as you please and eating the food she had just finished earning was a giant panda. Now, Xian Pu wasn't a gourmand by any means, but it was the principle of the matter. That food and the ability for her to decide who sat at the victory table with her mattered a lot to Xian Pu, one of the symbols of her primacy over the other girls in her age group. She growled angrily moving forward her chui in her hands shouting, "Stupid panda, I make you into a fur rug!"

When it heard her shout the animal looked up at her with something approaching human intelligence. It quickly pushed away from the table in an almost human maneuver standing on its back legs and growling. Yet it continued to stuff its face with its front paws.

"Stupid panda!" Shouted a voice in Japanese, a language that Xian Pu had begun to learn rather reluctantly a few

months ago. Turning towards the voice, she saw a redheaded girl about her own age and somewhat similar in build (but not quite as busty Xian Pu was happy to see) race through the crowd of villagers followed by an outsider male who Xian Pu had seen before around the area trading for food.

The panda turned, his hands going up into what looked like some kind of stance, but before it could raise them the girl was in its face, a fist lashing out faster than Shampoo could track, catching it in the jaw. Seconds later the panda was down and unconscious, and the redheaded girl was looking mournfully at the table. Pulling from a net from her backpack, it threw the net over the panda, tying it up and then moving the panda's body this way and that until it made a ball inside the net.

While it the redhead was working on this met Xian Pu strode up to her shouting angrily. "Was that your panda? It ate my prize! I should challenge you for that!"

The girl turned to her and in very bad Putonghua answered. "It not panda, it man. Cursed man."

Xian Pu scowled, but crackling elderly voice interrupted her. "Do you mean to tell me you and the panda went to the Jusenkyou girl? Oh and you may speak Japanese, I can understand the tongue of Nippon well enough." Xian Pu turned, watching as her great-grandmother hopping her way forward on her staff. Many of the youngsters in the village thought was a pogo stick, and there had been an actual competition to see who could get close enough to steal it at one point, but no one had been able to.

Ranma was not having a good few days. Oh, the past few years had been okay, though Ranma felt he would've still learned more from remaining to train with Miya. While he hadn't learned any techniques during that half a year, his strength, speed and his ability to read his opponent had all improved under Miya's tutelage, and he also had learned some of Miya's own sword style, though he preferred not to use it unless pressed.

He'd begun to realize that might have been the reason why his Oyaji was so insistent that they set out, Genma was becoming intimidated by Ranma's progress. Nowadays it was a very rare spar where the Oyaji was even able to challenge Ranma. He no longer fell for most of the Oyaji's tricks to get him angry, and Ranma's 'base stats' as it were gave him an undeniable edge.

In response Genma had taken to actually learning from the same masters Ranma did during their trip, hoping to bridge the gap, something which had begun in Tibet. Now both of them were able to use ki attacks, small ones admittedly, though Ranma's were quite a bit better than his father.

But that changed when his Oyaji had the idea to go to Jusenkyou. At first it seemed like a normal training ground, a place where you went to train dexterity, footwork, and above all midair techniques. A place perfect for their family style in other words. And then Ranma had smashed his Oyaji into a pool only to watch a panda jump out.

And of course the old fool, since he was so fat and heavy anyway didn't notice the God damn change. Ranma scowled, staring down at the two protrusions from his chest which were the sign of much of his anger the past few days. After Ranma had been smacked into a pool in turn, his Oyaji had run off not listening to the guide. Ranma however had stuck around and learned that hot water changed them back to normal. Then of course it had rained for two days straight.

Stupid whether, stupid curse, stupid Oyaji! I need to get a handle on this form, I need to go back home. Ranma didn't know when on this journey Izumo House had become home to him, but it had and he was eager to see his nee-san again. If anyone can help me figure this form out, and the do's and dont's of it, it'll be Miya-nee. *I better get used to it now, there might not be a cure after all, since for normal people the pools curses merge rather than cancel out!* And now, when Ranma finally arrived at the village where the guide said he might find someone able to point him to some sort of cure, his old man had beaten him there and made a bad impression.

He looked at the gnome on the stick, using all the lessons Miya had drilled into him about watching what he said to control his tongue for a moment. "Yes we were, and my fool of an Oyaji fell in." Ranma said, ignoring the fact the gnome had called him a girl. "Look, I'm sorry he let his stomach do his thinking for him, it's a hell of a lot smarter than what he has up here, ya know." he said tapping his forehead. "But I don't have enough money to pay, and I'd really rather not, you know, stay around and work for it."

At the word Oyaji Xian Pu blanched. "Grandmother am I right to say that she just said that panda was his father? As in he's both a human male, and old enough to be his father?"

"Yes granddaughter that's what she said, aren't you glad you didn't challenge it? If you had lost..." Cologne paused for a moment. Wanting to drive the lesson home she turned to Ranma and asked, "What does your father look like in

human form, child?"

"About as tall as in panda form, about as fat, bald and with glasses. He's strong but slow, stupid lazy, good for nothing but martial arts, and even then, he only does as little as he can get away with!" With that Ranma finished pulling the net around his father in panda form, smiling as he nodded at the panda ball, happy with his work.

For her part Xian Pu blanched a pure white at Cologne's translation. There went any thought of challenging the panda for eating her prize. *And I can't challenge the redhead, not only would I have nothing to gain, but it wasn't her fault and she's showing remorse for it anyway. I'd look like a bully!*

She looked up as suddenly the panda ball rolled to a stop in front of her. Looking around it to the redhead, she saw the redhead wink at her. "Soccer?"

Xian Pu looked at the ball. Soccer was well known in the village, and excellent calisthenics exercise as well as training for working together, or so the oldsters tried to convince themselves. To the youngsters it was just a fun game, and more than one teen laughed at the idea of using the giant panda as a ball.

So Xian Pu smiled and nodded, racing away and shouting over her shoulder "kick to me!"

Swiftly the young adults around her moved into two teams, and Cologne sighed sadly, moving up over to the side of the field where she would act as referee. *I wonder if it will occur to my granddaughter to ask a few questions about the girl...*

For about an hour the panda was smacked between them. The redhead and Xian Pu each led their own teams, more often than not meeting in 'personal combat' their speed and dexterity a cut above most of them with only Cot Ton coming close.

The game only ended as the sun was beginning to set, and more than one warrior was holding her stomach eagerly talking about dinner. With the prize ruined, they would all have to head home for that, but still they all had a lot of fun today, not just the tournament but the impromptu soccer match with the giant blowup ball of a panda. Which was looking much the worse for wear after so long. It had woken up a few times, but been unable to break out before being knocked unconscious again.

Xian Pu sighed contentedly stretching her arms above her head and cracking her neck. Her team won in the end, thanks to Cot Ton taking the redhead's legs out from underneath her when she tried to intercept Xian Pu as she was going in for the final score. "Good fun!" She said nodding her head at the shorter girl. "Are you going to stay in the village for the night?"

The youth shook her head. "Best get on way, this one recover too quick." she said smacking the panda ball earning a grown from its battered occupant.

Xian Pu nodded, as Cologne and hopped up beside her. "Good luck on your travels then." she said shaking the other girl's hand.

Now next to her granddaughter, Cologne smirked internally, finally able to ask the question she probably already knew the answer to. "By the way child, you went Jusenkyou and it is the very unusual for anyone to go there and not get curse. What did you get cursed with?"

Ranma grinned, tapping his chest causing his new protrusions to jiggle and he glared at them irritably. *Dammit, if only these things to jiggle like that so much, I could've one that soccer game!* Two days had not been enough for Ranma to figure out the differences in body weight and center of gravity, though she was close. *How do girls deal with the jiggle, what the hell?* "This form my curse form."

Xian Pu blinked. "Wouldn't that mean there was no change?"

Cologne groaned. "Granddaughter, while you sound like a bimbo when you speak Japanese, that is no reason to act like one! Would you like to change forms before you go?" she asked politely. Inside however she was cackling evilly. This could be just another lesson for her young charge, one that might well stick even more than the other about looking before you leap and always looking at the underneath.

"Sure." Ranma said with a nod. "Trying to get used to this form, but it still not fun." He blinked as he watched Cologne pull a warm thermos out from a voluminous sleeve. "That interesting trick." he said dryly.

Cologne cackled. "When you get to be my age young man, you pick up more than a few interesting tricks."

"Grandmother, why are you calling her a..." Xian Pu stuttered to a halt as Ranma dumped the contents of the thermos over his red hair, which swiftly changed to black.

Tall, was Xian Pu's first thought, followed by *Humina-humina!* The short redhead, which and only barely been up to her neck, now was a young man who stood at least 3 inches taller than her. Broad shoulders, broader than nearly any man in the village save the blacksmith's sons. Despite his wide shoulders he was lean and muscular, the muscles of speed and endurance rather than pure power matching his female form perfectly. The blue eyes were the same, though staring up at them was a very different experience than staring down into them had been. And where the smile on the redhead had been cute, on the male's face it set Xian Pu's pulse to racing.

"Well anyway, thanks for the water, and I'm sorry again for my old man, but we gotta get going." So saying in Japanese the youth turned, nearly causing Xian Pu to squeal at the sight of the most perfect male ass she had ever seen as he leaned down and picked up the panda with ease.

With a final nod towards Xian Pu and a bow towards Cologne Ranma said "Drop by if you're ever in Japan, I'd tell ya our exact address but we don't have one just yet." With a laugh, Ranma took off, racing out of the village ignoring the odd looks from the women and especially the young girls all around, who had stopped and stared at the transformation.

"I told you which several times child that going to Jusenkyou is to simply get a curse, and if she was a girl now, with the rain we've had, surely it should've occurred to you that that youngster was a man to begin with? And attractiveness carries over to the other form, as I have also told you. Remember the tale of Clip Per and her panther suitor? If you had, I might've allowed you to challenge **him!** A kiss of marriage could have easily solved your little suitor problem with Mousse. Too late now."

She looked at Xian Pu and noticing her shocked gaze stopped talking and began to cackle. The cackle broke Xian Pu out of her momentary stasis, and Xian Pu reached up to her head and started to curse of the top of her lungs.

OOOOOO

Ranma scowled internally as he tried to keep control of his face. He **hated** this. He hated being judged by his curse. The middle daughter, Nabiki, at least had been happy to see him, until she found out that the 'he' she'd been expecting wasn't a 'he' at the time. And now that she'd found out about the curse she was trying to push Ranma onto the youngest sister, something which Kasumi, the oldest one, had jumped on.

I don't really blame her or Kasumi, but this is still a raw deal for me. I mean sure Akane's got the fact she seems to think she's a martial artist, but she's not a very good one. And given her ranting now and the fact she was about ta kill me for her coming into the bathroom when I was already in there, I don't think we're going to get along very well. So much for being friends.

"Now hold on," he said holding up a hand as Akane stopped complaining to her sisters. "Your old man said it was my decision right? That means whatever you three decide between you doesn't matter, I'm the one that's got the final say!"

Nabiki winced, while Kasumi looked a little thrown off. Soun laughed. "Yes of course, but it's obvious that you and Akane have more in common than you and my other two daughters so..."

"We've only known each other for a few hours, I'm not going to make a decision that's going to affect the rest of my life that quickly." Ranma said firmly.

"Now see here boy!" Genma began to say, only to be cut off as Ranma's fingers flashed until they were right up against his larynx.

"Shut up Oyaji, the adults are talking. Now," he said turning back to the Tendo family. "I'm not going to decide who I want to marry right now, or even **if** we're going to marry. Yes there is some kind of honor promise between you two ta unite the houses, but that's not enough, since there was another condition to it."

"How dare you!" said Soun glaring angrily at him from across the table. "That oath is a bond of honor! Do you have no honor!?"

"Yes I do, which is why if I ever marry I'd prefer ta marry someone who I could live my life with happily with rather than someone I was forced ta marry. Or are you saying you don't care about your daughters' happiness."

"Are you saying you wouldn't make them happy!?" Soun growled, trying to turn Ranma's words around on him.

Kasumi and Nabiki however exchanged a glance as did Akane, who nodded her head slightly. Nabiki spoke up. "He's got a point daddy, while the idea of arranged marriages is still used, making it formal so quickly isn't. There's always a courting period, to see if the two people who are going to marry are compatible." She gave a brief nod towards Ranma, who nodded back. "How much time do you think it would take you to figure out if you're compatible with one of us?"

Ranma shrugged. "Well, I'd say at least a year, no two years. I'm 16, so two years and I'd be 18 we could marry then I suppose unless that'd get in the way of any future plans you all have?"

"Two years!?" both parents shouted. "Now see here!"

"That's actually perfect." Nabiki said with a nod. "Your 16, so you'd be what, a freshman in high school?"

"Sophomore I think." Ranma said with a grin. "I can pass any language requirement right now. I can speak English like a native, decent enough Putonghua, Guoyu, and both standard and formal Tibetan." He grimaced a little. "My Vietnamese isn't anything to write home about though. My reading and writing skills are better than sophomore level. My hard sciences are kind of bad though, I barely passed the last test I took. Really I'm just guessin' on the sophomore thing."

Nabiki's eyes widened in astonishment. Learning languages was incredibly difficult, and being able to have learned several languages while on the road for most of his life, that showed a very high intelligence. "Interesting," she said aloud. She was still very freaked out about the fact that magic was apparently real, but that didn't mean she was blind to the fact that it in either form Ranma was quite the catch.

Kasumi however was cocking her head thoughtfully. "You said that a marriage between our houses had a condition. While I understand, respect and even approve of your stance on its making the individuals in question happy, that actually wasn't mentioned in the marriage agreement apparently." It took all of Kasumi's willpower not to glare at her father for that. "What exactly was the condition you mentioned?"

"Well the fact, that there'd have to be two schools of martial arts coming together. No offense to Akane, but I didn't see any moves from her in our spar that looked like a distinct school, mostly I saw Judo, with some karate here and there."

That caused his father's brows to knit together and he closed his mouth mid-harangue. "Really?" He turned to his old friend. "Soun, haven't you been training your heir as you said you would?"

"How could I train my precious daughter?!" Soun bawled, looking as if he was about to burst into tears or attack Genma for the very idea.

Akane however looked a little interested. "Daddy, you know I'm a martial artist, I can take some punishment! If this has to be a union of schools that means we have to show our worth!" in response her father looked about to tear up again, and she shook her head in disgust.

"I think you two need to work that out on your own." Ranma said standing up. "So are we agreed on the two year thing? 'Cause I got a place I want ta get to."

Soun and Genma both turned back at that, looking like they wanted to object for a moment, but Kasumi and Nabiki beat them to it agreeing quickly. "Agreed, we'll talk to daddy about it."

Kasumi cocked her head. "May I ask where you're going?"

"I have a few friends I want to look up your in Tokyo."

"It's Shin Teito now." said Nabiki. "The name was changed a few months ago."

Ranma shrugged. "Yeah I heard about that, some company having bought practically all of the land under the city. Don't know why the government allowed that, but whatever."

"Boy I told you to stay away from that woman!" Genma growled. "She's made you soft!"

"Soft!? Her training is the reason why I can kick your ass old man, despite you taking me out on the road for so long." Ranma laughed.

Akane looked interested and Ranma shook his head. "No, I'm not going to introduce you to her, I don't know you well enough just yet."

Once again putting one of Miya's lessons in manners to use Ranma looked over at Kasumi cocking his head to one side. "Since I'm going out anyway, is there anything ya want me to pick up on my way back?"

Kasumi actually smiled at his thoughtfulness, tapping her finger against her lips thoughtfully. "Let me check on the condition of the guest room's linens and futons. We haven't used them in years, so I haven't aired them out for quite a while. And if there's anything you like in terms food..."

"We're both easy about that kind of thing." Ranma said with a grin, slapping his hand over his father's mouth before he could interject anything.

He knew Genma wouldn't have asked for anything for specific, just for a lot of everything. But frankly Ranma had looked around the house and he wasn't certain the Tendos could afford to feed the two of them without at least Genma getting a job. It was a very nice house, but there hadn't been any evidence of students using the dojo in a long time. And while everything was clean and orderly, they didn't actually have a lot of modern appliances.

Not that they need it, Ranma thought, reminded of the bathroom. That area reminded him greatly of the bathing area in Izumo House, after he had finished repairing it anyway. *Speaking of that...* he raised a hand quickly. "Before I forget, I've got some martial arts construction experience I learned years ago. So if you need anything around the place repaired, don't hesitate ta ask."

Nabiki and Kasumi both smiled at him, while even Akane looked grateful for the offer. "That's very thoughtful of you Ranma," Nabiki said. "Thank you, that'll help on the expenses around the house." She shot a little glare at her father for that one, but that was an old argument between them.

"Cool," Ranma replied, standing up fluidly. "So let's find those linens, and then I can head out and see Miya-nee again."

Genma watched his friend's eyes narrow, and waved his hand frantically. Soun subsided, waiting. Kasumi and Ranma quickly left to go up to the attic while Nabiki had headed back to her room, shaking her head and muttering about why the hell magic was real, and how it spoiled everything.

Now that they were alone Soun stared hard at all the Genma. "You're not concerned about your son going to see this, this woman he calls nee-san? What if she's interested in him, what if he's interested in her! That would totally derail the agreement between our families! And your son is already much more independent than I expected."

Genma scowled angrily. "Hmmpf, that's the witch's fault, but don't think she's a normal woman by any means." He shuddered, remembering the one time he had met the woman, and that aura of absolute terror she'd called up. It had utterly terrified him at the time, even more than the master had at his worst.

"BRrr, b-but she's a married woman, and is not interested in him in that fashion. If anything they are more of a master and student relationship, with a hint of older sister and younger sibling as the boy's nickname for her shows." He smiled suddenly, wrapping his arm around Soun's shoulder. "Don't worry old friend, the union of our families will still happen! The boy's shown no interest in the female form, even now that he has one! Now that we're here however, one of your daughters is sure to catch his eye. They're all quite attractive after all."

A moment later Ranma and Kasumi returned, with Kasumi smiling. "The bedding and the extra futons are fine father, though I've asked Ranma to pick up a few more bags of rice for us. Can you think of anything else we need?"

Ranma held up a finger pointing at his father. "And that doesn't mean extra sake for you fatty!" Genma growled angrily, and Soun frowned dropping his own hand down when Kasumi looked at him with her saintly smile on her face. Somehow speaking up in the face of that smile for the sake of more sake was impossible.

With the two older men silenced Ranma turned to Kasumi, gave her a little wave and hopped out of the open door to the backyard, then out and away over the outer wall. Watching this Kasumi chuckled shaking her head. "It's been years since I saw someone roofhop. Why don't you do that anymore, father?"

Under his friend's suddenly narrowed eyes Soun coughed uncomfortably then looked away. "Ahem, yes, well, I'll get out the shogi board shall I old friend? It's been forever since I faced another practitioner of Anything Goes Shogi."

That made Genma smile eagerly and Kasumi sigh while Akane, who had come down to grab her bookbag from the living room scowled slightly, jealous at the sight of Ranma bounding away. *Showoff*.

But her heart wasn't in it. Instead Akane sat down to her father, leaning in eagerly. "So daddy, since this whole agreement thing is about the two schools uniting rather than just the two families, are you going to start training me again?"

Soun coughed uncomfortably, looking away again. "Not right now daughter, Genma and I are going to play Anything Goes shogi, we'll talk about restarting your training this weekend. Or maybe the next..." he petered out under his youngest daughter's glare, and he quickly fell back to his staple defense, blubbing aloud. "Wahh, my daughter's angry with me, waaaaahhh!"

It worked. Akane scowled, pushed herself away from the table and stomped off angrily. Genma however stared at his old friend, wondering at how out of shape his old friend was. Not realizing how his friend was looking at him now, Soun triumphantly got up to get the shogi board without answering any more difficult questions.

OOOOOO

Ranma leaped around Nerima, then out into Tokyo proper. Immediately he noticed a difference in the architecture, and frowned, wondering what that was about. Well that and the sheer number of empty lots back there was just weird. I wonder if that means there are a lot of martial artists around? For challenge matches and things like that those lots'd be a good idea actually.

In the rest of Tokyo however he noticed something else. *What the heck, what's up with all the cameras scattered everywhere?*

Every roof he stopped at had at least four video cameras. They weren't all pointed outward either, many of the cameras covered their own roofs or that of the neighboring buildings. *Some of 'em could serve as security cameras, but the others? And there's too damn many of 'em. I wonder if it's a... what's that bigass company's name, the one Takehito worked for and apparently bought out Tokyo, MBI, I wonder if it's an in MBI thing, I don't think it can possibly be a security thing.*

OOOOOO

In MBI tower, a video operator frowned as he looked at his readings. "How many male Sekirei are there again?"

The on-duty manager looked over at him. "Two or three I think, why?"

"That's what I thought but... he's gone again."

"Whose gone again?"

"Nevermind, I think it might've been my imagination, too many hours staring into this thing."

OOOOOO

But that wasn't the only unusual thing that Ranma noticed as he raced over the skyscrapers and other buildings. No, that was the fact that there were several dozen other people going about roof-hopping and most of them were women. One or two of them stopped and stared at him, but Ranma was moving faster than any of them, and he simply waved at them as he raced nearby. One of them shouted something, but he didn't hear it, moving away as he was.

At one point Ranma saw a woman dangling off a girder sticking out of a half completed skyscraper. She was dressed sort of like some of the women he had occasionally seen hanging around the wharfs in some of the cities he and his old man had stopped in, or at least her costume hugged her body the same way, Ranma wasn't close enough to see more than that. Still when she looked at him Ranma waved, and saw her wave back, a bottle of sake dangling from one hand as she did.

I don't remember there being this many martial artists in Tokyo before, is there some kind of convention all woman's convention or something, going on? Hell, I didn't even know there were this many female martial artists in all Japan that could roofhop. Not one of them that he had seen so far had been a man.

Putting that aside for now Ranma stopped for a moment, trying to get his bearings. There were a few new buildings around and several older ones had been pulled down since he'd last been in Tokyo, which threw off his memory of the city. *Is it straight north from here, or should I head a little further towards the east first?*

His thoughts were interrupted by a shout from on high. "Thou Dishonorable louts! No mere monkey will ever wing me, it matters not what numbers thou dost bring against me! I am the strongest, and I will never submit!" That shout was followed by a sound resembling that of a fast moving waterfall for some reason, followed by a curse from someone else.

Ranma frowned, looking up at a skyscraper next to the small outlet store on whose roof he had stopped on. *That doesn't sound good, though what the heck is winging? Figure that out later, for now I think I just found a fight.* He smirked eagerly, then leapt upwards, easily ascending the outer wall of the skyscraper before jumping up to its roof.

Arriving on the roof Ranma found himself to the side of a fight between two opposing forces. On one side stood four women, facing one.

One had wild green hair with a long staff, wearing a blue and white tight top, long gloves and stockings held up by what Ranma thought were some kind of suspenders for legs over her bloomers and thigh length white boots. Next to her stood a younger girl that had short blonde hair. She wore a black leather top which showed off her belly, bloomers and stockings just like the other one, only a different color. From her fingers there were long whips, though Ranma wondered how the heck they could be considered a weapon. A third wore what looked like a kimono style dress, sort of the thing a kunoichi would wear, with no sleeves and white gloves. She had long black hair done up with a ribbon.

The fourth woman wore what looked like a priestess outfit, and had dark black hair done up in two ponytails. She had two long triangle shaped blades in her hands, and a almost panicky expression on her face.

This increased as she dodged to one side, letting out a small, quite cute "Eeek!" as an attack aimed at one of the others nearly hit her. She was still hit by it slightly, losing one of her blades but redirecting the torrent of water just enough for it to splash Ranma, turning him into a her for now.

The woman on the other end of that waterspout had to dodge an attack from the woman with the whips, cursing as she noticed Ranma. "So thou hast brought a fifth cur to do battle 'gainst me, it will avail you not!" She was a blonde-haired woman, wearing a black and white blouse of some kind. That was about all Ranma could tell before the two close combat specialists closed with her while the other two women looked at Ranma, frowning, since they knew the redhead wasn't with them.

Ranma grinned cracking her neck and shoulders for a moment. "Y'know, I like a fight as much as the next person, but four on one just doesn't seem fair. Mind if I join in Blondie?"

"My name is not Blondie, but if thou dost wish to address this imbalance, be my guest!" The embattled woman said, ducking under a blow from the staff that would've taken her head off then having to twist to one side as the kimono-wearing girl nearly caught her in the shoulder with a palm strike.

"Stay out of this Red! You'll get your turn soon!" said the green haired girl, not turning away from her opponent. "if you're not already winged I'm certain our master will oblige you."

"No idea what that means, but since Blondie gave her permission, let's go!" Ranma said, charging forwards.

The whip wielding girl turned to him, snapping her weapons at Ranma. "My Sekirei-sister told you to butt out bitch!"

Ranma shook his head grinning evilly as he leaped into the air propelling his body forward like he was diving and twisting in midair, dodging between the whips as they flew past. His fingers lashed out, grabbing the whips before landing, rolling and pulling in one smooth motion.

"W-gahh!" As Ranma had expected, the whips were connected by a grip in the girls hand, and she hadn't tried to let go of it before Ranma had pulled her off her feet. One second she was standing there attacking, the next she was in midair, squealing in shock as she was launched out into midair with such force she lost her grip on her whip's handle and went cartwheeling away through the air.

Ranma jumped over a blow from the blade wielder tapping his feet against her outstretched arm, propelling himself into the air and over the girl, still trailing the first girl's whips, kicking out and almost catching her in the back while she let out another cute "Eeek!" and launched herself forward.

Not letting up Ranma pressed her sharply, pushing her back into the fight around the blonde girl, who was being pressed hard by the last two. She seemed a long-range combatant by preference, using that weird water technique, which frankly Ranma was amazed by now that he thought of it, but she didn't seem to have very good hand-to-hand skills.

Her opponents on the other hand were very obviously close combat experts. The blonde girl was now bruised and battered, though showed no sign of slowing down just yet.

When the girl he was fighting over-extended in a desperate attack Ranma smacked a palm thrust into her chest, flinging her backwards into the staff-wielding woman fighting the blonde girl, then as that one staggered Ranma twisted to one side lashing out with a high kick that the staff-wielder barely redirected. Even so the staff shattered, and one of its bits caught her in the cheek. "God damnit! Who the hell are you Red!?"

"Names Ranma, remember it!" Ranma laughed, taking the staff-wielders legs out from under her while the blonde pressed her advantage against his original opponent and the unarmed girl, who had tossed the broken bits of her sword aside and attacked with her fists and legs now. "Suiryu!" She shouted some kind of technique for moment, and a blast of water slammed into the unarmed girl's chest with enough force to carry her into the knife-wielder then smash them both through the roof's guard-wall and off the roof entirely.

Realizing she was alone now the spear-wielder disengaged from Ranma, leaping across backwards to another rooftop. "Another time Red, Blondie!" With that she jumped down and away.

Turning to the supposed victim in this affair, Ranma cocked his head. "Why exactly were they attacking you anyway, Blondie?" he asked turning to the woman.

He found himself drenched suddenly as the woman held up a hand. "I am not Blondie stranger, I am Tsukiumi, Sekirei zero-nine." She then calmed down, put one hand on her hips as the other raised to move through her hair as she looked away, somewhat sheepishly. "I am... grateful for thy assistance. Four on one, especially when two were such skilled opponents, would have been hard to handle even for one as skilled as I. Yet who art thou? I have not seen you before though, that matters not. I had met very few of my sisters before we were let out for this farce."

There was a lot in that sentence that Ranma didn't understand, but he shrugged off for now, trying hard not to stare at the girl. She was a few inches taller than him, possibly as tall as his male form and she looked about two years older or so, maybe more. But it wasn't her height or her apparent age that caught Ranma's attention. No, now that the fight was over Ranma realized that she was an **astounding** beauty. *The other girls were good-looking, but this one!*

Long black boots with black stockings framed long, firm, powerful looking legs that seemed to go on forever under a long black coat open at the front with a very short, white under dress over what Ranma could tell was a hard, muscled stomach which segued into the largest chest that Ranma had ever seen. Seriously they were almost impossible for him to ignore despite his usual disinterest in such things, but here it was actually easier because her face was also drop dead gorgeous. Firm high cheekbones framed lips lifted into a faint smile at the moment without a hint of make up or lipstick anywhere. Azure eyes locked on Ranma's own, lighter and brighter than Ranma's, at least in his opinion. Her Blond hair flowed down and around her body in waves, which given her power was fitting. *Blessed Amaterasu, she is gorgeous!*

Looking away forcibly, Ranma was grateful that the girl hadn't noticed him staring. "um, I, I'm Ranma, and I heard you shouting at the beginning of the fight, I think, and decided to see if you need any help." He shrugged normally. "I wouldn't butt into someone else's fight, but since it was four-on-one I figured it'd be okay. How do you do those water techniques anyway?" Ranma was actually a little jealous, he had felt some kind of ki splash from Tsukiumi when she used her techniques, but nowhere near enough to figure out how she was doing whatever it was. *Maybe she pulls water from the air and condenses it, but that's well beyond any ki technique I've ever heard of. Elemental control like that sounds more like magic than ki! Although, I do know magic exists, so maybe that ain't as far-fetched as it sounds.*

"I too very much prefer even fights, one-on-one is the only true test of a warrior." Tsukiumi nodded. "As for my powers, I am the Sekirei of the waters. All water is under my control." She threw her head haughtily back smirking at him. "That is why I in the strongest!" She frowned then. I presume that thou art un-winged as well, but why dist thou not say your number? Tis only courteous to do so."

"What is this number thing you keep talking about?" Ranma asked. "And whats' winging anyway?" I'm not one of your sisters or whatever you're thinking of."

The girl's eyes widened. "Though dost not think though art a mere human? Impossible!"

"Hah, I didn't know there was anything else to be but 'mere human' Ranma said laughing and holding up his fingers making quote marks as he said the words 'mere human' . I'm not 'mere' anything Tsukiumi get that out of your head! I'm a martial artist!"

"I have seen martial artists in movies..." she said dubiously, "though I thought they were simply special-effects."

Tsukiumi was actually wondering if the redhead had taken a blow to her head at some point, and simply forgotten that she was a Sekirei. It would be odd, but not nearly as odd as a human being able to fight Sekirei. That would just be impossible, wouldn't it?

"Most of them are, but there are real martial artists out there that make that Hollywood crap look stupid as hell." He looked up at the sun frowning. "Look, I gotta go, I need to say hi to an old friend and I don't know if I'll be able to find where I'm staying once the sun goes down." He held out his hand, and Tsukiumi shook it. "I'll see you around I guess."

Tsukiumi nodded. "Thank you once again for your aid. It might not have been totally necessary, but it certainly made things easier." She added hastily

"Yer welcome, it was fun. Er..." Ranma paused looking at her hopefully. "I don't suppose you can heat the water in your attacks can you?"

"I'm afraid not, why, dost thou want another bath?" Tsukiumi laughed.

Ranma laugh to shaking his head. "Nah nothing like that, though I guess it'd be easier to show you, but some other time. Like I said, I gotta go." With that Ranma turned and leaped away landing on another roof and heading north.

Behind the redhead Tsukiumi cocked her head to one side. *I wonder what Ranma could show me with hot water that she could not with my normal tepid water? She was very skilled though, it's so sad that she seems to have had a head wound at some point. Tis always nice to meet one of my sisters who is not enamored of this game in any event, whatever her reasons. She was also cute for such a little thing...*

Tsukiumi blushed as that thought hit her, shaking her head. *While that wouldst be better than being attracted to a hairless monkey, tis not that much better.*

In any event, I need to find a place to stay for the night. She frowned hopping up onto a rooftop nearby as she stared around looking for a hotel. Say what you will about MBI, at least they have some knowledge that we need to be able to look after ourselves, she thought as she pulled a black credit care out of the small pocket of her skirt. And after that exercise I think I deserve a treat. I'm thinking French tonight. Pity, if Ranma was willing to stay around I would've treated her for aiding me today. I dislike being indebted to someone, even if that someone doesn't seem to realize the depth of it.

OOOOOO

It was silent in the video control room, as the overseer frowned frantically searching through the Sekirei database. "I'm not getting any hit on a short buxom redhead named Ranma, what the hell!?"

"Well, either the records have been altered, or something interesting has been added to the game!" said a voice from the doorway. They all turned President Minaka there, his cape flying out behind him as he stood, one arm thrust out dramatically. "The game of the gods needs to have some wildcards in it after all!"

He smiled, pushing up his glasses which gleamed in the light of the computer screens and the overhead lights. "Still, extend the research out to include national databases, and any public sightings of a redhead matching that description. Just because someone acts as a wildcard does not mean they can be unknown to the game keeper."

As the computer specialists all nodded obediently, Minaka turned away, but he paused, looking back over his shoulder. "Oh, and please don't share this development with Takami-chan. She's busy enough as it is, no need to bother her with something so minor is there?" Despite his bland tone, his eyes and face made it clear that was an order, and everyone in the room nodded obediently. He nodded back and left, laughing as his cape once more billowed behind him, dramatically, of course.

OOOOOO

About thirty minutes after leaving Tsukiumi behind, Ranma finally began to recognize houses from his time training at Izumo house and smiled excitedly. Pausing for a moment he looked around to see if he could find somewhere to get some hot water. Seeing a convenience store he popped inside, asked for some hot water from the tea dispenser and went outside dumping it over his head turning back to his normal body.

Can't show up on Miya's doorstep in my new body after all, I got no idea how Miya-nee's gonna react ta that. He smirked suddenly. Except for maybe pushing her over the edge and getting' her ta hunt my old man down and turn him inta a rug. Ranma had no problem remembering how furious Miya and Takehito had both been when informed of

some of the training Genma had put Ranma through, and he hadn't shared the worst stories either.

Now in his male form Ranma once again took it to the rooftops. *That's odd* he thought after a moment. *I don't see as many cameras in this area, is that because it's mostly a housing district, or somethin' else? Weird.*

Seconds later Ranma was looking over Izumo House from the roof of a nearby house. He paused there, debating internally whether or not to go to the front door and ring the doorbell, or hop into the backyard for old time's sake. *It has been a long time, I suppose I should go to the front door. Nee-san likes those kind of manners I suppose.*

With that in mind, Ranma leaped down to the road, and made his way to the front door of the inn, where he quickly rang the doorbell. For a moment there was no reply, and he pushed it again.

"Yeah, yeah, just a sec!" Said a female voice, but it wasn't Miya's.

They could've had a kid in the time I was gone I guess, but sure as hell not one that sounds that old. They did say this was an inn, so I guess that could be a tenant, though I never thought Takehito'd actually open it up to other people really.

The door opened, and Ranma blinked in astonishment, looking away quickly. "What the hell woman! Who answers the doorway dressed like that!"

The girl was a brunette who was almost as good looking as Tsukiumi with even larger breasts which before this moment Ranma would've said was impossible. She was in just as good a shape as Tsukiumi, which Ranma could tell because she was currently wearing only panties and a tight white shirt that barely covering her chest, leaving her stomach exposed.

"Hah, don't talk like you don't like it kiddo, you'd have to go a long way to find a sexier girl than me! What can we do for you anyway?"

"But some clothing on first." Ranma growled, still looking away.

He blushed hotly when the girl suddenly reached out, throwing her arms around her his back and breathing into his ear. "Oh come on, you can look at little old me."

Realizing he was being teased Ranma let one hand fall to his side right next to the girl stomach and began to move his fingers, tickling her. The girl giggled and jumped away, her face flushed for a moment.

Ranma glared at her, keeping his eyes on hers with difficulty. "How the heck did Miya-nee and Takehito-san let someone like you stay here?" He grinned suddenly, his mood shifting quickly. "Do you have some dirt on them or something?"

The girl laughed, shaking your head. "I like the way you think, but no nothing like that, we're just old friends and she lets me stay here for old time's sake."

"Uzume, what has Miya told you about answering the door like that?" said a male voice, though it wasn't Takehito. a tousle-haired older gentleman, around 25 or so, with silver hair and a bishonen face appeared behind the girl in the doorway, rubbing at his hair. He looked as if he had been in the shower, and he stared at the younger man with the ponytail, his brow furrowed. "Who are you?"

"You another tenant?" Ranma asked. The man nodded still looking at him somewhat suspiciously and Ranma shrugged his shoulders. "I'm Ranma Saotome. I'm here to see Miya-nee. I've been away for a few years, but she and I used ta train together, so I figured I'd tell her I was back."

The man's eyes widened and so did Uzume's. "Train together, really?" The two exchanged glances. "Are ya sure you have the right inn?" Uzume asked.

"Dark purple hair down to the small of her back, brown eyes, likes ta dress like a housewife complete with apron? Takehito and her can both summon up these masks tha, are like made of terror?" Ranma asked, smirking.

Uzume blinked. "Yeah that's them, I think..." Again she looked at the unintroduced man, who shrugged. "You seem to know Miya so I suppose it's all right. Kagari, could ya show him into the sitting room, I'll go get change before Miya show's up and uses that damn mask on me again."

With a sigh the now-named Kagari gestured Ranma into the Inn, and Ranma entered, leaving his shoes behind and

moving forward smiling as he noticed the interior hadn't changed. "When was the last time you saw Miya-san?" Kagari asked.

"About 3 years ago or so I think, on the road you're not exactly able to keep track of time most of the time, especially when you're in the boonies." Ranma replied.

So this isn't some Sekirei that escaped earlier than Uzume or Matsu, Homura, the Sekirei of fire thought. Interesting, but why would Miya of all people agree to train him?

When he asked that question aloud, Ranma laughed. "I challenged her to a match when I was younger, came by because I was looking for someone to fight. My oyaji was busy with work at the time, and I'd had this new technique to find large ki signatures."

He looked at Kagari's blank face and shrugged. "Er, life energy, ya mighta seen it described as chi, or chakra in animes?" Kagari nodded, having understood it the first time, simply not understanding how a human boy could have developed anything like what Ranma was describing. Ranma went on. "Miya-nee's frankly a monster in comparison to anyone else I've ever seen."

Kagari nodded, understanding that was simply the honest truth, and setting aside how the youth was able to use ki himself for now. Then he frowned, wondering if Ranma was using that technique now somehow. If so in all likelihood he and Uzume would have shown up as beyond human norm as well. The boy didn't seem to be though, so maybe their secret was still safe. Then something Ranma said struck him. "Wait what do you mean you challenged Miya-san?"

Ranma laughed remembering. "I hopped over the outer wall, and asked to fight the martial arts master who I thought lived here. When I realized it was Miya-nee, I challenged her directly, and when she tried to put me off didn't take no for an answer. It was fun!" He then rubbed his head "And painful."

"That I can believe a least." Kagari replied, still looking at him faintly confused. Though Kagari's emotions were nearer to shock and disbelief than confusion. *He challenged Miya-san like that, and **survived**? Okay, he was young at the time, but still...*

"I just want to be clear on this," Uzume said from behind them, giving voice to Kagari's thoughts. "You challenged Miya, and actually try to hit her? And you're still alive?!" Uzume was also wondering how the hell the young man could get away with calling her 'Miya-nee' too, but that was a smaller thing.

Ranma turned, grateful to see that the girl had changed though blushing still at how good she could make a pair of jeans and a regular T-shirt look. *What the hell are they feeding the people in Tokyo these days!*

"Er, yeah. It was touch and go for a few minutes there, but I offered to help fix up this place in return for trainin' and she and Takehito-san agreed to that Takehito was nice too, and understood how much money I was saving them. Is he still working for MBI by the way? What's he think about them actually buyin' the whole city and renamin' it? I think that's a crappy move myself."

The two tenants exchanged a glance. "That I think you'll need to talk to Miya about," Kagari said delicately.

Ranma frowned at his tone, but before he could ask about it, there was a clicking sound as the front door opened. Realizing who it must be Ranma grinned, leaping up from where he had been sitting at the table he had fixed all those years ago, hopping out into the hallway.

"Guess who's back Miya-nee!" Before Miya could register his presence, Ranma was already within arm's reach, lifting her up and twirling her around in a big hug.

"Ranma!" Miya said staring down at him, trying to frown but failing miserably, a small but very warm smile forcing itself onto her face. "Put me down!"

Ranma did so still grinning at her while behind him Uzume and Kagari both stared at him. The girl too was grinning. *He really call Miya nee-san! Oh that is too good!*

For her part Miya had begun to poke Ranma in the chest. "Three years! Three years without a word from you, and not only that but you left so abruptly! One day I hear that you're not going to come around because you are waiting for your poor friend to show up, then four days later I get a message from China! **From China!** Telling me that you're fine and not to worry but that Genma wanted to take you on a training trip to other countries. You could've called me at some point!"

"We're ya worried about me?" Ranma asked the grin.

Which ended abruptly as her ladle, which had not been in her hand, Ranma had make sure about that before picking her up, suddenly appeared and smacked him upside the head. "What do you think?" She asked coldly.

Rubbing at his head he glared at her a little, but subsided quickly. "I couldn't call ya, sending ya that postcard used up the last o' my cash, and my old man kept us movin' all the time after that, couldn't stop and earn more. And most of the time we were so far out in the boonies there weren't any phones in the first place ! And I couldn't come by to tell you I was going, 'cause I didn't know I was going. Oyaji decided we should leave, then when I refused he coldcocked me from behind while I was waitin' for Ryoga to show up for our match. It was all I could do to get away when we hit China ta send you that card."

"That does sound like him from what little interaction I had with him. I would've thought that my lesson to him would've stuck more than that though."

"In everything but martial arts my old man's a **very** slow learner, though ta be fair, ya scared him straight for a nearly a year, that's a hell of an accomplishment. Y'know what though, I think it's one of those balancing things, he can learn and teach martial arts to a high degree but everything else is you know, bottoms out." Ranma said gesturing with one hand way above his head and the other down to the floor.

"Or perhaps he's just an idiot." Miya said tartly. She sighed faintly, then put her arms around Ranma in a firm hug. "Still it's good to see you again Ranma." She smiled, stepping back from him. "I assume you've kept up your exercises?"

"What do you think?" he said smirking challengingly at her. "I also learned a heck of a lot on the trip too. Oyaji was feelin' the pinch before we left, and he pushed himself and me hard the entire time. Ya wanta see what I've learned?"

"No fear!" said Uzume from behind him, shaking her head. "You gotta have balls of steel bro, honestly."

"What have I told you about language like that Uzume-san?" Miya said cocking her head to one side as a hint of her hanya mask began to appear.

"Not to, not to sorry!" Uzume said backing away hurriedly. To one side however Ranma had whipped out a notebook, eagerly leaning forward.

Seeing this Miya glared, the technique dissipating. "What have I told you about prying into a woman secrets?"

"But that's not a secret!" Ranma protested. "It's a ki technique, and you learned it from Takehito-san anyway! I don't see why I shouldn't learned it, I'm a student of yours aren't I?"

"Only a part-time student," said Miya , shaking her head though she slowly began to frowned at the mention of Takehito.

That frown deepened when Ranma looked outside frowning as he noticed that the sun had begun to set. "I'd love to catch up, but I'm sort of under a time limit. I don't think I can find where my old man and I are staying once it's night out, so do you think your husband's going to be back by then? I'd love ta say hi ta him too."

Miya sighed. "Perhaps we should go sit down Ranma, I have something to tell you..."

End Chapter

Quite a bit more raw than my other prologue chapters, but as I said, I think it gives you a good idea of the tone of the story, and where I might be taking it. Please tell me what you think, and again, have a happy New Years!

Chapter 2: Chapter 2

I don't own Ranma or Sekirei. The first would have been sexier and Ranma not almost entirely asexual as a guy, and Uzume would not have died in the second.

So this won second place in this month's story poll. It was really damn close to, a lot of the time this and *Horse* were tied, and for a time *Semblance* was close too. Keep the votes coming guys, I love to see what people want to read, it adds to the fun for me. The poll for next month will be updated by the time this story posts, and will be open until the 17th.

For those of you who donate on , I apologize, I am trying to get into the habit of using that site more often, but it's hard to remember. I will however try harder in the future now that summer has begun and I am only taking a single course from now on.

Thanks as beta go to **ultimaflare0** who got this back to me on the same day I sent it to him!

Chapter 2 Icy Hot

Miya silently watched as Ranma knelt down in front of the small shrine she had created to honor Takehito in her room, the room she and her husband had shared for far too short a time. They were alone for the moment, her tenants knowing that this was a private moment between the two of them. That and one of Miya's rules was that none of her tenants could enter her room under any circumstance. Indeed since Takehito had died Ranma was the first person other than herself who had been in here.

Clapping his hands together Ranma mumbled a Buddhist prayer to the dead he had heard on occasion on their travels. He had never been as close to Takehito as he was to Miya, but Ranma had still seen him as something of a role model in many ways: the way the man carried himself, the way he was confident without being cocky or arrogant and the manners he and Miya had both tried to instill in Ranma. *With limited success I suppose but given where I started from I think I've made good progress.*

After kneeling there in silence for a few moments Ranma clapped his hands again, and rose smoothly, turning to face the door where Miya had remained, her own head bowed in remembered grief. Takehito's death had happened more than two years ago, but she still felt his loss keenly every day.

"How did he die?" Ranma asked quietly.

"An accident at work. One of his assistants left out some volatile chemicals, and there was an explosion." Miya responded by rote. That was MBI's official line to the disaster which had claimed Takehito and more than a hundred other lives that horrible day. Miya of course suspected there was more to it than that, a lot more, but had no proof.

If she had, Minaka and his dogs would all have died at the end of her blade long since, a concept that was, despite the lack of proof of what had happened to Takehito, gaining some momentum in her mind since she had found out about the so-called Sekirei-plan. Yet Miya was constrained by the simple fact that despite Minaka's own mad scheme for them, her little feathers were protected by MBI from the rest of humanity in a way she and her sword could not.

Ranma frowned at her looking a little suspicious, but he didn't say anything instead following Miya out of the room back downstairs. "You'll stay for dinner won't you?" She asked.

"I told you I'm not certain I can find where my old man and I're staying tonight if I stay out past sundown." Ranma said. "I'd love to stay and hear how you actually got some tenants. I'd have thought no one'd want to put up with your rules, or has that mask of yours gotten less scary over time?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about Ranma," Miya replied raising one hand in front of her mouth delicately. "And of course as an old widow, I would need a source of income and this place was designed as an inn in the first place."

"Old?" Ranma laughed. "You're still as pretty as ya were when I left, heck you don't look like you've aged a day Miya-nee. Heh I bet that mask of yours has got a lot of use over the years to keep the suitors at bay. Course, that's the soft option with you." He laughed, imagining anyone trying to hit on Miya without her consent. *Just because she uses a glorified spoon instead of a sword doesn't mean she can't still cut you in half.*

Miya slapped his shoulder lightly, well lightly for the two of them, if Ranma had been a normal human that slap

would've sent him sprawling. Even so she laughed, blushing slightly behind her hand. Ranma was blunt but his compliments were heartfelt, and it had been a long time since anyone had truly complemented her on anything but her cooking. Kagari did at times, but his compliments always felt forced or automatic to her.

"None of that Ranma, and your problem isn't so insoluble, we do use these things called the Yellow Pages. We can simply call this Tendo dojo of yours and then work out directions from here. Do you know what district your friends live in?"

"That's that common sense thing ain't it?" Ranma said shaking his head, his accent coming back for a moment. "Okay, so maybe I need more o' that. Though I don't like the idea of letting my father alone without a minder, and his friend didn't exactly impress me either. If I show up again and I find that they've already written up the marriage certificate and forced one of Soun's daughters to sign them I'm going to be **very** angry!"

Miya stopped suddenly, turning to him, cocking her head to one side the faint's start of darkness appearing behind her. "Marriage certificate? Whatever are you talking about?" *Don't tell me...*

"Yeah, it's one of my old man's hair-brained ideas! He's got this old training buddy. They apparently learned under the same grandmaster, though why that'd matter at all considering how many masters he had me training under I don't know. Heck he even trained with a few himself the past few years. Anyway their 'grand plan' is to unite the two schools he and his friend made from the original school of Anything Goes, but I don't see the point."

As Ranma and Miya entered the sitting room Uzume and Kagari looked up, smiling slightly in welcome as they watched Ranma follow Miya in. Both of them were **extremely** interested in the young man since watching him interact with Miya, who had always kept a certain distance between herself and everyone around her. The way Ranma treated her therefore was a cross between startling and hilarious with a smattering of fear for his wellbeing thrown in for good measure.

"Unite the schools, so you're some kind of martial artist or something? I guess that explains something, though how you got Miya to agree to train you it's something else entirely." Uzume said having heard that portion of their conversation. She leaned forward over the table, not incidentally flashing her cleavage at the younger man.

While Ranma blushed slightly and looked away, Miya let out a small amount of her aura, scaring Uzume into straightening up before answering, "I thought at the time it was almost my duty to train him in good manners if nothing else, and when we began training together it proved to be rather fun."

Miya had no wish to share with Ranma that she had initially thought he was the descendent of some Ashikabi/Sekirei pair, especially since she had decided that wasn't the case after a few months interaction with him. She should have felt some hint of a Sekirei core from him in that time if that was the case, but she hadn't.

She smiled at Ranma and gestured at him to sit down at the table before going over to a small table set by the doorway to the kitchen, throwing him the Yellow Pages. He caught the book deftly, and began to flip through it. "It was rather cute watching him try his best every time we practiced together however, and he sort of grew on me. Like a weed, or a vine." She teased, causing Ranma to stick his tongue out at her.

"Heh I didn't know you went for them so young...I'm going to shut up now..." Uzume started and then stopped as Miya turned to her, eyes narrowing and her smile becoming fixed.

Ignoring the two of them with the ease of long practice Kagari frowned thoughtfully, wondering if a normal human could become good enough to worry about if Miya was the one training him. *No*, he decided after a moment, *he didn't train with her for very long after all, and I can't imagine that Miya would push a young boy hard enough to overcome a Sekirei's natural advantages in speed and strength.*

The implications of Uzume's attempt at a joke went right over Ranma's head, and he continued to flit through the yellow pages while continuing to expand the original topic of conversation. "Anyway, Oyaji sprang this marriage contract thing on me a few days ago as we were arriving at the Tendo dojo. He's always doing stupid crap like that, deciding my future for me and all that shit."

"Language Ranma, but I have to agree with the sentiment, marriage contracts are so old fashioned, and rather foolish at the best of times. Which this certainly is not, seeing as you and the prospective bride have never even met before." Miya said, shaking her head as she entered the kitchen raising her voice slightly. "Do you wish me to come by to **chat** with him, or were you able to talk your way out of it?"

"I was able to postpone the wedding at least." Ranma said with a shrug. "The Tendo family has three girls and the

three of them and me convinced Oyaji and Soun, that's his old training partner's name, to wait two years so as to let us get ta know one another."

Ranma shook his head. "We'll see how well that goes, my old man's not one to give up on a scheme, but I also pointed out another problem with the whole joining the schools thing because the Tendo School might not even exist in the first place. Soun doesn't look to be a good enough martial artist to teach anything, and the only student who uses the dojo is the youngest daughter. She's got okay strength for a beginner I suppose, but no style, no footwork, and **no** speed." He shrugged. "Though I suppose I'm a pretty tough judge of that kinda thing."

Finishing with the Yellow Pages Ranma moved over to the phone situated on the small table by the doorway to the kitchen, and called the dojo. After a few rings Kasumi picked up, answering in that pleasant voice of hers. "Tendo residence, this is Kasumi, may I help you?"

"Hey Kasumi, I'm over at my friend's place, and she wants me to stay for dinner, I'll still pick up the rice on my way back though, don't worry. Figured I'd call and tell you not to bother with dinner for me, and to ask for your address so I know how to find the dojo later."

"Thank you for telling me Ranma, though I had hoped to talk to you further over dinner. However, I can understand wanting to reconnect with old friends." Kasumi went on giving him the dojo's address while in the background Ranma could hear two male voices singing or perhaps shouting something he wasn't certain. What was certain was they both sounded drunk as hell.

Ranma wrote it down then moved over into the kitchen to talk to Miya about directions. After a moment Miya realized Ranma had no idea about street names, train stops or anything else, being too used to going over the rooftops to bother with anything like that. Sighing she took the phone speaking to Kasumi directly her eyes narrowing when she heard the same thing that Ranma had in the background.

Swiftly thereafter Miya hung up the phone, shaking her head. "Your father doesn't seem to have changed much from what you told me about him." She said dryly, before smiling slyly as she looked at Ranma. "Kasumi sounded quite nice, a very well-spoken young lady. I suppose you could do worse," she teased.

Ranma flushed a little, shaking his head. "Yeah, she's er, nice I suppose. But I just met her this afternoon, but my old man acted like I was just supposed ta meet her or her sisters and go, bam wow, let's get hitched! Gah, seriously I don't know what my old man was thinking, assumin' I'd be fine with just marryin' someone I just met. That'd be just so damn stupid, meeting someone then suddenly deciding to spend the rest of your life with 'em."

Miya laughed quietly while Uzume and Kagari both looked at one another, scowling. After all, that was what finding Ashikabi was about, that instant connection with another person the destined one who made your soul sing.

Yet they had to admit from a human perspective it did sound stupid. *I'm beginning to realize why Chiho-baby thought it was a silly game when I explained it...* Uzume thought. For his part Kagari simply scowled, not liking Ranma making light of something he was coming to believe he would never feel, no matter that Ranma had no way of knowing that.

"Well at least you were able to postpone things. I hope that with two years to work with you and the young ladies involved will be able to figure a way out. But on a similar vein Ranma I did have something I wished to tell you the next time I saw you. Do you remember a young girl named Ukyo?"

Ranma paused as he was about to sit down crouching there as he cocked his head. "Umm... Miya-nee the only Ukyo I remember was a guy. His old man owned this small okonomiyaki cart. We fought, I mean trained every day together, every day, and if I won I got free food." Ranma remained there, then his eyes widened. "Wait Ukyo's a girl!?"

"I remember her," Uzume cut in grinning over at Kagari who had stiffened the moment Miya had mentioned Ukyo. "Huh, so you're the Ran-chan she was after huh. She was quite the tomboy from what I remember but certainly had curves enough didn't she Kagari?"

"I, I have no idea what you're talking about Uzume!" Kagari stuttered, looking away.

"That is what you get for always treating every young lady you meet like one of your clients." Miya said from the kitchen, not looking up from putting the finishing touches on dinner.

Ranma turned to stare at him, one eyebrow raised and Kagari coughed uncomfortably. "Er yes well. Ukyo took my, um my automatic response to girls developed at my job as my being honestly interested in her. She then began to,

um, flirt with me, in her own way it must be said, whenever she stopped by. Nothing I'm not used to, though the manner of her flirtations was rather... unique, and her persistence was admirable."

"'Admirable' he says, hah! She followed this lug to work and scared off, what did she call your regular clients, old hags or ancient hussies?" Uzume laughed. "Went on for nearly a month before she realized Kagari wasn't actually interested in her. Heh, I still don't know what was funnier, that, her reaction to my own preferences, or her first attempt to try and take over the kitchen."

"I... honestly don't know what to say to all that." Ranma said, shaking his head before smirking. "Although I'd have paid good money to see anyone tryin' to kick Miya-nee out of her own kitchen. Your cooking's fantastic Miya-nee, but you are kind of possessive about your kitchen, remember that one time I tried to make my own dinner here?"

"You were trying to make a takoyaki ball the size of your own head Ranma, that isn't a real dinner, and you only had to wait until I got home from shopping anyway. I was perfectly justified booting you in your rear." Miya replied primly. "As for Ukyo, while she knew her way around the kitchen she was a little too blinded by her infatuation with Kagari to realize how rude she was being. But that isn't important right now. You said you thought Ukyo was a boy?"

"Oh yeah, I mean, we were six, and he, er, I mean she, gah that's weird." Ranma shook his head, still trying to come to grips with the idea that his old childhood friend, one of very few he had made in his travels, was a girl. "We were six at the time, and she dressed just like her old man in miniature, how was I supposed ta tell? But why'd she come here?"

He paused for a moment, trying to bring to mind the last few memories of Ukyo he had. "Wait a minute, why was Oyaji pushin' their cart like that anyway?"

"She came here because apparently her father and you entered into a marriage agreement like the one you just described with the Tendos. Your father was supposed to take Ukyo with you on your training trip, only Genma, and you apparently, decided to run off with her dowry and leave her behind. She was able to find your middle school, and the principal there pointed her in my direction."

"B, but, why!? I mean, why'd her father want to do something like that, and why'd my old man do that?" Ranma's eyes widened, and he groaned. "Oh man, you don't think she was here for revenge or something? But, wait, if my old man was willing to make one agreement like that... could, could he have made more!?"

"I don't know about that, but it is a possibility." Miya replied as she left the kitchen, gesturing at Uzume to help her bring in the meal, grilled fish with a daikon radish side in Sekirei sized portions. Uzume blinked at the portion size for Ranma, wondering if Miya had forgotten that Ranma was human, but Ranma didn't seem to think it interesting enough to comment on.

As she handed out food Miya continued speaking. "In the case of Ukyo however I was able to convince her to put all the blame on your father rather than you, you were after all a young boy and could not be held accountable for your father's actions. She still wants to meet you, and was adamant the agreement was still valid, but she's no longer looking to kill you for abandoning her Ranma. Genma is another matter entirely."

"Ukyo left Tokyo about six months or so ago, but she did leave her cell phone number. We could get in touch with her if you wanted." Kagari said helpfully, as he got up to grab a fourth pair of chopsticks for their guest without being asked.

Ranma rubbed his face irritably, scowling slightly. "I think it'd be best to wait on that for now. I want ta make certain she's the only other person my old man did this to before meeting her. If it's just her, I suppose I could convince her to stick around for the same time I've talked my old man and Soun into giving me and the Tendo girls. If not... I don't know, maybe repay the dowry?"

"Quite a sensible way of going about things, although Ukyo no doubt will want to pound on Genma regardless." Miya said as she sat down, smiling over at Ranma.

"You could just marry them all bro." Uzume said grinning. "All boys want harems right?"

"Not this boy." Ranma replied, shaking his head. "I hardly know anything about girls in the first place, let alone romance and all that. What would I do with more'n one girl?" He smirked suddenly, looking over at Uzume. "But why did harems spring ta mind Uzume? You got a group of boy toys hidden 'round the place or something?"

"Enough about all that." Miya said, cutting in quickly. "Tell us about your training trip Ranma. I know you were in

China when you sent me that postcard, but where specifically did you go?"

At that question both Kagari and Uzume turned to Ranma eagerly, neither of them having ever been out of Tokyo save when they were transported to Tokyo from Kamakura island. Uzume in particular had often dreamed about traveling.

Nodding Ranma began to talk about his trip. Unfortunately for Uzume he hadn't been to many tourist destinations, though his description of some of the things he had seen out in the forests and jungles of Asia matched or exceeded similar, more accessible, tourist traps. And a time or two he caused all three of his listeners to laugh at his description of some of the things he and Genma had done in the name of training.

"You're pulling my leg," Uzume laughed as Ranma wound down, having mentioned nearly every place he had been but making no mention of his curse. He honestly was uncertain how Miya would react to the idea of magic, and was worried she would react poorly to it. "There is no way that Amazon elder looked like that!"

"I kid you not." Ranma laughed. "She was short, wrinkly, hell she looked almost like those old images of witches from Russia, Baba Yogie or something? Bounced around on her staff like it was a pogo stick. I'm just glad I was able to get out of there without any complications. When we passed through a town nearby afterwards, the people there told me that the Amazons had this weird tradition of how they went about bringing in new blood. If an outsider male defeats an Amazon, she gives this kiss of marriage."

He shuddered. "And of course is that means you're married in their eyes. Stupid crap, like one kiss could be enough to make you married in any sensible person's eyes. I might not know much, but I know marriage is about more than kissing or being stronger than the other person."

Again Kagari scowled, not liking how Ranma was making fun of something that was at the center of their society even if he didn't know it. But Uzume simply laughed, shaking her head. "Oh yes, a real tragedy there, getting to lock lips with sexy martial artist type babes, what horror. Still damn, just imagine if you had, then this Shampoo girl, Ukyo and one of the Tendo's could've had a three-way death match to decide who'd become your wife."

She paused then, smirking a little. "Or maybe just a three-way, the one with the most endurance wins!"

Miya was about to summon up her hanya mask to punish Uzume's lewd comment as it deserved, but paused as she noticed the comment going right over Ranma's head. Instead, he had turned to her, cocking his head to one side quizzically. "Speaking of matches, is there some kind of tournament or convention going on?"

"Not that I'm aware of," Miya said, though her tone belied her suddenly tense body. "Why?"

"As I was roof-hopping I ran into a few female martial artists. They didn't seem as honorable as I'd expect from someone who's actually trained with you, but they sort of had the same feel if that makes any sense?"

"What do you mean they weren't as honorable as you would expect?" Miya asked. She knew that the Sekirei fights were supposedly one-on-one combat, or at best teams of equal opponents fighting it out, and the idea of Ranma running into a group that didn't keep to that ideal bothered her. *Not that I should be surprised even at this early a date that someone is willing to break the rules.*

Ranma shrugged. "There was a group of four women fighting a single opponent. She was a tall blonde woman with blue eyes dressed in a black skirt and white blouse, had a sort of haughty attitude."

Recognizing the woman who had begun to style herself as his rival Kagari frowned. *I can't be on guard all the time, but that Tsukiumi was ambushed by a group that large when I was here sleeping off my job bothers me. I thought Higa and the others would be wary about moving during the day given the fact the police haven't been replaced by Minaka's tools yet, but that might not be the case. Damn, I'll need to cut back my hours and step up my daytime patrols.*

As the other man was thinking this, Ranma went on. "She had the coolest ki techniques I've ever seen too! She could create water out of thin air and use it to attack! That was damn awesome! Anyway, I figured that five on one wasn't very fair, so I joined in on her side of things."

Uzume's eyes narrowed, though she tried to remain cool, as she asked, "Wait, so you're telling us you found a martial arts match here in the city, today? You sure you didn't wander unto a movie set or something? You really expect us to believe there was a woman who could create water out of thin air? That sounds like special effects to me."

She shifted uncomfortably as Ranma looked at her, a deadpan expression on his face, then over to Kagari and Miya

who shook her head sadly. "Uuhhhhh, so that's how you're going to play it huh? I did mention my finding Miya-nee via a ki technique right, a technique that told me how large her ki reserves are didn't I?"

Inwardly both Uzume and Kagari cursed. Uzume had actually forgotten that, while Kagari had hoped the youth hadn't used it since arriving at the inn. Their secrets out, Uzume scowled. "Alright you got me. So tell us, what did the foursome who was attacking the blonde so dishonorably look like."

Ranma flashed Uzume a peace sign, enjoying her irritation but answered her question easily. "One was a younger looking girl, about as young as me maybe, with short blonde hair with a black leather top bloomers and stockings who used these stupid long whip things, hah! " He shook his head. "I sent her flying with her own weapon because they were all connected to this grip she had in her hands, and she couldn't drop them before I threw her."

"Another had long black hair done up with a ribbon and wore, well something I've seen in anime being worn by kunoichi, with white gloves. She was a better fighter than the first gal, but nothing special. The third wore what looked like a priestess outfit, and had black hair in two ponytails. She used kukri knives of all things."

Miya made an interrogative sound and Ranma explained. "Short triangle-shaped knives, with heavy crossbars as a hilt. Weird weapon from India meant to punch through armor and also be good for slashing attacks. She wasn't very good with 'em though, and she let out these little cutesy 'eek' noises whenever she was attacked. The blonde, Tsukky something, dealt with her and the kunoichi wannabe by sending the flying with a water battering ram."

"The last one had wild green hair with a long staff, and wore a blue and white tight top, long gloves and white boots. She used a staff and seemed to be their leader. For all that though, she was just as weak as the others. I shattered her staff with a kick and forced her to retreat easily enough."

That proclamation caused Uzume to spit out her drink across the table into Ranma's face before gasping and choking having recognized that description as one of Higa's chief enforcers. She hadn't met the woman often, but she knew that she was one that Higa used for dirty deeds, and was supposedly one of his most dangerous too.

The idea that his human could so easily dispatch her was beyond astonishing. "You can't be serious?" she shouted, as she wiped away at her mouth, not noticing that both of her table companions had gasped and were staring at Ranma now. "I," she finally looked up and her eyes widened. "W-what the heck?"

In Ranma's place was a short buxom redhead. She was at least a foot shorter than Ranma, and while her breasts weren't up to most Sekirei's standards, they were certainly decent sized for young human woman. Her hair was in the same pigtail Ranma wore and her eyes were the same color, but her face was softer, very distinctly that of a young woman rather than a young man.

"R-Ranma?" Miya asked, her brows furrowed in astonishment. "What, what just happened?"

Beside her Kagari was simply staring, astonished. *Maybe some kind of experiment from MBI? I thought I was the only one that went through that kind of thing! But the application of water, how could that trigger such a change in body mass?*

Uzume shook her head, reaching out and grabbing Ranma's breasts. "These can't be real! It's some kind of..." she trailed off as she hefted them in her hands. "Good grief, these are..."

She broke off suddenly as Ranma bellowed, "Okay that's it! I've had enough with people randomly feeling me up. First my old man back in Jusenkyou, then a dozen random people throughout China, then Nabiki, now you!" So saying he reached forward with both hands, grabbing Uzume's breasts. "How do you like it huh!?"

"I like it quite a lot." Uzume said honestly, staring down at the younger girls' hands where her fingers were actually nearly disappearing into her large bust. "You could use a little bit more strength though." As if in unconscious reply her own hands began to knead Ranma's chest, causing Ranma to squeak. "Seriously though, what the hell happenecakk!"

Both of them grabbed their heads, looking at Miya who had stood up quickly and smacked them both with her ladle. "That will be enough lewd activity from the both of you. Sit down." With that accomplished, she turned to Ranma again. "Ranma... what... exactly... is this?"

"I, I wanted to tell you!" Ranma stammered, poking her fingers together. "I just, I just couldn't figure out a way ta bring it up!"

Seeing how nervous Ranma was Miya reached out a gentle hand, touching the redhead's shoulder. "Calm down

Ranma, and just tell us, **me**, alright? Whatever this is, I'll listen calmly, alright?"

As Miya didn't immediately seem to judge him/her as so many had like Akane, or freak out like many more had, like Kasumi and Nabiki, Ranma nodded, and went on calmly. "Um, I mentioned the Amazons right? Well we were in the Bayakala mountain range because my old man had heard of this training area called Jusenkyou. That translates to the 'Cursed Springs'. Turns out it wasn't just named that because there were a lot of springs, but because they really are cursed... as in magically."

Kagari scoffed. "Magic!? You expect us to believe that magic really exists?"

Ranma looked at him blankly. "So my transforming would be what, a mass hallucination? Miya-nee putting some high grade drugs in her tea?" Kagari scowled while Miya and Uzume both chuckled.

The younger man went on in the same deadpan tone. "My old man fell into a spring. He came out transformed into a panda and then attacked me, knocking me into another spring. After he and I talked to the guide, he changed us back with hot water. After that, let's just say I became a believer okay?"

"My old man ran off in shock I talked to the manager of the Springs, and he says there are hundreds of other springs each of the with the corresponding animal that drowned there. They range from sizes almost too big to believe they could drown in them in the first place to as small as a kitten or pig. I was actually pretty lucky to fall into one that let me stay human shaped. Even if it comes with these damn things." Ranma muttered, cupping her breasts. "What the hell am I supposed to do with these things anywOOW!"

"Young ladies do not feel themselves up like that in public Ranma." Miya said, putting her ladle back down and staring at the redhead in quiet astonishment. She had been around for quite a while, far longer than any of her younger feathers and seen many things. But she had never seen anything like this, never even imagined it. *Could it really be magic?*

"I don't believe you." Kagari said shaking his head. "There's just no way that 'cursed springs' could really exist!"

"How's that phrase go?" Ranma murmured as she reached over to grab the teapot, pouring it over her head. As 'she' became 'he' Ranma smirked. "'There are more things in the world then your philosophy has room for'? Something like that anyway."

Kagari was actually quite well-read, and recognized the phrase Ranma was trying to quote and failing miserably. However his astonishment at the change stole his breath away.

Smirking suddenly Uzume looked between Kagari and Ranma. "So is that why you don't want to marry anyone or care much about romance? Are you secretly glad you fell into that spring?"

Ranma glared at her. "I'm a guy whatever my body looks like, and I'm into girls, damnit!" He paused, pulling at his pigtail sheepishly. "I just don't know what ta to with them."

"Pity." Uzume murmured, looking at Kagari, who came out of his momentary stupor to frown at her. He hadn't felt any attraction to Ranma as Uzume seemed to be hinting, something he was actually quite thankful for. Frankly the whole magic thing was beginning to freak him out. "If, if magic really exists... how many of those old legends or fairy tales are real?"

"Probably a lot more than you might want to believe." Ranma replied with a shrugged. "I know that my old man and I have run into more than a few legends that turned out to have some fact behind them in the course of our training trip."

Miya shook her head slightly. "I really do think I'm going to have to insist on speaking with your father at some point. In fact, let us kill two birds with one stone. I will call Ukyo and get her here next weekend. You bring Genma along, and she can subtract her pound of flesh before he and I begin to talk most seriously about what he has done to you."

Seeing Ranma's conflicted look she sighed, reaching across to touch her younger brother's hand gently. And that was the way she thought of Ranma, a rambunctious younger brother who she wanted to protect somewhat, though she knew that Ranma could look after himself. *Taking on that many of my feathers and beating them so easily says that he has indeed kept up his training. Excellent, I'm actually looking forward to seeing how good he has become.*

"I am not saying your curse changes how I view you Ranma." She said aloud. "Only that you should never have gone to this Jusenkyou place in the first place, and that it is your father's fault that you did, and then his fault you were cursed in the first place! I presume that you looked into some kind of cure for it?"

Ranma nodded relieved at Miya's reaction. "There were a few items that were supposed to cure it, but the only surefire method seems to deal with some kind of ancient treasure and finding the spring of drowned man to offset the current curse. If I don't use the ancient treasure I'll just mix the two curses."

Kagari blanched at that, while Uzume actually looked somewhat thoughtful. Without even looking Miya reached out, smacking her upside the head with the ladle in her free hand.

"Still, very interesting," Miya mused as she leaned back again after patting Ranma's hand one more time. "We will have to go shopping together. After all, I don't think you have anything appropriate to wear as a woman, do you?"

"No but why'd I need them, I mean can't I just wear my normal clothing, and try to avoid cold water?"

"You could, but that would be avoiding the issue, not dealing with your new problem Ranma. And there are certain items of apparel that a young lady needs. Most particularly bras, unless you want to give boys a free show?"

Ranma paused thinking about it, then shuddered a little at the idea of guys looking at him like, though he didn't want to admit it, he had looked at Uzume at first or the blonde from earlier that day. "Okay, you got a point I suppose, I guess I'll have to come up with some kind of technique to change clothing quickly or something."

"That's the spirit." Miya said with a smile.

"I'll go too!" Uzume said with a grin. "No offense Miya, but your tastes are a little old-fashioned. Don't worry bro, you'll be the sexiest girl on the planet by the time I'm done with you!"

"No chance in hell!" Ranma said pointing dramatically at Uzume despite fighting back a small smile on his face. "I don't trust you."

"That hurts," Uzume pouted, holding one hand up to her prodigious chest, deliberately making her breasts bounce for a moment. "Right here."

"That's not where your heart is." Ranma said deadpan.

"Nope!" Uzume said with a laugh.

Ranma laughed too shaking his head. Uzume was a lot of fun, her sense of humor was a little more 'body related' then he was really comfortable with, but she was a barrel of laughs anyway. "Thanks for the offer, but I think we'll be fine."

"And with that, I think it's time for you to head to the Tendo's Ranma," said Miya, stretching slightly. She looked at the clock and frowned, realizing it was nearly 10 o'clock at night already. Ranma's description of his training journey had eaten away more than four hours.

"Make sure ya come back tomorrow quick as you can bro." Uzume said with a grin. "I want to see you and Miya actually spar together. I still think you're both trying to pull a joke on us with that whole tale."

Kagari said nothing, still trying to come to grips with the idea that magic really existed.

"I'd like that." Ranma said without faint smile on his face as he turned to Miya who nodded amicably. He stood up, followed by Miya who walked with him toward the front door.

"It was good seeing you again Ranma, and I look forward to having you in the area once again. I am certainly up for checking to make certain you haven't that backslid in the years since I've seen you last, but after that, there are a few little projects I'd like you to look on around the house." Miya said, smiling at Ranma while he pulled on his shoes in the vestibule.

"That's fine Miya-nee." Ranma said with a grin, pulling her into a hug. "Even if you weren't willing to train me anymore I'd still be willing to patch up this old place for you. It's nice here, there's... I guess a sense of peace or something about it. I really missed it when I was gone you know I don't know what that feeling is."

Miya smiled into his shoulder, noting for the first time that Ranma had broadened rather noticeably in the shoulders, and his arms certainly showed the musculature of a swordsman on top of that of a normal martial artist. *It will be interesting to see what his form is like tomorrow.*

But that portion of her mind shut down after Ranma spoke, and she smiled slightly, kissing him on the cheek. "That feeling is that of a home Ranma, and I am happy to hear you feel that way about my little inn. Take care and I'll see you tomorrow."

Ranma nodded, squeezed her one last time around the waist, and turning opening the front door, leaving Miya to stare at the door thoughtfully for a moment before turning back to enter the sitting room. Turning she made her way back to the sitting room. Kagari was still out of it, staring directly ahead, his organized mind unable to deal with the revelation that magic might be real.

Uzume however cocked her head thoughtfully as she looked up at Miya. For once she was serious as she spoke. "Miya, exactly how much does Ranma know about us? I mean, I know you well enough to know you wouldn't have told him anything, but this 'ki' technique that lets him see other peoples, what does that really tell him about us?"

"Ranma is rather more perceptive than he lets on, something I think he learned from his father. So I would suggest trying not to keep secrets from him at least when it involves your various abilities. But don't tell him, Ukyo, or Genma anything about the Sekirei Game, not yet. I want to get a feel for how Ranma might react to that, understand?"

She let a bit of her terror aura out, and both of them nodded quickly, the terror of the technique succeeding in knocking Kagari back to normal. Both of them looked at Miya's expression and understood she was very serious about this. With her message given Miya turned, heading into the kitchen humming happily as she went about cleaning up after dinner.

OOOOOO

Ranma crossed the city somewhat slower than normal having to stop and search around for street names, trying to find the landmarks Kasumi had mentioned that would lead him to Nerima. He also had to stop to check the written directions several times, perched on lampposts and leaning over slightly to let the light catch them.

It was at one such stop after Ranma had entered the central city, the area with the most cameras and largest buildings, that he saw something which made his blood run cold. A young woman was entering a park area about half a block ahead of him. Nothing unusual, until you looked closer at her and the trail she left behind.

She moved like a zombie, a shambling, almost uncoordinated gait. She was wearing no shoes, and a doctors coat which barely covered her upper body. If she was wearing something underneath that robe Ranma couldn't see it from here.

But it was what was dripping from that coat which had caught Ranma's attention. Blood, red blood dripped from the end of that coat, and had left a trail on the street. A street, Ranma now realized as he looked around, which was strangely almost suspiciously empty of normal civilian traffic. *Yeah, something's going on here. And I think that woman either needs help, or... well, let's see what we can find out.*

Ranma leaped from where he had been crouching on the top of a lamppost into the trees of the park, making his way quickly through the park to intercept the woman. Soon enough he broke out onto the park's path, and he saw the woman sitting down on a park bench by a fountain. A nearby lamppost was the only light in the park, but it was enough to tell Ranma a lot about the situation.

One, there was no one else around here in the park either. Two the woman was almost certainly worse off than he had feared. Not only was the woman's face blank, like someone who had given up all hope, but there was an odd mark on her forehead. It was a complicated image centered on a bird shape overlapping a yin-yang symbol with several small moon shapes circling it. It looked like a brand or tattoo or something, and the sight of it told Ranma something really weird was going on here.

Moving forward Ranma stopped in front of her staring down at her, forcing a small but warm smile on his face despite his danger senses (or in this case weird ass shit going on senses) tingling. "Hey miss, it's kind of late to be out by yourself y'know, um..." Ranma trailed off, only now realizing that the woman wasn't wearing anything under the doctor's coat.

The woman looked around the same age as Uzume, twenty or so. She had unkempt short tan colored hair, and porcelain colored skin, her uncovered legs visibly glowing slightly from the light of the lamppost. Her chest, slightly smaller than the blonde woman from that afternoon, rose and fell evenly, the coat nearly falling open enough to let Ranma see the treasures within.

Her eyes, which were gray, at first had a thousand yard stare of someone who had just taken a major emotional blow.

Then as Ranma watched those eyes concentrated on him, and he allowed his smile to widen. "Can I ask your name, miss? And if you have anywhere you want to go? My name's Ranma."

The Failed Sekirei, Akitsu, looked up at the young man standing before her. In the dim light provided by a nearby lamppost his blue eyes shone somehow, and Akitsu thought at first they glowed with an inner light, before they dimmed slightly. The face those blue eyes were set into was handsome, with black hair done up in a pigtail, and his lips formed into a kind smile.

The kindness confused her, why would anyone look at her with such kindness? But despite her confusion as to the why of it, she recognized it, and that kindness was like a drink of water to a woman dying of thirst.

Licking her lips slightly she spoke in a halting voice, her voice scratchy. "Ahh... I, I have nowhere to go. All I want, all I wish for is my Ashikabi." She shook her head slowly, sorrowfully. "But I am alone now, my wings broken. Nothing more than a broken experiment."

Akitsu heard a grinding noise and looked up to see the young man's hands had formed into fists, so tight she could hear the bones grinding together. "Well, I don't know what an Ashikabi is, but ya say ya don't have anywhere to go huh? How about you come with me then? Maybe we'll be able to fix that thing on your forehead."

Looking at the woman with his ki sight Ranma had been able to see there was something really wrong with Akitsu. The technique was a sort of upgrade from the technique he'd learned from Ryoga's father all those years ago, though it took a lot out of him, and he was nowhere near an expert at understanding what he was seeing. But there was a lot of the woman's ki, of which she had a massive amount, tied up or blocked somehow from the rest of it by that mark on her forehead.

It was weird and almost perverse to him, and what she was saying was in a way even worse. She sounded almost like a druggie or someone who had been indoctrinated. *And the fact she is naked under that doctor's coat, and calls herself a failed experiment... I was worried I might be dealing with a madwoman before. Now it's almost certain I am, but I don't care about her victim any longer, in fact I'd probably gut the bastard myself.*

That brought to Ranma's mind again that Akitsu was the next best thing to naked. He looked away, and in the light of the lamppost Akitsu could almost make out a flush on his face. She watched as he quickly pulled up his shirt over his head before handing it to her. "Err, why don't ya put that on and we can get going okay? You can stay with me for now."

Akitsu was astonished again at this bit of kindness, but grabbed at it eagerly. She set aside the overcoat that she had stolen during her escape from the lab and pulled the T-shirt over her head before putting the overcoat back on. Now dressed somewhat better, she reached out to touch his hand.

When he looked at her with those deep blue eyes and that welcoming smile however, her words faltered for a moment before she could get them out of her mouth. "Ahh... will you be my Ashikabi?"

With his faint smile still on his face despite his rising anger Ranma gripped her hand in his, pulling Akitsu to her feet and into a friendly hug, like the one he had given Miya when he left Izumo House. "I don't know what that is, but if ya need an Ashikabi to feel better or stop feeling like you're broken, then yeah, I'll be your Ashikabi. Whatever ya need Akitsu to feel better."

Akitsu's face morphed into a small, but incredibly joyous smile, and her arms went around Ranma's waist, clenching him in a grip that would have broken a normal man's bones. Ranma didn't even grunt, simply hugging her back gently, trying desperately to ignore the feel of her barely covered breasts against his bare chest.

Breaking the hug he was about to take Akitsu's hand and lead her off then paused, staring out into the park. "Okay, unless yer bloody perverts I assume you lot got some reason to be spying on us?"

Hearing the change in Ranma's tone, Akitsu turned as well, and though her body language remained almost blank, her arms fell to her sides, her fingers slightly curling. Something in those hands and that stance told Ranma she was ready for battle, and he spared her a nod of approval before turning back to the forest.

"None of that nii-san, we've got no business with you unless you make us. We just want to talk to the girl. She's a pretty rare card in this game, and I mean to have her in my deck." Out from the shadows, a boy stepped forward. He looked somewhat European. He was dressed in what Ranma thought was a period costume at first, and had a somewhat effeminate face and body from what could be seen from the lamplight.

Next to him stood a tall man and upon sighting him, Ranma's hand's clenched, recognizing another martial artist. He was tall, taller than Ranma, and thinner in the shoulders, but held a katana in a simple sheath in one hand. His eyes were closed, but his body tense, and as he moved into the light his eyes opened, locking on Ranma.

On the youth's other side stood two girls, twins by the look of them, both of them wearing long blonde hair done into twin pigtailed and was dressed in yellow and black exercise togs from neck to toe. One held a whip at her side, the other stood in a loose martial arts stance designed to emphasize her mobility but was unarmed. Next to the man, neither of them even registered as a threat.

Yet even so looking at them all Ranma smirked glad to have an outlet for his anger. This group might not have been involved with whatever had been done to Akitsu, but they were willing to take advantage of it, and that was enough for him. *Now, how to deal with this Saotome style? Oh, yeah, make them mad, make them stupid.*

When he spoke Ranma let his speech go back to the style his old man had trained into him for so long, just another way to get under his opponent's skin or make them underestimate him. "I don't know what you want kiddo, but ain't it past yer bedtime? Yer minder there should take ya home. Maybe tuck ya in with a good story or somethin'."

"My bedtime is 11:30 thank you very much, and Mutsu certainly isn't my minder he's my Sekirei!" the boy bellowed, then coughed as the man next to him looked down at him. "Ahem, anyway, last warning mister. Walk away, or you're going to get hurt."

"What, ya gonna throw yer nappies at me, or sick the Mad Exercisers on me? The seventies called gals, they want their cloths back, and I hate ta tell ya, but yer a little **old** ta pull off the twintail look."

The whip wielder shrieked like a kettle as the other girl shouted something, the first's shriek drowning it out but Ranma went on unhurriedly. "Or, ooh, your minder, wouldn't want that pretty boy face of his to get roughed up would ya?" However as the quartet all showed signs of anger he whispered out of the corner of his mouth, "Akitsu, you feel like a fighter do you think you can handle those two girls?"

Akitsu had been listening to all that was said silently, and was wondering why Ranma, her Ashikabi even if she couldn't go through the winging, was bothering speaking at all. Now she simply nodded, wondering why he hadn't asked her to defend them from the male Sekirei, who looked to her to be the most formidable of the trio.

"Enough of this!" The boy shouted, nearly red with anger. "No one mocks Mikogami Hayato rules or no! Mutsu get them!"

Mutsu sighed and moved one step forward before bringing up his still sheathed sword to block a kick from the young man standing next to the Ice Sekirei, who had crossed the distance between them between one second and the next. He smirked slightly as he heard the youth make a tsk noise and shook his head. "Sorry, but that kind of verbal sparring won't work on me."

"Meh, had to give it a try. Name's Ranma, you?" Ranma grinned even as he pushed off his opponent's sheathed blade, jumping backwards before moving forward quickly exchanging punches and kicks with the man, who still kept his blade sheathed.

"I'm Sekirei number five, Mutsu. I'd say pleased to meet you, but I'd be lying." Mutsu grimaced as one punch got in, damn this human was strong. Almost as strong as a Sekirei fist type, and fast too.

Pressing forward Mutsu tried to use his speed and strength to wear down the human, but was surprised when Ranma used the momentum of one of his blows to flip into the air. Thinking the youth had made a mistake, he brought his sheathed blade up and about in a slash that should have caught the youth in the center and blown him backwards, possibly breaking bones, certainly putting him out of the fight.

Instead Ranma moved in midair somehow dodging the blow only to tap a hand down on the sword once the blow was past him. Before Mutsu could set himself a kick lashed out catching him in the face and throwing his head back. Using the momentum of the blow he jumped several feet backwards to get some space, staring at Ranma as his free hand rose to his face rubbing his jaw.

To one side the two girls had rushed forward intent on subduing the ice Sekirei, but neither of them had realized how incensed Akitsu was at their attempt to separate her from the young man who she saw as her Ashikabi, irrespective of her broken wings. The unarmed one was flung violently backward by a piece of ice that had materialized out of the air racing forward to impact her chest like a rock thrown from a trebuchet.

As she fell down her sister brought her whip forward but Akitsu calmly raise a hand, and a wall of ice blocked the whip from touching her. The girl tried to pull it back only to realize the ice had flown up the whip, freezing it in place. She quickly let go of her weapon and dodged forward, trying to close.

At the same time two more Sekirei came out from the woods, moving in quickly with sword and spear. Akitsu dodged backwards, and in the next few moments it was all she could do to not become encircled. Her powers kept them all at bay, so long as she could keep them in sight, but if they could attack her from all sides, Akitsu knew she would lose in short order.

"Wow, that's fantastic I want you for my collection even more now! Get her everyone, and Mutsu finish that guy off... quickly..." Hayato's voice trailed off as he turned his head to stare at the battle between Ranma and Mutsu.

Both of them were moving so fast Hayato could barely track their bodies let alone their limbs, and every time their blows smacked into one another there was a loud boom of noise. Mutsu was bleeding from his nose, had a black eye, and he seemed to be limping slightly. Ranma had been tagged twice in the chest, his bare stomach now showing a series of bruises, and one of his shoulders was nearly black with another bruise.

Yet his wounds were already fading, Ranma's enhanced healing ability beyond anything even most Fist type Sekirei thanks to his father's continued pressure. And his aerial style was giving Mutsu fits. If Ranma stayed still for even a moment, Mutsu might have been able to finish him in a single blow, but Ranma was too good at dodging, and too skilled in the air, which negated most of Mutsu's earth-based sword techniques.

Mutsu got another surprise a second after Hayato turned his attention to their fight. Ranma had noticed how badly Akitsu was being pressed, and decided that it was time to break off this fight. It irritated him, but he'd already worked out his anger and he didn't want Akitsu hurt. So he decided to use one of his few ki techniques to get some time if nothing else. "Fierce Dragon Wave!"

A ki blast of gold and white rocketed out of Ranma's fist, slamming into Mutsu's chest and carrying him several feet. It didn't do much damage, merely smashing Mutsu back several yards and making him grit his teeth in pain as a single rib broke. Ranma had a lot of ki for a human, but had yet to learn how to put all of it into his attacks.

Yet even so, it was enough. Before Mutsu could move forward again Ranma turned, leaping into the air to avoid Mutsu's "Destructive Point!" The attack shattered the ground around his previous position and for several yards in every direction, but Ranma's jump left it behind.

Ranma landed next to Akitsu, grabbing her up in his arms. "Time to retreat Akitsu, these guys don't seem like they want to play fair!" With that Ranma leaped up into the trees. The few Sekirei who were close enough to follow were forced back by several ice shards.

The escaping duo didn't slow down for a while, until Ranma was certain they had left their pursuers far behind them. Stopping on a rooftop he put Akitsu down, with difficulty. She didn't seem to want to let him go, but got the hint when he tried to step back after her feet touched the ground. Not that carrying her had been unpleasant, far from it, which was sort of the point really. "Um, so, let's find out where we are, and then I need to find a grocery store and buy some rice."

Behind them in the park Hayato stared at where the duo had escaped, then looked over at Mutsu, who was holding his stomach gingerly. Shaking his head, the youth asked, "Are we sure that wasn't another Sekirei?"

"I don't know what he was, he certainly wasn't normal. But the next time we fight I won't underestimate him, I'll tell you that." Mutsu said, grimacing angrily. Then he sighed, shaking his head. "Come on, he was right you know, it's pushing past your bedtime now."

Ignoring his Ashikabi's angry shouts Mutsu nodded over to one of the others who picked up their injured brethren as he did the same to Hayato. As they walked back to the limo Mutsu shook his head, wondering what Ranma was and where he had come from. And, possibly just as important, whether there were more humans like him out there.

He suddenly smiled, hidden in the dark as they saw the limo in front of them. *Huh, I wonder what that would do to Minaka's vaunted plans? Nothing good I'm sure.* That thought cheered him immensely. *Maybe this night hasn't been such a bad night after all.*

OOOOOO

High up in MBI Tower the observation teams all looked at one another, wondering the same thing as Mutsu, and not

for the first time in the last twenty four hours. The night manager turned to the tech chosen as the day's sacrifice to the crazy bastard they worked for, who gulped audibly. "Grab a copy of that fight then head up to the President's suite. I've got no idea what we're dealing with here, but one unknown Sekirei is one thing, a guy who can fight just as well and looks like he could be her brother is entirely another."

OOOOOOO

By the time Ranma, with Akitsu trailing behind him, found the Tendo dojo, everyone had gone to sleep. Which, Ranma reflected, was probably a good thing considering Akitsu and her current clothing, or rather lack thereof.

He led the way over the rooftops and the two dropped into the garden at the back of the property. Holding one finger up to his mouth to indicate they should be quiet Ranma led the way into the house via the porch, dropping off the two bags of rice he and Akitsu were carrying there. With Akitsu still following him silently Ranma then made his way through the house towards the linen closet that Kasumi had shown him when they were setting up the two futons in the guest room.

"I'm sorry we don't have of futon or a sleeping bag for you, but this isn't even my home really, my old man and I are already guests here. And I doubt you want to share the same room as two guys." Ranma murmured, his voice low so as not to wake up anyone.

He turned watching Akitsu pause for a moment, as seemed to be her habit before speaking before speaking in her soft, halting voice. "Ahh...I am not... sleeping with you?"

Ranma blushed at all the various ways that could've been taken, grateful that the hallway was so dark right now. "No! Er, That'd be bad on many levels. Just very, very bad."

Though her expression and body language didn't visibly change, there was something that told him Akitsu was not happy that and Ranma went on quickly. "Not that you know I mean, you're very pretty, and I wouldn't mind, er, um, y'know, sleeping with you..."

In any way you can take that phrase said a dark treacherous part of Ranma's mind which he promptly beat back into submission. Hormones had hit him and a few years ago, and he did not like how they seemed to have a mind of their own at times.

In fact even trying to appease Akitsu right now came from that portion of his mind. Ranma couldn't forget the image of the body underneath her shirt, **his** shirt, which seemed to add a strange touch to the entire thing. Her body was one of the best he'd ever seen. Right up there with the blonde, Uzume, Miya, better than the Amazon girls.

Shaking off those thoughts he went on quickly. "B-but I share a room with my father, and, um, like I said this isn't our house so even if I had my own room, there um, there might be trouble there, especially considering the reason my old man wants us here in the first place."

While she didn't follow much of that, Akitsu nodded understanding at least some of it. At the same time whatever it was about her face or body language that told him Akitsu had become sad went away. Instead she shivered a little, and Ranma frowned. "Do ya want to take a bath before bed?"

"Ahh...yes Ashikabi-sama," Akitsu said softly, her gray eyes lightening up slightly.

"And tomorrow," Ranma murmured as he led the way towards the bathhouse were going to be talking about that. "We're going to be talking about that Ashikabi thing very seriously."

He led Akitsu into the bathroom, showing her where the towels were and everything else, before heading inside to start the hot water running for the bath. He turned from that and was about to exit the bath area when Akitsu entered, naked as she had been under that doctor's coat when they first met.

Staring at her, Ranma gulped, blood dripping from his nose as the part of him he'd been ignoring with limited success tried to rear its head once again, before being beaten back in equal parts by self-control and embarrassment. As blood continued to trickle from his nose Ranma turned around quickly. Despite that quick reaction the image of Akitsu standing there in the light of the bathroom, her pearl-pale skin gleaming, her breasts moving as she stepped into the room, her bright cherry red nipples a sharp contrast to the rest of her, was burned indelibly into his head.

Despite his mind nearly shutting down in its battle between his hormones and his self-control, one thought did percolate through Ranma's mind. *So wait, some women don't have hair down there? Or is that one of those things Miya wants to talk to me about? Not looking forward to that conversation at all,* Ranma thought, the thought actually

helping him gain control of himself enough to form words. "A-Akitsu?! What're you doing?!"

Akitsu calmly cocked her head to one side, seemingly unable to understand the question. "Ahh...taking a bath?"

"Yeah, b-but you have to wait until I leave the room before you get undressed!" Ranma squeaked, though if anyone else had been there he would've denied that description. "Girls don't like guys seein' their bodies like that!"

"Ahh...Why?" Akitsu asked innocently.

"T-they just do, it's a modesty thing!" Ranma replied rather lamely, still looking away. "I'm a guy, you're a girl, you shouldn't be so comfortable being naked around me!"

Akitsu frowned, and touched his shoulder gently with one hand. Ranma almost turned around, but stopped himself until Akitsu's other hand came up to take his chin forcefully turning his head around to look at her. "Ahh...You are not a 'guy.'" She said after a moment spent marshaling her words. "You said you would be my Ashikabi, my master. Therefore I am your Sekirei. Or do you really not wish to be Ashikabi, Ranma-sama?"

Ranma still didn't have much of an idea what that word meant, but he understood it was **very** important to Akitsu, and that her self-image was wrapped up with it somehow. He knew she needed all the positive reinforcement she could get, so responded promptly. "Of course I do! It's just I don't even know what that means, and we really haven't even known each other for very long, and boys and girls they don't, I mean that is..." he stuttered, his words failing as he looked into her gray eyes.

A faint smile appeared on Akitsu's face and she nodded. "Ahh...we will talk about what an Ashikabi is tomorrow master." She frowned then, marshaling her thoughts once more. "Ahh... I am uncertain what it means on your end. That was never explained to me."

"Er, understood and I know you think you're a Sekirei or whatever, but for now I'm going to keep treating you as a woman. And women don't like men who they barely know seeing them naked o-okay?" Ranma blushed again as he felt Akitsu's breasts pressing into his chest, this time without even a single shirt between them.

He moved back quickly, smacking the back of his legs against the bath moving around Akitsu quickly. "Um, I'll prepare something for you to eat before you go to bed, okay?"

Akitsu barely had time to nod gratefully before her master was out of the room. The broken Sekirei frowned, their interactions were not going anywhere near what she had expected. Though she hadn't really expected much of anything the few times she had been allowed to think of what her master could be.

Still, he was kind, gentle, handsome, thoughtful, and had fought for her! Akitsu was still trying to get her mind around that, a human being able to fight a high numbered Sekirei. It was astonishing, and something which had never even been suggested at any of the briefings she had been given about the world beyond the laboratory.

Akitsu's frown went away as she dipped her hand into the water feeling the warmth. Despite being the Sekirei off ice, Akitsu enjoyed extremely hot baths, and she sighed as she stepped into this one.

When she stepped out of the bathing area several minutes later, Ranma was waiting for her in the small family area which served both as sitting area and TV room. The small sofa had a blanket over it, and the shogi set had been pulled over next to the sofa to serve as a makeshift table.

Hearing her footsteps Ranma turned from placing a small plate of rice and some left over dinner, fish and a very good cucumber side dish onto the shogi set to smile at her only gasp again and turned around quickly. "Akitsu!?" he exclaimed, his voice a sort of strangled, whispering shriek. "Clothing!?"

Akitsu looks down at herself, then up at Ranma's back. For a moment she was silent then nodded. "Ahh, forgot."

"T-try not to forget in the future, okay?" Ranma said, still staring at the wall.

Akitsu turned back to the changing area before coming back in the shirt Ranma had given her, smiling as she smelled her Ashikabi-sama's scent in the clothing still. Ranma turned, smiling at her now, and gesturing her to the sofa and food. "Just leave the plates there, I'll get them tomorrow when I wake up. I'm normally an early riser, my old man gets me out of bed quickly enough."

He frowned thinking. "I think the first Tendo you'll see is Kasumi, she's in charge of cooking and things here. Don't try to explain about the fights or anything, simply say I brought you here because you didn't have anywhere else to go. I'll

try to explain what happened last night from my perspective, okay? I don't think she's the type to really want to hear about the nuts and bolts of the fight, so save that for later."

Akitsu nodded as she sat down, "Ahh...Yes master. I will remember."

"Again with the master thing," Ranma muttered. "Could I get you to just call me Ranma?"

"Ahh...Yes Ranma-sama."

"Right, we'll count that as a work in progress. I am tired so I'm going to hit the hay." Ranma said, turning around and yawning as he moved toward the doorway to the stairs.

Akitsu hand lifted, as if to grab his wrist, before falling back as she nodded. "Ahh...Good night, master."

Ranma frowned at the little gesture, understanding now that her desire to sleep with him was actually a bit more important than he had first thought, and wondered again where this level of devotion was coming from. *Whoever the hell messed with her mind is now on my official shit list! And I'm goin' to enjoy crossin' his name off when I figure out who it was.*

"Don't worry, we'll see each other early tomorrow and have some time to get to know one another more." He said, not knowing why but knowing somehow that his presence gave Akitsu comfort. There was just something about her, not her devotion to him, but the neediness about her that called out to Ranma to defend her, even from simply being lonely.

Akitsu nodded, that feeling of being a kicked puppy going away for a moment as she turned to her meal digging in quickly. Ranma smiled at her again, which caused her to stop and smile at him slightly, as if moving her face wasn't something she normally did. "Good night Akitsu."

"Ahh... good night master" she said again, nodding her head after a moment. But there was a faint smile on her face as she watched Ranma walk off.

OOOOOO

Ranma was not surprised that Genma opened his eyes as he entered his room. He was surprised however when Genma sat up in his futon and stared at Ranma. "Where've you been boy?"

There was no hint of drunkenness in Genma's tone, another surprise, but a good one. "I was over at Miya-nee's as you know, and then I ran into some trouble on the way back. Our martial arts weird ass shit level of trouble."

"Really?" Genma asked skeptically.

Ranma nodded, and went on to describe Akitsu, how the two of them had met, as well as the mark on her forehead and the combat after. He did not mention Miya having met Ukyo, wanting that piece of information to come as a surprise later. He watched Genma's face in the moonlight streaming from the window, and smiled wanly as Genma frowned, scratching at his chin. "And you say this construct on her forehead is somehow blocking some of her ki inside of her? How do you know?"

"I don't, not really, it just looks like a slave mark or something, like something out of science fiction or fantasy novels." Ranma said shrugging shoulders. "It's also blocking her from accessing a lot of her ki, I can tell that much, so it's definitely not a normal tattoo."

Genma frowned, scratching at his chin thoughtfully. "I've heard o' some tattoos which have magical properties, or ki energy built into them. There was one time my old master faced a martial artist who had tattoos along his fingers in such a way as to make 'em into blades as hard as steel and just as sharp..."

The older man shook his head. "I'll look at it tomorrow boy, I've never heard of anything quite like what you're describing, and I don't like this whole Sekirei Ashikabi-master thing just as much as you do. Do you think..." he said going on a little hesitantly he hated admitting this, but even hearing about this second hand told Genma he was out of his depth. "Do you think Miya would know of anything about this?"

"Maybe, or maybe the Tendo's do, they've been living here in Tokyo after all." Ranma shrugged. "Like I said meeting Akitsu wasn't the only weird thing that I ran into, and there were a lot of other women hopping around out there beyond the group I fought earlier."

"Good point, I'll talk to Soun about that in the morning." Genma replied with a nod, then he went on, his shoulders straightening visibly in the moonlight from outside. "However there's something else we need ta talk about now. Your engagement to Akane."

"I thought we'd all agreed to put that off for two years so I can at least get to know them, and it isn't just Akane I have to get to know, but all three I didn't make that choice yet." Ranma said hurriedly, hoping to head any specific idea about that off now.

Genma however waved that away. "Yes, yes you convinced the three of 'em about that need, though I would've still been pushing forward if not for the other thing you pointed out: that Akane has no skill whatsoever."

"I wouldn't go that far..." Ranma said, calmer now. "She's at least a brown belt in judo."

"Which makes her precisely useless at our level!" Genma exclaimed angrily, slapping one hand down his thigh for emphasis. "Soun was supposed to teach his heir all the secrets he'd developed in his school martial arts, the Earth style of Anything Goes, yet she doesn't know anything!"

"Earth style?" Ranma mused then nodded. "Like ours is the Aerial Style right?" He frowned. "Strength and endurance I suppose, though I've gotten a lot of that simply following up on what Miya taught me."

Genma growled, again not liking to admit that Ranma had sought another teacher, but not wanting to bring it up right now. There were more important things to think about now, and he couldn't deny that woman's training had made Ranma an even better martial artist than he would have been, no matter how hard he tried. "You're right, those areas're the emphasis of his school, as well some body modification ki techniques, and the use of polearms and ki manifestation weapons."

He smiled at Ranma's suddenly interested appearance. *Thought that'd grab your attention.* "But he hasn't taught any of his daughters." he said aloud grimly. "I know that training a woman in the Art is a waste... most of the time." Genma went on hurriedly, as Ranma stiffened. "But I think my old friend's own training has slid, something I'm going to make certain of tomorrow. But for the two schools to unite, Akane must be taught his school, so he and I will be training her."

"Do you think she has the Spark?" Ranma said skeptically. The spark was an idea Ranma had come up with, a concept that encompassed natural aptitude, drive and a desire to learn martial arts for no other reason than because you loved it. Frankly he didn't think Akane had that. If she had she would've found another teacher once her father refused to teach her.

"I don't know, but we'll see."

"All right, that makes sense. You're not going to try to teach the other two though? I think Nabiki at least has kept in pretty good shape."

And she really had, at least from what Ranma had seen of her, she seemed to move like someone in full control of her body anyway. *And those legs...* Ranma shook his head irritably. *Damn hormones, Akitsu really got to me.* Kasumi moved like that as well, but it was harder to tell given her normal rather housewifey dress.

"We'll see," Genma said again before signing faintly. "Frankly, I'm goin' ta have my work cut out fer me trying to convince my old friend to train Akane, let alone the other two. While at the same time possibly whipping **him** into shape too!"

Genma didn't realize it but his attitude towards the Art had gradually evolved over the past few years. With Ranma nipping at his heels, Genma had been forced to step up his own training, training with many of the masters he brought Ranma to meet. Because of this he had regained some of his pride in his school and the Art.

It wasn't perfect, he was still lazy, a misogynist, not very brave, had a very warped sense of honor and a habit of insulting people without even thinking about it while at the same time looking down on anything not connected to the Art. But when it came to the Art at least he was a far cry from the lazy, cowardly and hypocritical panda he might have become otherwise.

Ranma nodded, wondering if he should mention something else that had occurred to him. With the two of them and possibly Akitsu all staying here, it gave the Tendo household three more mouths to feed, and Akitsu at least would need some clothing and some other things beyond that expense. And Soun, as far as Ranma knew, was the only person in the family earning any money.

He decided not to push his luck though. Genma was in an unusually serious mode right now, but it had to deal with the martial arts, not such unimportant things such as money to pay for their stay. The things he and Ranma had to do on the road for food and a roof over their head had taught Ranma that while greedy Genma really didn't like to think about getting food or money the normal way. Jobs were for other people.

Genma however brought up one aspect of that already though why he did wasn't because he worried about the Tendo's financial situation. "Boy, that woman you brought here, you know that trouble is probably going to follow her. Are you sure you want to stick your neck into this?" That was what he said, but what he really feared was that Akitsu might take his son's attention away from Akane and the other two. That could spoil his long-term plans.

"Maybe, though I don't think so. I didn't see any of the other roof-hopping women after we entered Nerima so maybe they won't follow us here for some reason. But whatever the case, I'd still help Akitsu. Whatever happened to her, Akitsu needs someone to care for her, the Code would demand nothing less of me." Ranma said with a shrug, making no mention of his reaction to her body.

Even as Genma stiffened Ranma grinned suddenly. "But hell, even if I didn't want to help her I'd still want her around. You should see some of the ice techniques she has they are way beyond anything I've ever thought possible! I hope I can figure out how she does them if I observe them enough."

Genma breathed a sigh of relief, grateful that it wasn't the girl's looks that had attracted his son, but his do-goody attitude and his interest in the martial arts. "That's my boy."

OOOOOO

The next morning Genma woke up, stretching lightly as he smirked, looking over towards the futon where his son resided. The boy had never learned the trick of getting up early in the morning, which made dawn attacks very effective so long as you knew the trick to them. But after only a moment his smirk faded. *I'd be much prouder of that if it wasn't the only way I can get one up on the boy these days.*

It was supposed to be a teacher's true joy to see the apprentice surpass the master. But Genma's control of Ranma was almost entirely based on the martial arts and his position as Ranma's master, or so he thought. Genma knew if he wasn't careful Ranma would leave him in the dust now that he had access to that woman again, and he resolved to make certain he learned any techniques his friend had created before introducing them to his son as slowly as possible.

But for now, best get my licks in before he can... Genma's thoughts froze as he finally noticed that there were **two** heads sticking out of the covers of his son's futon rather than one. He frowned, quickly moving over. Standing by the foot of the futon he saw it was the girl Ranma had described from the night before.

Though she wasn't a girl that was obvious, this was a woman, possibly a few years older than Kasumi, with a body to match, obvious even under the was asleep, her arms around his son, a sight which made Genma frown harder. *She didn't activate his sleep-fu?*

Over the many years they had travelled together Genma had trained Ranma in situational awareness, the subconscious ability to know if danger was around whether he was asleep or not. While Ranma's skill with it was limited while awake, asleep his situational awareness became incredibly acute. It had gotten to the point where if any individual or thing got close to him Ranma's body would start to defend itself without Ranma waking up.

Genma of course knew how to get around that: by staying at the bottom of the bed and grabbing the youngster's legs. But this woman couldn't have known that could she? It looked as if she had simply entered the bed as normal from side, but she hadn't activated his defense?

That wasn't good, that wasn't good at all. That meant Ranma was at least unconscious level comfortable enough around her to let his defenses down. *Not good, not good at all. He's not supposed to notice females except for the Tendo's! This, plus the need to wait for Akane to become a true heir of the Earth Style could throw the plan entirely out of whack!*

With that in mind Genma grimly reached forward grabbing Ranma's legs and intending to pull him down and out of the bed as he always did before tossing them out of the window. *That pond will do as a landing point, and once he's put in his place we can talk about getting rid of this woman somehow.*

But he couldn't move the boy, something was holding him in place. He looked up frowning and noticed that the girl, what was her name again Akitsu? She had woken up and was staring at him.

Genma could feel the temperature in the room start to drop, but undeterred he once again tried to pull Ranma out of the girl's grip and out of the bed. The girl only tightened her hold on Ranma, squishing one arm under her body as her chest pressed into his side. Suddenly without any kind of gesture or anything guiding it a spear of ice appeared above the bed, shooting towards Genma.

Genma quickly let go of Ranma's feet, bringing up a fist, shattering the ice spear in a single blow even as he stared astonished at the girl. *So the boy wasn't exaggerating about last night.* Genma had felt a brief pulse of ki there, but nowhere near enough to create ice out of thin air let alone throw it at him.

Before he could think on this further Ranma woke up at the noise of the ice shattering, "Wha's that old man?" he mumbled, stretching. He frowned though when one arm refused to move. "Some new way of waking me up..." He trailed off as he turned to see what was impeding his arms only to see Akitsu there, staring at him from barely 6 inches away. "Akitsu?"

It took a second then her presence actually registered in his mind. Ranma literally jumped out of bed, pulling his arm out from under her with a yank. "Akitsu! Wh-what're you doing here!"

The girl looked at him, then down at the bed, then at the sheets that had been over them then back up. "Ahh... sleeping."

"B-but I prepared the, er, that is. I mean, why are you sleeping here in my bed! With me still in it?!" Ranma replied, his words falling over each other in his mouth.

Again Akitsu looked down at the bed then up at Ranma. "Ahh... Warm. And my place is at your side, master."

Genma frowned glancing at Ranma. "So you weren't exaggerating about the mental conditioning boy."

"Course not." Ranma muttered, his hand moving slowly down his face in exasperation. "Akitsu, I told you why I didn't want to sleep in the same futon with you, remember? Modesty, my sharing a room with my father, us just having met?"

Akitsu looked down at the bed for a third time, before looking up at Ranma her face still as unemotional as ever, yet Ranma could somehow tell she was feeling a little stubborn about this for some reason. "Ahh, you are my master, and you are warm." She said as if that explained everything.

Just then the guest room's door burst open, with Akane racing in. "What the hell is all this screaming about so early!? Some of us have routines they're going about you know, they don't need to hear the two of you yelling..." she paused as she stared at the girl in Ranma's bed, then where Ranma was pressed against the wall, not really seeing his body language, only that he was still shirtless and Akitsu was wearing his shirt.

"You," she fumed, a red aura appearing around her. "You **pervert!**" She shrieked charging forward, suddenly holding a hammer she had pulled out of nowhere.

Ranma noted that must be that ki weapon technique that Genma had mentioned, but at the moment he had other things to worry about.

He was about to dodge out of the way of her attack, but Akitsu swiftly raised a hand, and suddenly a giant block of ice appeared in front of Akane, smashing into her legs and taking them out from under her. Akitsu stood up quickly, moving in front of Ranma protectively. She didn't say anything, but the way she stared at Akane made it very clear that she would not tolerate any threats or attacks on Ranma.

At that point Soun burst into the doorway having heard his daughters scream of fury. "What's all this?!" he paused staring at Akitsu. Then suddenly his head seemed to swell, his eyes glowing demonically and his tongue coming slithering out of his mouth like that of a snake. "**Geenmmmmaaaaa**, what has your son done bringing a whore into my house?!"

"Calm down it's not like that old friend!" Genma said, holding up his hands placatingly, backing away from the Head of Terror™ a technique Soun had learned and modified from their old master.

"That's what it looks like," Akane muttered, pushing herself off the floor and glaring at Akitsu, staring hard at the tattoo on her forehead, sneering even as the pain in her legs forced her to calm down. "Some kind of magic using whore!"

Ranma growled, while Akitsu looked blank, not understanding that word. "She's not a whore!" Ranma growled out, his hand suddenly glowing white and gold. "And the next time either of you call her that were going to have... **problems.**"

"Perhaps we should talk about what is actually going on over breakfast." said Kasumi's quiet voice from the doorway. Unlike Akane and her father she looked as if she had been up for hours. Though she smiled pleasantly, there was something in it that caused everyone there to pause and nod hurriedly.

About half an hour later Akitsu and Ranma sat at the dining table as Ranma described what had occurred last night as far as he knew, reaching out gently to touch mark on her forehead, which caused her to first flinch away slightly for a second. "I don't what this is, there's something in it that is blocking off... maybe her emotions, maybe just the majority of her ki reserves, she can't access most of it. What she can is still huge in comparison to most, but not quite up to me or my old man's standards."

To one side Kasumi and Nabiki were looking at the girl with sympathy. For her part Akitsu had described what she was as well as the fact that, in her terms, she was 'broken', without going into any real detail because she just didn't know any.

They didn't understand the full story, but they understood that the girl had been mind-fucked, as Nabiki put it. "You believe," she said, softly but with steel in her voice, "that that mark is a sign of your being broken, that without these 'wings' you can't find your destined one? And that you're destined one is someone who will take care of you? That sounds like a fairytale mixed with psychedelic drugs."

"Ahh...." Akitsu sighed, looking up from where she had been leaning into Ranma's touch. "I am a Sekirei. We were let out by MBI to seek our destined ones, to become winged and to gain access to all of our strength. But I am broken. It is a sign of my being broken. Yet Ranma-sama wanted to be my Ashikabi anyway."

"And you really believe you're an alien?" Nabiki said skeptically.

Akitsu merely nodded at that question.

Nabiki really didn't want to believe that, she really didn't. *But it would explain how MBI has so much high tech gear, and how it grew from a small camera company into one of the greatest tech and pharmaceutical giants in the world. She had even wanted to work there before this. But brainwashing like this, that's beyond the pale.*

Akitsu merely nodded again. None of the Sekirei had ever been told anything about where they came from or why, only that they were not human and that their destiny was to search for their fated one in the Sekirei Plan.

"I think that whatever indoctrination Akitsu went through, it wasn't the full deal. She doesn't know enough about this plan of hers, nor about the world in general judging by her blank looks to some of my own questions." Kasumi said, frowning faintly, her eyes narrow as she set aside her normal mild, uninterested attitude.

"Agreed, I think she was some kind of, well, experiment, MBI or the doctors there wanted to see if they could somehow break this bond thing of hers." Ranma said with a wince, putting an arm over the girl and hugging her so she wouldn't take offense at being talked about like that. Akitsu simply sighed and nuzzled into his side, a sight that caused Kasumi to smile faintly and Nabiki to roll her eyes.

Genma growled a little at that, but his initial anger at the girl's presence and fear of what it meant had given way to interest. The boy was right after all, her ice techniques were incredible, and they might be able to recreate them if she used them often enough. Plenty of time to get rid of her after that. Soun however looked as if he was about to launch into his Head of Terror™ technique until Kasumi turned her smile on him.

Akane too didn't like what she was seeing, and grit her teeth. She really, **really** wanted to pound the pervert, but there were several problems with that. One, her own sister had remonstrated with her about thinking before acting. Two, Akitsu would just use that weird cheating magic on her again, not realizing Akane was merely trying to protect her. Three, she **hadn't** actually seen the two of them do anything perverted. She really had jumped to conclusions, though she didn't like to admit that aloud. *Damn, Kuno and his herd of perverts have really affected me.*

"Whatever has happened, you're welcome in my home as long as you wish." Kasumi said, though her father frowned at that.

"I agree," Nabiki said quickly, reaching over and taking the other girl's hand and squeezing. The very idea of a woman walking around a city with only a coat to cover her, Nabiki shuddered at what might've happened if she had run into anyone but Ranma. *Like she almost had with that schoolboy and his bodyguard, though the Mikogami name, that's oddly familiar, I'll have to look it up.* She looked over at Ranma. "I'll try to gather more information on this Sekirei Plan, though don't you hold your breath, this feels a lot bigger than anything I normally deal with."

Ranma cocked his head at her and looked over at the other Tendos. Kasumi supplied his answer, smiling faintly and touching her middle sister's shoulder. "Nabiki is very good at following up information and rumors Ranma, in fact she has a bit of a business built around that kind of thing at school."

Ranma nodded at that looking at Nabiki with renewed respect. She smiled and nodded her head slightly, then looked over at the clock on the wall. "Speaking of which, I should get going."

Next to her Akane finished the food on her plate quickly, standing up and moving over to join her. It was only now that Ranma noticed both of them were wearing schoolgirl uniform arms. It hadn't really registered during the chaos of his morning so far. "Nabiki wait I'll go with you!"

"What are you talking about sis, you need to show Ranma to school don't you?" Nabiki smirked teasingly. "Besides, this'll give you two love birds a chance to get to know one another." With that parting shot Nabiki left quickly, chuckling to herself as she shook her head.

"That's right my boy," Genma suddenly said smacking Ranma on the back as he puffed himself up importantly. "We signed you up for school over at Furinkan. After all, you need to finish your education, and it'll give you some time to get to know at least two of the girls you might be marrying soon."

"**Not** soon," Ranma growled.

But before he could continue Soun nodded his head quickly. "Indeed, this would give you time to get to know my daughters, and you said that was important. Plus education will also be important going forward"

Ranma growled, but nodded. "I suppose I do have to finish high school at least, don't even want to think what Miya-nee would say if I didn't." The shudder that followed that was not at all exaggerated. He remembered all too easily that Miya held **views** on education.

As Ranma stood up to head after Akane, who had rushed out the door after Nabiki, Akitsu made to follow him, but Kasumi shook her head. "Not you my dear, we need to get you some more clothing, and I'm afraid to say that you're a little old looking to be a high-schooler, no offense meant."

Akitsu merely cocked her head at that, then shrugged and completed the motion of standing up to follow Ranma anyway, disregarding all of it as unimportant in comparison to staying with her master. Kasumi however touched her hand gently as she too stood. "I'm afraid I'll have to insist. A woman such as yourself should not go out without the proper clothing."

The Sekirei of Ice was about to move around Kasumi and follow her master anyway when she caught Kasumi's smile. Something in that smile made her willpower start to fade away, and after a moment she nodded docilely.

"Good girl." Kasumi said smiling lightly and patting her hand now, addressing her as if Akitsu was younger than her despite the Sekirei's physical age. "Now, could you help me clean up the table? After that, we'll go up to my room and I'll take some measurements. Hopefully Nabiki or myself will have something that will fit you."

That was said in a rather dubious tone, as Akitsu was, while as tall as Kasumi rather fuller in the chest. Her hips were also slightly slimmer, something that Ranma's clothing was showing off to good effect if Kasumi was honest. And she was, Kasumi wasn't a woman who really cared overmuch for appearances, but she was comfortable in her own skin, and easily admitted that Akitsu was a rare beauty.

Akitsu simply nodded, and moved over to the table holding her hands out as Kasumi began to pile them up with cutlery and tableware. The two men had already vacated the table, heading out to the dojo.

OOOOOO

Minaka scowled angrily, staring at his computer screen, one of several set up on his desk. The fights from yesterday were playing on two of the other computers, and the limited information his sources could find overnight on the young man in the second battle. "'Name, Ranma Saotome, occupation, student, age 17, unknown home address, martial artist level XXX, approach with care.' What in the universe does martial artist extreme mean, and why in the world haven't I run into the term before!?"

His scowl still in place Minaka turned away, staring out his wide windows into the city of Shin-Teito. That sight, the sight of an entire city he had bought lock, stock and barrel, calmed him. What was this martial artist but a small pit of fluff or a cog out of place in the machine that was his dream of the return of the gods?!

His equilibrium so restored, Minaka decided to send out messages to his agents among the government. That phrase said that the government knew something more and he would find out what, though the fact they had such a phrase meant there might be more martial artists like this Ranma fellow out there. The fact he had absconded to Nerima, a district of Tokyo where MBI's influence was barely felt, was an issue for the future.

The government had been oddly reluctant to hand over control of that area and much of it remained, strangely enough, in local hands, most particularly an ancient samurai family by the name of Kuno. It was as if Nerima had been there long before the rest of the city and left alone to develop on it's own for some reason. Yet that was immaterial, the area wasn't self-sustaining and regardless of his personal skill, a single martial artist wouldn't be able to fight the Disciplinary squad if I decide to send them in.

The broken one being with him was irritating but not important in the long term. She had been allowed to escape in that manner to meet with Mikogami to hopefully add to Mutsu's presence to create a power block against Higa and his growing influence. She had been broken to make certain Mikogami couldn't become too powerful in his own right. Still, that was really unimportant in the long term so long as Higa didn't add to many Ashikabi 'allies' to his faction in the near future.

If this Ranma and the broken one remained together for a time he would send someone over with a phone or TV, once he figured out where Ranma was staying anyway. *Who doesn't have a cell phone in this day and age anyway!? Mindless peons.*

Yet the redhead, there's no information about her. But they appeared at the same time, and from what I can see use the same style, a sister perhaps, half sibling kept out of the legal records for reasons of honor? Still, her heh, her I can do something far more amusing about.

Even as he cackled and began to plot a little addition to his grand game, Minaka never realized something very important. He never realized he had no idea where Ranma or his 'sister' had gone in the north of the city, having no coverage there. So he had no idea that either had a connection to the Hanya of the North. Nor did he really consider the possibility that there might be more martial artists out there as important.

OOOOOO

Akane glared up at where Ranma was walking along the top of the metal fence as easily as if it was solid ground, having just jumped over a splash of water from an old woman washing her front doorway. *Showoff! And my sister of course just had to leave me with the pervert.*

The pervert part of that mental statement wasn't as strong as she could wish, after all she now knew that she hadn't actually happened between Ranma and Akitsu, and she couldn't fault Ranma for helping the poor deluded girl. Yet she couldn't quite leave the thought alone thanks to Kuno and the rest of the idiots at school.

The showoff however more than made up for it. Akane didn't like how effortlessly Ranma could do things like that. It brought to mind how Ranma had beaten her in their spar yesterday so easily, something which rankled badly because it showed that her belief in her being the best she could be was a false one.

Hmmpf, I bet I could do that kind of thing too if my father had kept on training me. With the blame properly placed, Akane asked, "Why the hell are you up there anyway?"

"Stance, balance and footwork training." Ranma replied promptly. "That and allows me to see more of the area around us than I would if I was just walking along the ground. This was one of the first things Oyaji taught me it's a basic training technique for the Aerial Style of Anything Goes. I bet your old man has something similar though I don't know what it could be."

That caused Akane's angry frown to turn into a thoughtful one. "I don't know either," she muttered, "though if my father and Genma really do start to train me that'll be great." The two of them had mentioned that briefly this morning while Ranma was taking a bath and Akitsu was waiting for him outside the bathing area, Kasumi having made certain she would not follow him in. Then Akane smirked suddenly looking up at Ranma. "So, you like to get high?"

Ranma cocked his head, brows furrowed as he looked down at her. "Was that supposed to be a joke or something? I don't get it."

The girl shook her head. "Never mind. I thought it was funny." she muttered under her breath then frowned again as they turned around the second to last bend in the road heading towards Furinkan high school, the school coming into view over the intervening buildings.

She slowed down, perforce forcing Ranma to do the same as Akane looked up at him. There were some things she had to say right now before they came within sight of the school. "Listen, when we get the school don't act like you know me. In fact don't even speak, and when we get there, get away from me quick, okay? It would just cause a lot more trouble than it's worth."

"Ooookay?" Ranma said slowly, then watched as Akane nodded and began to mutter something under her breath as she picked up speed until she was almost jogging. Keeping up with her Ranma couldn't make out the words, but it sounded like a chant, and the cadence was almost warlike. "Er... are you chanting something, you expecting trouble, getting yourself hyped up?"

"Exactly," Akane smiled grimly. "Like I said stay out of my way." With that she ignored Ranma, and now he could make out the words she was muttering, each time growing louder. "I hate boys, I hate boys, I hate boys!"

Scratching his head bemusedly Ranma continued to sprint along the fence above Akane and a few moments later turning onto the road directly facing into the school. It was a largish school, separated from the rest of the district by a stone wall about a story high, with the main building facing the entrance directly, separated by a wide pathway. But Ranma didn't care about all that, if you had seen one school you had seen them all in his opinion.

No, what grabbed Ranma's attention was the fact there seemed to be a huge crowd of boys on the school grounds between the main building and the gates in the outer wall. Furthermore, they all looked like they were ready for battle. There were baseball players, sumo wrestlers, tennis players of all things, one or two basketball players, martial artists of all sorts of schools, or at least mainstream schools he mentally corrected himself, and kendo club members.

"What the heck?" He muttered, leaping down from the rail and racing alongside Akane for a moment.

"I hate boys, I hate boys, **I hate boys!**" Akane snarled ignoring him and racing forward at a sprinting now to the horde waiting for her. The crowd waited until she had crossed the threshold into the school before charging in turn.

They didn't seem to be working together, each individual was getting into everyone else's way, shouting things as well. "Akane you look lovely this morning, go out with me!"

"Akane, if I beat you we'll go to the movies tonight!"

"Akane please date me!"

"Akane, with this attack accept my love!"

"Date her, love, wha...?" Ranma muttered leaping up onto the outer wall and crouching there staring at the action. "Since when does beating a girl in a melee fight lead ta dating?"

He watched as Akane weaved through their attackers, returning blows that were seemingly rather powerful, lifting up a sumo wrestler at one point. One tennis player got his arm around her shoulders, only to be lifted over her shoulders and hurled into a baseball player, taking both of them to the ground. She swirled around, a low kick taking the legs out from underneath a Kendo user, followed by a right cross to the chin that lifted the man up into the air over another person's head while Akane danced out of the way of a basketball player trying for a high kick.

Individually none of this crowd seemed to be anywhere near Akane level of ability, and she took advantage of it. She ducked and dodged, bobbed and weaved. The numbers of them tried to wear her down, but didn't seem to have any overall plan, and got in each other's way too often. Still to Ranma it was an interesting experience, watching a fight like this from the sidelines.

His thoughts were interrupted by a somewhat familiar voice shouting, "Ranma, over here. Just head into the school." He turned from the carnage to stare up into the building. From a third story classroom Nabiki was leaning out from an open window waving at him. "Don't worry, this goes on every morning."

Ranma frowned but nodded, skirting around the melee he made his way towards the school quickly, then leaped up, landing on the windowsill next to Nabiki. He nodded at her then twitched his head towards the ongoing battle. "What the heck is that all about?"

"A senior in my class made this stupid declaration at the beginning of the school year that no one could 'court' Akane without first beating her in a martial arts match. Yes, I know that's stupid, but all the boys went along with it because he's the best martial artist on campus, and his family basically own the school." Nabiki replied shrugging her shoulders, then looked at him, head cocked to one side. "What do you think of it?"

"I think it's kind of pathetic," Ranma said simply, now sitting down on the windowsill kicking his legs out against the side of the building. He continued to watch, shaking his head. "There we go, some of them are actually working together. Look," he pointed to where a few of the students, not all of them from the same club, seemed to be getting together in the crowd.

At least to his eyes, Nabiki couldn't see it. "I can't see any of them working together honestly," she said staring at the crowd.

"Just watch, that one sumo wrestler's going to go for a low attack, try to get your sisters legs out from under her. Then the baseball player and that Kendo guy are going to come in from either side, and the tennis player's going to try to grab her arm. It won't work though. Akane's going to flip over the sumo wrestler..."

Nabiki watched as Akane did just that, listening to Ranma give an account of what was going on a second or so before the action actually occurred. She shook her head, marveling at his ability to read other people's body language in combat like that.

"Then she's going to grab the baseball players bat, pulling it into the Kendo user's stomach, while kicking out at the tennis player. Uhp, but she'll open herself to that other sumo wrestler, unless Akane can, ahh there she goes, another over the shoulder throw! Akane's quite strong for her size and training I suppose, but her overall strategy needs work. Look, she's backed away from the school now, and has lost her bag."

All around him the other students from Nabiki's class were listening as Ranma continued his commentary, punctuating it with "Not a bad try," and "that's not going to work, Akane might be devoted to staying on the ground, but even so."

"her core's too strong for that kind of grab to work. The sumo wrestlers need to change their styles really. They can match her strength for strength, but her speed and maneuverability make them almost useless in this fight."

"And don't get me started on the European style wrestlers!" That was said after one of the wrestlers tried to get a chokehold on Akane, only for her to break the attack rather brutally by slamming her elbow into the man's chest and hurling him backwards into several others. "Too damn predictable and not nearly strong enough."

The battle began to wind down after a few moments, and Nabiki turned away to stare at Ranma. The commentary had made the show much more interesting this time around, and she wondered idly if she could get Ranma to do it again. The commentary would add to the videos of the fight she routinely made. "So what do you think? I mean about Akane now, not the whole battle."

"She's good, but nowhere near as good as she should be. Your father definitely screwed Akane over deciding not to train her as he did, though maybe he has a point. She had to psych yourself up for this, ranting about hating boys. Not exactly the best mindset to have when it comes to martial arts, or well, anything else I guess. If you use anger like that you're not a martial artist, you're a berserker. And there's no telling what kind of damage a berserker could do with the strength Akane's already got."

Nabiki filed that away for a moment, then waved her hand for Ranma to go on.

"She doesn't use kicks as often as she should, but I don't know if that's her style, or because she's wearing your school uniform. Her situational awareness isn't quite what it should be either. She shouldn't be letting any of those idiots down there successfully grapple with her like she is. Akane should simply have more speed than she does, and her overall form is, well, it's rather abysmal frankly. All in all I'm afraid I'd stand by my original assessment, she's not even a black belt, not really, it's just that her basics stats are much higher than most people's."

Nabiki once again nodded, wondering if Soun and Genma would really be able to train Akane to be better than she was. She doubted it; Akane didn't seem to have that kind of dedication to anything which at her age was fine. Though at the same time Ranma seemed to have dedication to his Art well beyond anything Nabiki was used to.

Unfortunately other people had heard Ranma's assessment of Akane, not just the students in the same room with them and present, but the very senior who had put forth the challenge that had developed into this morning melee.

He stared up at them from around the corner of the building where he had been waiting to move forward to issue his challenge to Akane once again. Hearing someone denigrate his fierce tigress, the young man had decided to deal with this interloper first.

He held up his bokken, pointing it up at Ranma, before declaiming dramatically, "Hold knave, who art thou to

denigrate my fierce tigress so!? Your words are that of a snake, all lies designed to beguile the weak! For surely there is no stronger flower of the feminine sex than Akane Tendo! Introduce thyself at once so that I might know the name of the fool who I am going to smite!"

Then he held up a hand dramatically. "But hold, is it not honorable to introduce myself first? For I am the Blue Thunder of Furinkan High!" In the sky above a burst of thunder went off, as the sky began to darken noticeably. "Tatewaki Kuno, aged eighteen."

Next to Nabiki one of her factors leaned forward muttering "Blue Thunder? That's a new one, I thought he was calling himself Rising Star or something like that."

Nabiki smirked. "The thunder was a nice touch. Sometimes the gods favor idiots."

That caused the students around her to laugh, while Ranma simply stared down at the slightly older teen, marshaling all his Asama-taught formality before reply. "I'm Ranma Saotome, Akane Tendo's senpai in our families' style of martial arts. I can give my opinion on her abilities all I want so long as she calls herself a student of our school."

"So you say, but surely no student of that school exists who could match Akane! No, thou art speaking out of jealousy, and shall be smitted by the heavens themselves for your lack of tact. Come down here so that I might do their will promptly." Tatweaki pontificated

"Er, I don't think 'smitted' is a word, Kuno-baby," Nabiki drawled.

"Okay," Ranma said ignoring her and leaping down to land easily, barely bending his knees on impact. He glanced at the wooden bokken Kuno was holding, and smirked evilly. At the same time, Miya, dusting her front walkway suddenly looked up with a faint smile on her face. "I see you use a blade, I'm something of the swordsman myself, you wouldn't happen to have a spare on you?"

"As if a knave such as yourself could ever be mine equal with a blade! Never mind! I attack!" With that Kuno moved forward, his bokken thrusting out in a straight jab towards Ranma, before coming around in a short economical slash as Ranma ducked aside.

Ranma dodged both blows, not closing just yet, wanting to see how good this Shakespeare(ish) spouting moron was before ending the match. *Decent enough speed for a normal person, and I guess he's got some style, but he's got no ki to speak of, and I doubt he has much physical strength either.*

It quickly became apparent that this Kuno moron really didn't have much of anything going for him. *Man this is pathetic I could beat this guy back before I started training with Miya-nee or headed overseas with my old man. Now I could do it with both hands tied behind my back. Heh, might want to try that sometime if this fruitcake tries to fight me again in the future.*

The bell signaling the start of classes began to ring, and Ranma decided to end this farce. Kuno's next swing came at his head and Ranma moved forward quickly. Stepping under the blow he grabbed Kuno's upraised hand lifting his fist slamming it into the underside of the sword, shattering it with ease.

Then as the kendo master stared, Ranma let go his grip on Kuno's hand, striking like a snake, the fingers of that hand slamming several dozen times into Kuno's forehead, so hard it sounded like a staccato rhythm being beaten out on a drum. Then just as the sky began to rain, Ranma leaped up to where he had been, just missing the rain as it began to fall. "Well that was an interesting way to start the school day." He said, smirking.

"What did you do to him?" Nabiki asked, cocking her head to one side thoughtfully as she stared at the seemingly paralyzed kendo user down below while Akane, who had already finished her fight and had been watching the match between her chief tormentor and Ranma, ran inside the school just as the last bell chimed.

"Just gave him something to remember me by." He paused, scratching at his pigtail sheepishly. "Um, and **maybe** a little brain damage. Could be too late for that given how he was talking though."

Nabiki laughed, then clicked her fingers and pointed at one of her factors. The young man ran out quickly heading down towards Kuno. One of her long-term arrangements with the school was that she would always make certain that Kuno was in class, regardless of whatever happened.

No one wanted to even think of him being forced to repeat the school year after all, and one of the few things they couldn't ignore was missing classes or assignments. They could ignore or not report anything else, but scholastic standards had to be met, or at least the letter of them if not the spirit.

"You better had the class Ranma," she said, turning back to him. "I'll see you at lunch, okay?"

Ranma nodded and exited the room quickly. He soon found himself in the same classroom with Akane in class 2-B, something he frowned at. He didn't think the two of them would get along frankly, not given her reaction to his curse form, Akitsu, or her apparent jealousy and his own ego.

Luckily Akane was seated already when Ranma was told come in by the teacher, surrounded by a few friends where she sat at her desk along the outer wall. "Introduce yourself Mr. Saotome." the teacher said to Ranma.

Ranma nodded, and waved his hand informally at the class. "Yo, I'm Ranma, heir of the Aerial style of Anything Goes School of martial arts. My father and I are currently staying with the Tendo's, who teach the Earth Style."

At that there was some muttering from both sexes. The girls were irritated that Akane and Nabiki apparently had an in with the new guy, who was pretty darn handsome in their opinion. And the boys were irritated given his apparent closeness to Akane, not even thinking about Nabiki.

Ranma ignored the whispers as unimportant and went on. "I've been traveling for most of my life on a training trip, so some of my grades aren't going to be up to snuff, but I speak Chinese, and some Vietnamese well enough to get by, and I'm fluent in English. I'm also not going to be joining any after school clubs so any of ya thinking ta recruit me don't even bother asking."

There were some muttered groans about that, and more than one boy banged his head against the table. Ranma's spar against Kuno had already gone around the school, and any sports club would pay good money to have someone like him on their team.

"That's good enough I think. If you have any questions class wait for lunch." The teacher, a nearly bald man with coke-bottle glasses said. "Mr. Saotome if you don't have books, borrow one from one of your neighbors."

Ranma nodded, moving towards the back of the room. He then began to concentrate on staying awake, helped by the image of Miya and her hanya mask.

OOOOOO

At the back of his class Kuno stared at his reflection in a small hand-held mirror he had borrowed from one of his female classmates. On his forehead reaching a small red bruise formed the word 'idiot' in kanji.

"For his fingers to move fast enough to do that and all you felt was a single touch..." Nabiki mused from where she was sitting next to him, her voice a mere whisper as to not interrupt the drone from the their math teacher. It wasn't like she had anything to learn from this class anyway. "Interesting, I think you're sort being given a clue here Kuno-baby. Maybe you shouldn't try your luck with Ranma again."

"The foul serpent-tongued lout has simply found some kind of sorcery, my blade will overcome it the next time we meet in battle, never fear. Besides the buffoon didn't even spell it right. You spell it like this," Tatewaki replied, quickly writing out the word on a piece of paper on his desk.

Wrongly, as Nabiki was quick to point out. Tatewaki turned to glare at his female classmate directly. "I hate you Nabiki Tendo."

"The feeling's mutual Kuno-baby." Nabiki replied dryly.

"Still, even certain demons have their uses, and one of yours I know full too well. What can you tell me about this 'Ranma' character?"

"The usual payment, Kuno-baby?" Nabiki asked to buy time as she leaned back in her chair, thinking hard. She'd known this would be coming. Kuno was nothing if not obsessive, beating him like Ranma did, well the only way would've been worse was if he had beaten the moron in his female form. She shivered at the memory of that, magic still bothered the hell out of her.

And I don't know enough about Ranma's personality to know what he'd do if he discovered I was sharing things he might not want shared. And, considering that the so-called agreement is open ended on our part, I'd not be served letting people know about it either. So we'll stick with just the facts and precious little of those for now.

By the time Kuno had put the money on her desk Nabiki had finished thinking and she quickly made the money

disappear before answering. "Ranma's just like he said, Akane's senpai in Anything Goes. Apparently my father and Genma started their own branches from the main school and want to see which branch is the better one. Unfortunately my father hasn't actually trained Akane for several years, so it's going to take a while until she's brought up to snuff enough to be an equal comparison. Until then Ranma and his father are living with us."

"Say it isn't so Nabiki Tendo!" said Kuno, his mouth wide and his hands on his face in a comical expression of shock and rising anger. "A young man living under the same roof as my beautiful tigress?!"

"No Kuno-baby you're missing the point!" Nabiki said quickly. "It's not Ranma's fault he's staying with us, in fact I think he's got someplace he'd rather stay, but his father and mine are both adamant that they stay with us. It's simply a martial arts agreement thing, nothing personal, nothing emotional or anything!"

"You speak honorably about an agreement between your families' Nabiki Tendo, but it is you who miss the point entirely. This serpent-tongued lout is male is he not? Then no doubt the foul sorcerer will be beguiled by thy beauteous sister's magnificence in time, he cannot fail to living so close to her womanly body! I won't allow it!"

Kuno's soliloquy was interrupted by a piece of chalk smacking into his forehead. "Kuno sit down! You can be crazy on your own time!" the teacher bellowed. Kuno growled, but did as he was told, while Nabiki rolled her eyes and went back to pretending to listen to the class.

OOOOOO

The day passed uneventfully after that. Most of the boys in the date Akane group knew not to interrupt class and Kuno had no way of avoiding his teacher's orders to stay in his seat. Indeed, even at lunchtime he was forced to remain behind to write out lines on the chalkboard about not interrupting class.

For her part Nabiki quickly escaped the room heading down towards the classroom she knew her sister was in. She saw Akane leave, nodding at her. "What, not going to sit with Ranma?"

"Heck no," Akane said bluntly. "You saw how he and Kuno were this morning, and since everyone knows our families share a style, I don't want any weird rumors start."

"Good point sister dear." said Nabiki smiling and nodding her head while Akane moved around her, not mentioning she had told Kuno about that or that Ranma was living with them. She entered the room just in time to see Ranma leave out one of the windows, and smacked her forehead. "Of course."

Still, she knew her way about the school easily enough and quickly found Ranma up one of the trees out in the yard, laid out on one of the branches. "Ranma, come down here for a second I want to talk to you."

"What's up?" he said, landing next to her easily.

"I figured we should go over the story we want people to know about your curse." she said. "Also, were you serious about wanting to help out around the house? Because I have to tell you, just you're martial arts construction skills aren't going to do much. I mean yes there are a few things around the house Kasumi and I would love you to help us with, but the main thing is going to be..."

"Feeding my old man and me. Trust me, I know how much money it would take to feed me, let alone him." *Without resorting to all you can eat restaurants and dine'n'dashes anyway.* "The only thing I got from him physically is a bottomless pit where my stomach should be."

"Bottomless pit?" Nabiki laughed.

"Trust me the Saotome stomach has well-earned that name. What are you thinking about in terms of making money? You want me to get a job? I'm not certain I could do that and still come to class." He said, not bothering to hide his sudden hope.

"Now, what would this big sister figure of yours say to that?" Nabiki teased, motioning Ranma to sit down beside her as she leaned against the tree trunk.

"Nothing good." Ranma replied rather glumly as he squatted next to her, seemingly as at ease in that position as she was sitting down against the tree. "But if not what's your idea?"

"I sort of... run a few businesses here." Nabiki said delicately. "One of them's information, another's bookkeeping on the various fights that go on."

Those were the ones she was willing to share right now. The third way she made money was selling pictures of Akane to her various admirers, particularly Kuno, who she always charged through the roof for them. None of them were pornography of course, not even of Akane in an embarrassing position or anything, just her going through her daily business, exercising, walking, or just sitting down doing her homework sometimes.

Nabiki knew that they served to add to Kuno's obsession, but there was nothing in them that anyone could really object to. Besides, she'd begun selling those when Akane had accidentally ripped one of her favorite dresses into pieces after realizing that it was too loose in the chest.

Now she kept doing it because she was worried that if she didn't Kuno would send his pet ninja Sasuke to get his own pictures. The money was good, and besides, she knew that Sasuke wouldn't be so careful about what he took pictures of. *Although, now that Ranma and his father are living with thus, maybe I can get them to keep him out. Something to think about if Ranma goes along with some of my plans long term.*

"Are you trying to ask me to be some kind of muscle for you?" Ranma asked suspiciously. "Because if you are, the answer is no. I won't use my skills for something like that. If someone else tries to muscle in on your 'operation', or threatens you I'm fine with defending you, but not if you're the one doing the threatening."

"That's fine Ranma," Nabiki waved that away. "I don't ever threaten anyone unless they welch on a bet, then I simply make certain everyone knows they did and let peer pressure take its course. Besides, I'm not exactly defenseless myself. I might not be Akane, but I have kept up some of the exercises our father showed us when were younger."

"I know that," Ranma said smirking a little and tapping her calf where it poked out from under the school uniform. "You got some muscles under there."

Nabiki actually blushed a little at that, pushing his hand away quickly. That he would complement her after he had brought home a girl like Akitsu said something though. And it wasn't like she was used to being complimented.

"Anyway I was thinking more about you doing some commentary on the morning fights like you did, it certainly adds to the comedy value, and I could start charging more for the videos that I routinely have some of my friends make." She went on. "After that, how would you feel about someone taking pictures of you in both forms?" she asked hesitantly. "Or, if your skills at it are as good as you say, some jobs to take advantage of your martial arts construction skills?"

Ranma frowned thoughtfully, pulling at his pigtail. Before he could reply however Kuno suddenly ran towards them from the school. "There you are, your foul magics will not avail you against the Blue Thunder, foul sorcerer!"

"He's already conscious?" Ranma asked, surprised. "Impressive durability."

"We think he's been dropped on his head for years, so any damage you do to that thick skull of his isn't going to keep." Nabiki said, cocking her eyebrow thoughtfully as Ranma moved forward, grabbing up a stick from the ground.

It was a fallen branch, left behind by some of the groundskeepers, about three feet long. Using his hand like an ax Ranma quickly clipped off the few smaller branches on it, before moving into a sword stance that Nabiki, admittedly no expert, had never seen before. The 'sword' was held straight in one hand over a shoulder pointing forward, the hand somewhat back of his head, his other hand out thrust, palm open.

At the site of the other teen taking up a weapon Kuno laughed. "You mean to match your feeble prowess against me in my owndominion? More fool you, but I will not afford you any mercy!"

Ranma's loose hand, shifted into a fist, the middle finger flicking up in a derisive gesture as he smirked evilly. "You consider yourself a swordsman you Shakespearean knockoff? Well I've been taught by the best swordswoman in the world and you don't even come close. Something I'm going to prove it to you."

"Enough false bravado I attack!" Kuno declaimed, moving in with the same forward thrust, his feet moving quickly as he thrust forward with all of his body weight behind the blade before swinging around in a slash at waist level.

Ranma however dodged to one side his body low to the ground, his makeshift sword flashing up to smack Kuno's second attack away with punishing force. Kuno nearly lost his hold on his blade, but twisted with the force of the attack, coming around in a blindingly fast slash, which Ranma quickly blocked, smacking it aside again before moving forward with a small probing attack of his own.

At least he thought of it as a probing attack, Kuno barely got his blade up in time to deflect it, and he stepped back hurriedly. Bringing his sword forward he shouted "I attack, hiyahh!" the blow started from his waist and zoomed

forward in a slash, too short to actually hit Ranma. Instead, it created a slash of air pressure, which shot towards Ranma.

But this wasn't the first time Ranma had seen such tricks. Even though he was surprised Kuno had such tricks, he quickly reinforced his makeshift blade, smacking the air pressure to one side.

The wind pressure attack carved a furrow out of the ground, and Ranma frowned angrily gritting his teeth. "What would you have done if that had hit Nabiki or any of the other students all around us you moron!?" They were about fifteen or twenty students scattered around where Nabiki and Ranma had been eating, but Ranma had deflected the shot away from all of them.

"You blame me, yet t'was your act which didst put them in danger! If you would only surrender to your just fate this could be over!" Kuno cried, smashing his sword against Ranma's defense in a series of blows with Ranma deflected, easily.

"All right that's it!" Ranma growled, and then went on the attack for real. A thrust came in, which Kuno barely dodged in time, followed by a slash to his leg, which he barely blocked, then it was all he could do to keep up, as Ranma went to town on him, cutting his clothing, his arms and legs, not penetrating the skin but leaving bruises every time his makeshift sword landed. His speed and strength was such that everyone watching knew Kuno was severely outmatched, it was only his desire to make a point that kept Ranma from ending it quickly.

Finally he smashed up powerful blow into Kuno's sword, shattering it, and then before Kuno could move, stepped back quickly, bringing his sword up and around. His eyes blazed white for a moment and he shouted "Fierce Dragon Slash!"

From the end of his makeshift blade out Crescent of white and gold energy shot out, impacting Kuno and flinging him backwards over the heads of the watching crowd to slam into the side of the building with enough force to leave a crater. "The next time you challenge me, I'm going to do even worse than that! I have no patience for fools who threaten other people!" Ranma shouted.

"What was that?!" Nabiki exclaimed, coming out of her stupor after a few seconds, while the rest of the crowd simply stared from Ranma to where Kuno was even now falling forward out of crater his body had made in the stone wall of the school building. Akane too quickly came out of it, almost glaring at Ranma, but there was more wonder than wounded pride in her expression now.

Ranma smirked at her then looked down as his makeshift weapon began to collapse into sawdust. "That was a ki attack, one of the few I've got in my bag'o'tricks at this point. I told you my father and I have been on a training trip, that's just one of the tricks I've learned."

"First magic now ki attacks." Nabiki said, rubbing one hand through her hair irritably. "Why am I even surprised?"

"I don't know, why?" Ranma asked, causing Nabiki to roll her eyes as she smacked his arm lightly.

That blow and the previous beating overcame Kuno's durability for the rest of the day, and Ranma was forced to sit through the rest of a very boring day at school, feeling Akane's eyes on him from time to time, sometimes speculatively, other times angrily. At the end of the day, Ranma and Akane met up with Nabiki at the school entrance.

However when Nabiki tried to continue their talk from lunch Ranma shook his head, moving over to the wall from where he could make his way to the rooftops beyond. "Sorry Nabiki, I'd like to talk to you, but I want to head home and grab Akitsu for a bit, the mystery around her is more important than money matters right now."

The very idea of something being more important than money made Nabiki wince, but she had to agree with that assessment, so she merely nodded. She and Akane watched as Ranma raced off over the rooftops, then Nabiki turned to Akane, a smirk on her face. "So, why can't you do that kind of thing sister dear?"

"Shut up Nabiki! I could do that kind of thing if I wanted to." Akane growled, moving off quickly.

For his part, Ranma ran as easily over the rooftops as he had walked on the rails that morning. *Akitsu might not be able to tell me what's really going on, but I'd bet those two at Izumo house can. And if they can't, then Miya-nee almost certainly will!*

End Chapter

I hate writing Kuno-speech. Seriously. I don't know what's worse, him or Yoda/Yaddle. Ughhhh.... I honestly wanted the chapter to be longer, to carry on through the rest of the 'big reveal' section, but writing Kuno just killed all my forward momentum. Do you all think it would make the story too serious too quickly if I killed him off in the next chapter?

I wanted to introduce Ranma to Akitsu as quickly as possible and show how this Ranma is different from canon Ranma in the way he deals with Kuno et al, plus the changes to Genma and the start of the changes that will come from that. I am going to space out the first few events from Sekirei canon for a bit, to let Ranma get his feet under him, get to know Akitsu, introduce a few other characters, and have a few adventures from the Ranma side of things, but that shouldn't take more than two chapters before Ryoga shows up, and things kick into high gear.

Hope you all enjoyed this and as always please review.

Originally this chapter's author's end notes contained a set of comedic rules that the Sekirei have to follow, in the same spirit as the fic *Things Gryffindor House Are No Longer Allowed To Do*. However I posted them without permission from Mordreek, not remembering that he had originally wished to publish them himself as a separate fic after working on them in collaboration with others. As such, and because the original idea was his and he has indeed been continuing it, I have removed them.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3

I do not own Sekirei or Ranma 1/2. One needs to have more character building to go with its boobies, and the other just has too many shounen stereotypes to list here.

Short I know, but I said a while back the chapters for this and for my other works besides ATP would be smaller, the last chapter of Horse just got away from me. I probably would have added more, possibly spread out the events/discussions here, but they made sense happening all in a jumble like this.

This chapter has not been betaed. I have sent it off to my beta, and will update the chapter when he gets it back to me. However I wanted to post this as soon as possible, to keep with my two-story a month update. Also, some of you need to read my author's notes. I saw several reviews for ATP asking where this was, when I said this chapter would be a few days. Frankly, I'm happy it only took one more considering I only started work on this chapter on Sunday...

Chapter 3: Mistaken Assumptions Can Hurt

It took only a few moments for Ranma to reach the Tendo place but he paused suddenly on a rooftop nearby, then sighed jumping down to the roadway. *Manners Ranma, manners. That means entering from the front door rather than jumping over the wall.*

Ringling the doorbell, he wasn't surprised to see Kasumi answering it. "Hey Kasumi, was Akitsu any trouble?"

"Oh, she is quite a dear girl, indeed I was happy for the company." Kasumi said with a smile. "Two extra pairs of hands definitely made my chores go much faster, why I even had a few hours to read some of my old textbooks. How was your first day at school?"

"More interestin' than I expected actually. You know that Akane's been dealing with this senior who wants to beat her up to in order to date her, and that it's spread to the rest of the school?" Ranma asked as he entered the doorway.

"Young Tatewaki Kuno," Kasumi sighed. "Yes, both Nabiki and Akane have mentioned him and his odd brand of idiocy. We've tried to get the school to put a stop to it, but even my father's position in the local town council hasn't been able to do anything there."

"Nabiki said that his father owned the school or something? Weird, but not the weirdest thing IEEEE!" suddenly Ranma shrieked as he turned slightly only to see Akitsu standing just behind him and to the right, where she definitely hadn't been a moment ago. "Akitsu! Don't do that!"

Akitsu cocked her head to one side, making a questioning noise as if she didn't understand what he was saying while to one side Kasumi laughed at his surprise. "Ahh... my place is by your side Ranma-sama."

"Again with the sama thing, Akitsu?" Ranma chuckled, shaking his head even as he smiled at the young woman. "I'm going to break you of that habit if it's the last thing I do."

Though she did not respond verbally a certain mulish gleam entered Akitsu's normally impassive eyes. Seeing this Ranma groaned mentally, knowing that job was going to probably be just as tough as figuring out what this whole Sekirei Plan was supposed to be about.

Stepping back slightly, Ranma looked at what Akitsu was wearing, and had to fight down a blush. She wore a long skirt and blouse combination that looked like it came from Kasumi. It was normally a very modest dress but while Akitsu was as tall as the other girl, she was at least two sizes larger in the chest area and had slightly wider shoulders as well. Kasumi had obviously tried to let the blouse out, but even so she'd been forced to let a few buttons undone.

Kasumi laughed at his expression, shaking her head. "As you can see, Akitsu will need an entirely new wardrobe. She's too tall for anything from my Nabiki to fit, and she's rather too chesty for anything I have to fit."

"We were planning to go out shopping anyway Kasumi." Ranma replied shrugging. "Miya said I needed some things, though I don't know what she meant by that."

"I do, and I think you should probably prepared to be embarrassed." Kasumi said dryly, refusing to elaborate further. "I hope she sits you down and talks about certain... downsides to the female form too."

"What you mean besides having these great honking things on my chest, and the change throwing off all of my balance and everything?" Ranma asked. "Or about being generally weaker in my female form?"

"Those are mere incidentals to the rather large elephant in the room Ranma." Kasumi replied her tone still dry though inside she was giggling. Today had truly been a fun day. Indeed she'd had more fun today than she could remember having in years.

Firstly, Akitsu had indeed been a joy to have around. She didn't talk much, but she was still good company, an excellent listener and hard worker. She had taken to aiding Kasumi in her chores, particularly cooking far better than her other sisters.

Second, Ranma's arrival was a breath of fresh air to the household, hinting of adventure and far away shores. Even if she was still a little leery about magic in general, the idea of Ranma and whatever Akitsu was involved in promised that Kasumi's staid homebody existence might see some adventure.

Kasumi had been forced to step up to the plate when her mother died. Becoming a second mother to her two siblings she had practically raised Akane, and often regretted the fact that she had concentrated on that and keeping the household going, because it had allowed her father to fall into bad habits, becoming an emotional wreck of a man for years who let himself go physically. Something she hoped that Genma, who she didn't truly approve of otherwise, would correct.

And as for Nabiki, she had retreated for a time emotionally, and it taking several years for her to regain her emotional equilibrium. Even now Nabiki didn't open up to others very easily, and there were places inside Nabiki that even Kasumi didn't know. But even Nabiki had shown signs of 'thawing' when Ranma arrived, eager to meet her possible fiancé, and she seemed intrigued if disturbed by the mystery Akitsu represented.

The two martial artists also represented possible growth for Akane. Kasumi doubted Soun would ever be able to train her, but if Akane was serious about it, Genma seemed willing to step up to the plate, which Kasumi felt might force Akane to mature beyond her current nature, or possibly grow out of being a martial artist at all.

Ranma would have questioned her further, especially seeing the small smile on her face, he knew that expression, but his father's voice interrupted them. "Is that you boy? Come out here!"

The younger boy nodded to Kasumi once more, then walked off saying over his shoulder, "If you need any shopping for done, make up a list, I'd like to make up for not being able to do much shopping yesterday."

"I'll do that, feeding you, your father and Akitsu will probably take quite a bit more food than I'm used to having on hand." Kasumi watched Ranma and Akitsu walk off still wearing a faint smile, before turning to the kitchen.

Out in the garden Ranma found Genma and Soun obviously having just finished a spar. And it was just as obvious that Soun had gotten the worst of it. He was gasping out of breath down on one knee, his face bruised and one forearm black and blue. Across from him Genma stood dripping wet in his panda form, apparently the victim of a retaliatory splash from the pond.

"Any progress?" Ranma asked, flicking one hand towards Soun and then back over his shoulder towards Akitsu. Akitsu in turn was staring at the strange panda, torn between a desire to pet it and look around for her master's father, wondering where he had gone.

His father shook his head, pulling out a large wooden sign on which words were written. "What we feared is true, my old friend has lost much of his training over the years." The sign flipped, and without any sign of pause, showed, "And worse, can no longer use much of his school's techniques!"

Soun looked up at his old friend and his son, shaking his head. "I, I hadn't realized how much I'd fallen out of shape," he said between gasps. "I really let myself go since my darling Kimiko..." He paused, his eyes watering, his lip quivering about to launch into one of his patented sob assaults.

But before he could Genma-panda hurled his sign at him. Or Akitsu thought it was the sign, but instead of the words that had been on it, there was a new message displayed. "None of that! It'll take work Soun, but don't worry we'll get you in shape again."

Something in the panda's expression made Soun wonder if it would be worth it, but Genma had already turned away, nodding his ursine head towards Akitsu who blinked in surprise as the panda was suddenly holding another sign. "We had Akitsu show us more of her powers, boy." Flip. "They're intense, very powerful, very adaptable." Flip. "More

defensive than anything else, but she has a decent offense when she wants to."

Cocking her head to one side, Akitsu actually frowned slightly. *How are the messages on the signs changing like that? And where did the panda hide it anyway?*

Her interest in the signs ended abruptly when Ranma turned to her, smiling widely. Akitsu blushed slightly under his regard, moving forward to stand closer to him, not certain what she had done to earn that smile but happy it was directed at her. "Sparring with you is going to be fun Akitsu!"

At that Akitsu paused, a faint frown appearing on her face but after moment she simply nodded her head docilely. If that was what her Ashikabi-sama wanted, they could do so.

Seeing her docile nature Ranma frowned again, shaking his head slightly. "That's another habit were going to have to break Akitsu. Don't go all ice statue like that, you have a problem, talk to me."

Akitsu frowned looking at him, but then nodded her head slowly. "Ahh...I do not like the idea of hurting you Ashikabi-sama. You are strong, stronger than we were told humans could be. I know this from last night. But even so, I do not wish to hurt you."

A sign was thrust down into the water of the pond, the word "**Bah!**" written out on it in bold lettering, visible even as it splashed a small wave of water at Ranma. As the now female Ranma glared at his old man, the sign flipped again. "If my son was afraid of a little pain he'd be the little girl he turns into for real!"

Growling irritably, Ranma pulled off her now soaked shirt, wringing it out while before turning a smile on Akitsu. She didn't notice Soun gaping at him, turning away rapidly. "Despite my old man's backhanded way o' complimenting me, he's right, I am used to pain when training. And training against you will be good training if either we have to face anyone with similar element-based powers. I already ran into one gal with something similar before I met you so it's possible."

Akitsu cocked her head to one side, frowning at that but this time Ranma knew what was causing it. "And yes Akitsu, if you have to fight in this Plan thing, I'm going to be fighting with ya, just like I did last night."

Akitsu sighed, but nodded her head slowly. This time it was a nod of agreement, rather than a nod of submission, and Ranma smiled.

Seeing they were finished with the sappy stuff, Genma spoke up quickly, having taken the time while they were talking to pour a pot of hot water over himself. "Anyway, we saw her powers, but can't make head nor tails of 'em. We can both feel **something** going on with her ki, but we can't understand it."

"So we've decided something, the two of us are goin' on a training trip." The seemingly obese man pointed a finger at his old sparring partner while Akitsu blinked at the change before making the mental connection between that change and her master's. "I need to whip Soun into shape before trying to do the same with his youngest, and I want to call in at a few shrines. We need ta figure out a way to follow the flow of ki within Akitsu's body if we're going to replicate her techniques."

If that's possible at all Ranma thought, shaking her head slightly. Ranma and his old man had run into a few martial arts techniques over the years that were purely family-based: no one outside the family could perform them even if they were taught how to. He/she felt certain that would prove the case with Akitsu and her ice powers. But even so it might be a good idea since it could lead to fixing whatever that mark on Akitsu's forehead was doing to her.

"All right old man, I understand that, but Miya-nee wants ta talk to you next weekend, you can leave after that. She's not going to hurt you or anything." Ranma hastened to add seeing his father paled noticeably. "She just wants to know more about the training trip, and about the specific masters we trained under. She seemed impressed with my progress, and I figured you'd be able to answer those questions better than me."

Ranma had made up most of that on the spot but it sounded good, and hid the real reason why he didn't want Genma to escape just yet. Ranma was eager to see what Ukyo would do to the moron. So he watched as Genma nodded slowly, his ego almost visibly fed at the idea of Miya being impressed by their training.

"Anyway, I'm going to go take Akitsu out shopping and introduce her to Miya-nee. She wanted ta go shopping with me for some reason for my other form, don't know what that's about." Ranma finished, shrugging.

Being a father of three girls and having seen how Ranma treated his female form Soun coughed rather delicately, looking away from the still soaked redhead. "I suggest you take a bath first, and ask for what your friend wants to

buy you, that would probably be bras and underwear."

He shuddered remembering the times he had to buy those for his daughters. Those had been the most embarrassing moments of his life! He still couldn't remember what he had done to aggravate Kasumi enough for her to push that job off on him, but she had.

Though he still didn't remember, Soun had forgotten Kasumi's birthday not once, but three times in a row. Even gentle Kasumi had wanted a bit of revenge after that, made worse by Soun still pushing more of the duties around the household onto her shoulders at the time.

"Why would I need those?" Ranma asked cocking his head to one side.

Soun blinked at Ranma, then a horrible suspicion went through his mind for a moment, powered by how disinterested in his female body Ranma seemed. "Genma, you did give your son the Talk at some point correct?"

"Of course I did," Genma said waving that off while Ranma blanched of the memory. Genma had indeed tried to give him the Talk, which had been embarrassing, confusing and horrifying all at once.

Luckily for him the local judo master had overheard them and pulled Ranma aside the next day to give him a more understandable version. It hadn't helped much, but had at least given Ranma enough information to know the changes his body was going through were normal.

Soun breathed a sigh of relief, shaking his head quickly. "Let's just say that the bras in particular will help you from receiving unwelcome attention."

"Still don't get it but whatever," Ranma said cheerfully. "I'll trust Miya-nee know what she's doing. But I am going to go take a bath first. Get a change of clothing too."

With that he turned, entering the house, with Akitsu following him. She followed him all the way into the changing room, and it wasn't until Ranma was actually sitting down on the bench preparing to wash himself that he realized she had followed him in their too. "AHH, Akitsu!"

OOOOOO

"Hey, did you see that new message from MBI?"

"Sure did man, 'A redhead of fiery disposition has been freed and is yours for the taking if you can find her.' Sounds like a lot of fun. I'm gonna grab my girl, and we'll see if we hunt this redhead down. Heh, I've always wanted a threesome."

"Dude leave some of the wealth for the rest of us!"

"You know the rules man, first kiss, first served."

OOOOOO

A few moments after that scream a rather disheveled and heavily blushing Ranma and a silent and unemotional but somehow satisfied Akitsu joined Kasumi in the kitchen. "Do you have that list Kasumi?"

Kasumi smiled, making no mention of Ranma's blush. "Here it is, and here is some money for the food. If you tell the grocers that you're buying for the Tendo family, he'll probably give you a discount. I helped him when his baby had a cold a few months ago." Doctor Tofu had been busy with an elderly patient at the time, and the grocer, a first time father, had panicked at his son's first cold. "I would like to talk to you this evening Ranma, so if you could be certain to come back for dinner that would be most helpful. Before you go though, Akitsu could I trouble you to meet me some shaved ice? It's rather hot out, and I thought it might do for a nice treat."

Akitsu frowned, cocking her head as Ranma laughed. "Ahh...Shaved ice?"

It took Akitsu a few moments, but she was able to create small pieces of ice, which Ranma then crushed into a large bowl. From there Kasumi quickly separated into several smaller bowls, adding flavors to them and putting most of them away in the fridge. After they were done Ranma stole a spoonful before heading out the door into the garden, planning to jump out over onto the rooftops.

As they passed through the sitting room Nabiki and Akane arrived and the two of them stopped, watching as Ranma

and Akitsu jumped to the top of the outer wall and away. "Wow, so even Akitsu can do that." Nabiki smirked, nudging her younger sister. "Maybe if you ask nicely they'll teach you that kind of thing. Or maybe how to do those ice attacks of hers. How cool would it be if you could use those on Kuno? Bet he'd leave you alone then."

Even though the idea did have some appeal, Akane still growled at her older sister, who had been not-so gently teasing her about how she stacked up against Ranma on their way home. "Shut up Nabiki! I don't need his help, I just need daddy to take my training seriously! And Akitsu's not a martial artist, she's some kind of alien witch, remember?"

She stopped when she saw the shaved ice on the kitchen table. "Oh, shaved ice."

OOOOOOO

Two rooftops away from the Tendo place, Ranma grinned suddenly, poking Akitsu in the shoulder. "Tag, you're it!" With that he raced off, leaping and bounding from rooftop to rooftop faster and faster.

For a moment Akitsu simply continued following Ranma at her slower pace, trying to decide if she should really try to win or simply follow, wondering which one her Ashikabi expected of her. After a moment however she decided that since her Ashikabi-sama was a rather competitive person, he probably expected her to do the same at least in little ways like this. With that in mind she sped up, but was unable to quite catch Ranma before the two of them up began to enter the North.

Neither of them noticed that dozens of cameras had been following them from the moment they entered Tokyo proper, or that there were even a few people, mostly Sekirei but one or two Ashikabi who noticed them and tried to follow along physically. None of them succeeded however before they crossed into the north of the city, which, for some reason unknown to most was a no-go zone for the Sekirei Plan.

Seeing the evening in the distance Ranma paused then leaped down to the road. *Manners, manners. You don't want Akitsu to give me a bad them worst impression after all.*

He turned with a smirk to watch Akitsu jumped down beside him only for his victorious expression to collapse into a blushing stuttering mess as her dress billowed out around her knees when she jumped down. This caused Ranma to catch a glimpse right up her dress, which showed him far more than he was ready to see. Turning his eyes away rapidly he gasped "A-Akitsu! Where're your panties?!"

Akitsu landed, cocking her head thoughtfully to one side as she reached down, touching the front where her panties would be underneath her skirt. "Ahh...Forgot." she said finally.

Ranma groaned, then shook his head. "Come on, I'm certain Miya-nee or Uzume will have a pair you can borrow."

The ice Sekirei nodded, and followed him docilely as they made their way over to the inn ringing the doorbell. Miya answered the doorbell quickly, smiling as she saw Ranma. "Hello Ranma, come inside. I'll be just a moment..." Miya trailed off, cocking her head seeing Akitsu behind Ranma. "Who's this?"

She of course recognized Akitsu as one of her feathers, nothing could keep her from sensing that, and she found herself irritated that the decision of when to talk to Ranma about the Sekirei and MBI had been taken from her. The mark on Akitsu's forehead however drove that out of her mind. *What happened there!?! How could a Sekirei's ability to bond be broken like that!?!*

"This is Akitsu, she's a Sekirei according to her. I guess those women I ran into yesterday are the same thing just like Uzume. And you too?" Ranma asked, one eyebrow raised as he looked at Miya.

"Yes, well, I should have realized this would come out sooner than I could have wished." Miya said with a faint chuckle, one hand rising to cover her mouth demurely as she gestured him inside with the other. "No doubt you have questions."

"Tons," Ranma admitted. "A lot about you, and a lot about why Akitsu thinks she's 'broken', and what Sekirei really are. Akitsu's told me what she knows but that wasn't much, and while I can sort of feel some of why she might think she's broken I can't explain all of it, and I'd like to know what you know about this plan or whatever it is."

"Not as much as I'd like," Miya said shaking her head irritably. "Still, sit down and I'll tell you what I know..."

Over the next few minutes, Miya filled Ranma in on the Sekirei Plan, backing up Akitsu's explanation about them being aliens. She had no idea why they looked almost exactly like humans, or any of their history, though Ranma wasn't interested in all that. What he was interested in was the bond, the Sekirei Plan, Akitsu, and Miya herself.

"The Sekirei Plan is a mad scheme made up by Minaka, head of MBI. I have no idea why, originally he intended, or at least he told us that he intended to let Sekirei out into the general population slowly in order to both guard our secrets and find out destined ones. You have to know how the governments of the world would respond to the idea of aliens, especially given the ship and the technology it represents."

Miya sighed looking away as she remembered the battles she and the original Disciplinary squad had faced to protect the ship and the feathers within. Across from Miya, Ranma waited while Akitsu sat docilely beside him, sipping at the rather good tea Miya had served them. "But somewhere along the line that changed. He is still releasing the Sekirei as he promised he would, but he won't allow them out of Shin-Teito, and he is forcing this Plan of his, pitting Ashikabi and their bonded against one another."

Lifting one hand up to her mouth, Miya chuckled. "Of course most of my feathers enjoy the challenge, we are a rather combative race after all. But I can't say I approve of the trend you reported, several Sekirei ganging up on one? That isn't honorable. But I'm just an old widow woman so what do I know?"

At Ranma's deadpan gaze she pouted. "Mou, that's not very nice Ranma." Shaking her head Miya went on more seriously. "I have no idea what Minaka's goal is, or why he put this game in place. By the time it began I was well out of the loop, and then my husband..." She broke off, shaking her head. Takehito's death was the one wound that would never heal.

Ranma nodded, frowning slightly at that, but turned their discussion specifically to the bond. Here Miya was able to give him a slightly more complete, if not very detailed answer: that the bond developed between an Ashikabi and a Sekirei, merging their souls, which Ranma took to mean ki, and using the Ashikabi's ki to unlock the Sekirei's full potential. A Ashikabi could have more than one Sekirei, there was no social stigma among them against harems, and indeed the more Sekirei an Ashikabi had, the more powerful his 'ki signal', what Miya called his call of compatibility, became.

One area Ranma questioned closely was the amount of control the Ashikabi had over the Sekirei, not liking how docile Akitsu was toward him, the entire master thing weirding him out. Miya replied that was mostly indoctrination, but real for all of that since the Sekirei had all been 'adjusted', weakened so they could not harm their bonded Ashikabi. But the bond was a true two way street, both sides got out of the bond what they put in. A stronger, more loving relationship between Ashikabi and Sekirei would allow both to grow stronger than a one-sided relationship.

"Of course, given Akitsu's predicament... I would assume that she will be stronger and have more control of her current level of power than others of equal rank. But unless you find a way to repair the bond, she won't be able to become stronger than she is now." Miya sighed sadly, looking at Akitsu closely. She looked familiar, but it was best to make certain. "Tell me dear, do you know your number?"

Akitsu looked up from where she had been drinking her tea. While enlightening, most of what they had discussed wasn't anything she was particularly interested in. All she knew was that despite being broken, Ranma accepted her. Besides, sheer strength was one thing, technique another, something she had learned from watching her master fight the male Sekirei the evening before. "Ahh... Number 7."

Uzume whistled, while Miya nodded, satisfied. At Ranma's look Miya explained quickly. "The general rule is the lower the number, the stronger the Sekirei. There are of course exceptions, but the Sekirei below 15 are all very strong, both in will and physically."

"Okay, so... you lot are aliens who bond with humans via your ki, calling the person you bond with your Ashikabi, and you think if you can bond with them it means you're destined to be with that person forever. There is a big-ass competition going on between all these bonded pairs and groups, with an unknown prize at the end, and it'll probably end up being team-based combat at some point." Ranma summarized in his own way. "But what happened to Akitsu to make her unable to access her ki, or to bond like you said?"

"That... I do not know. I have never heard of the ability to bond being broken like that." Miya replied honestly. Ranma swiftly explained what he and his father could faintly sense occurring within Akitsu, but couldn't understand. Miya replied that it was more than she expected but despite her habitual self-control it was obvious the subject was making her **very** angry, so Ranma decided to change the subject.

Pulling at his pigtail Ranma he frowned, looking at Miya. "Okay, so where in all this do you fit?"

"Not something I wish to talk about at present Ranma." Miya replied firmly. Her own history was something she wanted to lead up to slowly, not pile on the number of revelations she'd already had to share today. "I will tell you soon, but I think we've talked enough about such matters for one day. Do remember we need to go shopping. You

need bras, and I have no doubt that Akitsu could do with a whole new wardrobe at least judging by the strain she's putting that blouse under."

"Did I hear someone say shopping?" Uzume asked, suddenly, sticking her head around the corner. Seeing Akitsu her smile widened. "Wow, Ranma, you dog! I thought you were engaged to one of the Tendos, no way is this babe one of them, not with that mark on her forehead."

"Oh shut it Uzume." Ranma retorted. "Besides I thought I said we wouldn't need your help shopping."

"You didn't actually think I'd not invite myself along anyway did you? This is going to be hilarious." Uzume replied, not bothering to hide her smirk as she sat down next to Akitsu on her other side, who looked at her, her eyes narrowing slightly. "Hey, ah, don't worry or anything, I might be a Sekirei like you, but I've already got an Ashikabi."

Turning around slightly, she pulled her brown hair out of the way, baring the back of her neck. "See?"

Akitsu nodded, feeling both relief and jealousy at the sight of the Sekirei crest on Uzume's neck. Then she looked at Ranma, who was looking at her with concern, and her jealousy faded slightly before he turned away to look at Uzume. "Your partner doesn't live here though?"

Turning to the brunette Akitsu and Ranma both saw her face fall slightly as she looked away. "Um, nah, Chiho-baby's sick, she lives at a hospital downtown." That admission made Ranma and Akitsu both feel rather awkward, but Uzume didn't let the moment linger and she smirked at Ranma. "So you've decided you do want a harem huh? This gal, one of the Tendos, Ukyo..."

"Akitsu and I met up last night, and I promised to help her, it's got nothing to do with this Sekirei stuff." *Though if I run into any fights, or see something like with blondie again, heh, this could actually be fun...*

Ranma explained what they knew about Akitsu's status, which made Uzume shake her head sadly, pulling the other Sekirei into a companionable hug, sad the other girl might never feel that special bond. Ranma finished by stating firmly, "And I sure as hell am **not** interested in a harem!"

"I did say that larger flocks would have an advantage didn't I Ranma?" Miya asked, shaking her head slightly as she looked between him and Uzume. "I know you might be able to match up against most Sekirei, but not all of them. There are a few who stand above the others, much like Akitsu apparently with her ice powers. If you couldn't close the range on her, could you beat Akitsu?"

Akitsu frowned at that, shifting uncomfortably but Ranma took her hand in his, squeezing it once before letting go as he answered Miya's question. "Maybe, we'll find out when we spar. And I think I could beat that water-using woman from the other night too. I'd certainly like to try, and like ya said if I close the range I don't think either of them could beat me."

"But that's only two examples, there are others, and in particular there is the Disciplinary Squad and the chief dog that leads them." Miya's face twisted into an expression that Ranma had never seen on it before and which made him rather uncomfortable, a look of utter loathing and hate. "Her name is Karasuba, and she is a sadistic combat junky of the first order. She's also easily the most powerful feather, and will not hesitate to kill you if she's ordered to, or if she can get away with it."

"I understand what you're saying Miya-nee, and I'll watch out, but I'm still gonna do what I want ta do." Ranma said firmly.

"I know, I just want you to be careful. And we will restart our training regimen tomorrow, since I'm afraid our discussion took overlong today." Miya said very firmly. "You'll stop by after school, and we will spar for two hours, after which I will make certain that you are doing your homework too. Don't think that you can use this as an excuse to get out of your school-work Ranma."

"Yes Miya-nee," Ranma said, smirking and actually bowing in place rapidly with each word, though inside he was practically giddy at taking up his training with her once more. "Of course Miya-nee, wouldn't dream of it Miya-neeOUCH!"

Miya quickly put her ladle back into her skirt's sleeve, smirking at Ranma before looking over toward Akitsu as the air suddenly became cold. Just as she noticed that a small sliver of ice appeared in the air above her guest. It shattered immediately, Miya having withdrawn her weapon and sent a small barely visible shockwave at it before quickly putting her ladle back before any of her table companions could notice.

"Ara, ara, Akitsu-san, violence within Izumo House is **forbidden**." So saying Miya summoned up her hanya mask, the terror reaching out to the others at the table. Akitsu quickly began to twitch, shifting slightly to the side almost hiding behind her Ranma, overcome by the fear of the Hanya mask.

Ranma twitched a little, but that was all. Instead he leaned forward, pulling out his notebook. Seeing this Miya canceled the technique pouting slightly.

On Akitsu's other side Uzume shook her head, breathing deeply as the pressure of Miya's technique faded. "Balls of steel bro, seriously."

Miya stood up, still pouting lightly, but thankful she and Ranma had gotten through the serious discussion already. She had a lot more she could tell him about the Sekirei of course, but Ranma didn't seem all that interested, not after she had told him most of the Sekirei didn't have problems fighting one another. After that, while he still seemed worried about the nature of the bond, he was also excited at the idea of facing so many opponents and didn't seem to care about the larger issues.

"If we're done talking for now Ranma, let's be on our way."

"Huh, but Miya, someone here isn't changed to go out yet." Uzume said, then pulled out a water gun she'd bought that morning, shooting Ranma in the face with it before any of the other three could move. "There, all better. Damn, that still is just awesome to watch sis."

"You, you uncute tomboy!" Ranma growled, pulling her once again wet hair back from her eyes. "I will have my revenge for this you know."

"Uncute tomboy? Is that supposed to be an insult, come on bro, you can do better than that." Uzume sighed then yelped as she dodged to one side as Ranma leaped over the table, his fingers going for her sides twitching.

"Enough you two!" Miya sighed, wondering if she was going to regret allowing these two to meet. "Ranma, Uzume's right, you need to be in your female form for this, and Uzume, I think Ranma's having a bad enough time with his new body without people like you taking every opportunity you can to splash him like that."

Both of them nodded, looking suitably chastened though with similar glints in their eyes which made Miya sigh again. For some reason she just knew Uzume and Ranma were going to cause trouble down the line. "Now, we should get going, I think we need to head to one of the local malls..."

OOOOOO

"Ma'am Number 1 is on the move heading out of the no-spy zone. What should we do?"

Takami Sahashi, Chief Adjustor and all around troubleshooter for MBI and the Sekirei Plan in particular looked at the man who had spoken up irritably. "Why the hell is Miya leaving Izumo House?"

The man shuffled his feet under his boss's glare. "Um, unknown ma'am but we got some recordings of the Broken Sekirei heading towards the north with..."

The man next to him kicked him lightly under the table, glaring him into silence. President Minaka had told them to keep the redheaded unknown from Takami, and none of the techs wanted to get between the two of them.

His intervention came to late however, and Takami marched over to their stations. The man who that tried to stop his fellow from talking was laid out by a sudden slap from her metal clipboard to the back of the head. While he fell to the ground twitching, Takami twisted the chair of the man who had been speaking around, her heeled boot coming up to slam directly between his legs as she glared at him. "With, what or who exactly? And why wasn't I told about whatever it is?"

With Takami right in front of them and glaring the tech's fear for his job became much more personal. He stammered out about the unknown redheaded Sekirei that had appeared last night. When he was finished Takami glared at him, thinking hard. *An unknown Sekirei is patently impossible! As for a human male who can fight Mutsu of all the Sekirei to a standstill, well, no let's not make an assumption there, I'll look over the video footage myself. Matching Mutsu isn't the same thing as escaping him, still an impressive feat but not one to worry about.*

Wait, need to deal with her possibly knowing Miya first. Our bargain with her won't let us record anything near Izumo House or her, so... damn it. "Shut down all the listening devices and video recorders around Number 1 in a quarter mile radius. If she finds out we're spying on her beyond following her power level, Number 1 may decide we're in

violation of our agreement with her, and that's something we can't afford."

With the immediate problem solved, Takami turned to one of the communication techs. "You, have any messages been sent out today to the Ashikabi?" The response to that only made her angrier and she shook in place for a moment, her hands twitching. "Damn you Minaka. Alright here's what we're going to do, cut out all MBI sanctioned cameras."

As two techs leaped to carry out that order Takami turned to the rest of the room, pointing at one minion after another. "Hack into any local surveillance along the route Number 1 follows, get me a read on them I want half you morons on this ten seconds ago! I want confirmation that the Broken Sekirei and this redhead are with Number 1."

I'll figure out what it could mean later. It could be as easy as her taking in two more strays, fine and dandy so long as no one actually pokes the sleeping dragon. But if there's more to it, we need to find out now. Thank god Minaka's busy explaining the new facts of life to the various police chiefs etc. His particular brand of crazy would just make this mystery worse.

OOOOOO

"Master, it says here that the brunette has already been winged. The one with short tan s called a 'wild card' whatever that means." The girl speaking was tall with large earrings, black hair down to her shoulders and wore a punk rocker outfit.

The man she spoke to wore much the same, but his hair was bleached blond, and he had a tan to boot. "Hmm... but it doesn't say anything about the redhead having been winged yet?"

"No master, but, well look at this." The woman held out a phone to the man, who took it, never looking away from the quartet of women.

He stopped looking at them however when he noticed a young woman in a miko outfit enter the mall from another entrance, moving slowly but following the original quartet. Taking a moment, he looked down at the phone, and his eyes widened. "Okay, why the heck does that old lady have a picture here? And what's this, 'off-limits, avoid at all costs we **REALLY** mean it?' What the fuck's that supposed to mean?"

The two fell silent, watching the quartet move toward a women's clothing store. The girl sighed, looking at some of the styles on display, causing the man to smirk lightly at her before one eyebrow rose in surprised when the redhead apparently panicked and tried to make a break for it. The attempt was stopped by the old lady, who took one arm while the winged brunette took her other arm, literally dragging the redhead into the lingerie store, with the tan-haired girl following behind them.

The tanned man stood there for a moment, his eyes moving around the mall then back to the store front before twitching over to the girl dressed in a miko outfit, and several other men, one his own age another slightly older who seemed to be following the quartet too. His smile slid from his face however when he saw a group of men dressed in suits and two obvious Sekirei, one with short hair and the other with long green hair, loitering just out of sight of the shop, each of them holding cell phones or tablets. "Fuck. Let's go Lin, this pot is getting a little too rich for my blood."

Lin nodded, and the two turned away, heading out of the mall quickly. "Still wonder about the old lady's picture being in there, and that weird message..."

OOOOOO

Inside the lingerie store Ranma looked at his older sister figure blankly as she held up the small flimsy silk bra towards her. Miya had somehow figured out her size without a tape measurer, but even so... "You have got to be kidding."

Miya's eyes narrowed slightly. "I believe we've already discussed your need for some coverage Ranma, and this is in your size too."

The redhead growled irritably. They had indeed agreed about this the day before. And the looks some of the men they had passed had given the redhead made her/his fists clench.

But now that it came to it, Ranma was definitely having second thoughts. "But Miya-nee, I've already told you that I've noticed how cold water seems attracted ta me, who's to say that the exact opposite won't happen if I wear something like that? Can you imagine how embarrassing that'd be if I turn into a guy while wearing a bra?"

"I've already agreed that you shouldn't wear panties for that very reason Ranma. But you were going to try to figure out a quick change technique weren't you? Or are you saying that you won't be able to?"

"I can learn an' create any martial arts technique you care to name!" Ranma said proudly, then paused smacking her forehead. "All right, I'll wear them, but not any of those frilly ones. Get me some of those what ya call them sport bras."

Miya smiled at him before putting the red lace bra that she had originally chosen down. Smart as he was at times, Ranma really didn't understand haggling. Miya had initially chosen that bra because she knew Ranma wouldn't go for it, and was willing to come down to the sport bras. But this way, it would look as if they had both compromised, rather than her simply laying down the law. "Now, we've gotten you a few blouses, all we need is an emergency change of uniform for when you're at school."

"I do **not** want to be a girl while I'm at school!" Ranma said holding up his arms to make an X. "With that Kuno character I met on my way here that's just asking for trouble."

"I realize that, and really if your last remonstrations of him doesn't sink this supposed kendoist might need more... **corrective** methods to change his ways. But you still need to prepare for these things. Unless you want to admit to having your curse?"

As Ranma was trying to imagine what that could mean long term, the two of them were interrupted as Uzume came around the bend in the aisle holding out a set of underwear that made the pair Miya had shown him look plain in comparison. "Here Ranma try these on."

"GAH, no way!" Ranma said, backing away, looking as if he was going to bolt.

Not realizing why her master was feeling so afraid of the brunette, Akitsu, who had been following behind Ranma silently, stepped around her facing the other girl. Uzume grinned. "Ohoh, someone's eager for her turn. Well then come on Icy-chan, let's get you dolled up. When we're done with you bro here won't be able to control himself around you, I guarantee it."

"I think Akitsu-san would look better in traditional clothing than your normal so-called modern style Uzume, but if you wish to go first Akitsu-san you could have just said so." Miya said, looking at the silent Akitsu, who had cocked her head to one side as if thinking about Uzume's words.

For a moment Miya forgot about Ranma, who quickly took advantage of it, exiting the shop quickly. She was out the doorway before either woman noticed her absence. Sitting down on a nearby bench, Ranma groaned a little as her stomach made itself known, growling angrily. "Just put up with it a bit longer, Kasumi will have made dinner for us by the time we get back, don't worry."

"I hate to see a young lady go hungry," said a rather obese man from another nearby bench, startling Ranma slightly. "Would you like to eat something in the food court? My treat, merely being in the presence of such a beautiful young woman would be payment enough."

He smiled winningly at her, but Ranma frowned shaking her head. *Normally I'd be fine with the idea of free eats, but...* "No thanks man."

The older man frowned a little both at her response and her attitude, then nodded and pushed himself to his feet, walking off quickly. Despite knowing that the redhead was a Sekirei free for the taking, he wasn't the sort to push his attention on anyone. Besides which, from his previous interaction with the Sekirei he'd already bonded with, if there had been any kind of spark it should have occurred the moment the redhead laid eyes on him. No, best to let this hunt go as a bad job.

Unfortunately for Ranma, others were not nearly so decent in their pursuit of Sekirei. Ranma found this minutes later. She had left the bench for a moment to find the nearest bathroom. As she walked back however, a man came out behind her from where he had been loitering in a small loading entrance to one of the stores built along the small crossway containing the bathroom.

Without any warning his hand clamped trying to pull her to one side. "What a babe! Pucker up and prepare for your destinEE!"

Before he could do more than tug on Ranma's shoulder Ranma had already broken his weak hold. By the time he realized that Ranma had grabbed his hand, and thrown the man over her shoulder. He crashed to the ground of the

crossway, and before he could do more than grunt in pain, Ranma had reached down, grabbing him by the throat.

Turning to one side, Ranma slammed the man upside down into the wall. "What the hell man! Even I know you don't just go around kissing random girls!"

"L-let me down you bitch! You're not supposed to fight back! You're not a regular girl, you're a Sekirei, that means any guy who kisses you owns you!"

"What the hell?" Ranma reiterated shaking her head. "I'm no Sekirei you moron. I'm a martial artist! And anyone trying to kiss me like that is going to get their boy bits removed, understand?"

With that she let the boy dropped, watching him run off for a moment muttering about coming back with reinforcements, whatever that meant. Quickly walking back to the store Ranma paused as he saw Akitsu follow Uzume out of the changing area with Miya smiling slightly behind them. Akitsu now wore what looked like a combination of her original looks and Uzume's: tight jeans and a loose blouse. Uzume looked a little put out, while Miya was smiling that slight serene yet triumphant smile of hers, and Akitsu looked a little sad about something.

Deciding not to inquire what it happened, Ranma asked "Uzume, Miya-nee, you two have any idea why I just got 'attacked' by a man claiming that I'm a Sekirei?"

Miya's face nearly shut down at that while Akitsu's eyes noticeably hardened at the very idea of her Ashikabi-sama being attacked while she wasn't around. She quickly took her position beside and slightly behind Ranma, glaring around them in her own, unemotional way.

"Sorry bro, but I kind of... sort of... escaped before my release date." Uzume said sheepishly, scratching at her hair. "I don't have any direct link to MBI so I've no idea why people think you're a Sekirei other than your general martial arts skills. "Maybe someone saw your fight last night when ya rescued Icy-chan or helped blondie, and is making an assumption? Social media could spread that kind of thing really quick."

Ranma frowned but had to admit that point. He was still getting used to cell phones and communication being so useful after having spent so long in the boonies, but that didn't mean Uzume was wrong. I suppose that works. Anyway, let's get out of here, I feel like I've got a big target painted on my back for some reason."

Outside the mall, Ranma and Akitsu split off from Miya and Uzume, wishing to head home from there, since it was closer than Izumo House. Miya agreed they were done for the day, since she knew Ranma would be back the next day and she wanted to work on Akitsu's combat costume, the one item of apparel they couldn't get at the mall. She was irritated they hadn't covered all the subjects she had wished about Ranma's new form, but most of those would keep at least for a day, and seeing how twitchy Ranma had become she knew they had to call it a day anyway.

OOOOOO

"Ma'am, we've got footage showing Number 1 and #11 breaking off from the unknown number and the Broken Sekirei. Number 1 seems to be heading back north, while the others are heading on a course to the Nerima district, where we lost them last night."

Takami nodded, frowning thoughtfully even as she breathed a sigh of relief. No one had been stupid enough to start something in a public place other than that one idiot who ambushed the redhead, so the odds of Miya lashing out had just decreased dramatically, which was all to the good. The redhead's violent response to the moron however was a little worrying if she really was a Sekirei, though Takami still wondered how that could be possible without her knowing about it. "The moment they are a single block away from Number 1 I want our cameras and audio pickups back online. If anything goes down I want to see it."

"Oh Takami-chan you look as if you're having fun! Whatever has happened in my absence?" Minaka said as he slid into the room flopping onto the chair in the direct center of the control room, which he called his 'throne'.

Before he could finish sitting down however, Takami's clipboard smashed him in the side of the head, sending him sprawling. "I've been cleaning up your fucking mess as usual you freaking madman! What the hell were you thinking, siccing the Ashikabi on that unknown redhead when we have no idea where she came from?! Did you know she might be connected to Miya!?"

Minaka paled slightly before regaining his equilibrium with the ease of the truly mad, but before he could answer his ex-wife's accusations, one of the techs spoke up. "Um, ma'am, sir, we've got several fights going on right now..."

"What?" Takami asked, blinking as she turned aside, only to groan as she stared at the screen that man and a few

others were looking at. They were the hacked feeds from the video cameras on the rooftops around the mall. It appeared as if several Sekirei and Ashikabi pairs had broken off following the broken Sekirei and the unknown redhead to fight it out amongst themselves. After only a moment's glance there seemed to be at least four or five different Ashikabi represented there, including the two currently known as the most powerful, Mikogami and Higa.

While Takami rubbed her face and worried about the collateral damage this was causing so early in the plan, Minaka merely laughed aloud. "My, what wonderful chaos, and all of it merely a side effect of a little message? I might have to send out other such messages to keep the game lively." Takami turned to glare at him, but Minaka ignored her, turning his attention on a few other techs. "Still, that is no reason to lose sight of the prize, can you pull up current footage of the redhead? I have no doubt she's somewhere nearby..."

OOOOOOO

Jumping up to the rooftops Ranma and Akitsu were several blocks away from the mall when they stopped, turning around at the sound of combat coming from behind them. Ranma frowned, wondering if he should head back and see what was going on, but then suddenly smirked, turning his head sideways. "Yo, you can come out now, I know you're there! How long've you two been following us?"

"Not long Red, we were just waiting until you both were well away from any bystanders to confront you. We didn't think you knew we were here though." Said a voice. Two women came out from behind a AC box built into the rooftop to one side of the route Ranma and Akitsu had been following.

Both of them were tall, slightly taller than Ranma would be in his male form, which meant they were more than a foot taller than his female form. They both had black hair done up in ponytails and hazel eyes, and even their faces were alike enough to show they were twins. One of them had a bust larger than Akitsu, who was in turn bustier than Ranma's female form, while the other's bust was smaller than Ranma's.

The busty one was wearing a black suit, the other a purple one. If Ranma was a worldlier fellow he/she might have thought they looked like bondage suits. As it was Ranma felt they looked like a cross between a leotard and a female RPG villain's outfit.

Ranma stared at them, shaking her head at their outfits, fighting down a faint blush. *Damn, is every Sekirei good looking, or have I just lucked out so far?* "All right, so what do you want from me?"

"We don't really want anything from you, but you see you're an un-winged Sekirei, and we want to make sure you stay that way. So why don't you just stay right there and let us put you out of the game?" Replied the bustier one. At the last word a bolt of lightning shot from her outstretched hand towards Ranma.

He dodged to one side quickly, though he needn't have bothered. A wall of ice sprang into being immediately between them taking the attack. To Ranma's side Akitsu strode forward. The ice shattered under the bolt of lightning, but Akitsu was prepared, and the pieces of ice didn't touch the ground before she hurled them forwards.

When she spoke there was none of the normal hesitation in her voice, her words coming out crisp and clear. "You will not harm Ranma-sama."

"Hikari, isn't that..." said the heretofore quiet girl in purple, pulling at her sister's shoulder.

"Hell, if you want to be knocked out of the game now, that's fine by me Broken one!" Hikari replied, and the two of them began to return fire, small bolts of lightning shooting out of their hands towards Akitsu, who conjured up more ice, blocking their attacks with ease.

They should have kept their attention on Ranma too however because by this point he had closed the distance between them. The as yet un-introduced girl turned to her, a leg coming up in a decent kick, but it was telegraphed just a bit too much to surprise the charging redhead. Instead Ranma leaped up over it, using it as a springboard to lash out with her own kick that caught the purple-wearing twin in the face.

"Gah!" She grunted, but to Ranma's surprise she moved with the blow, coming back around and throwing out another rising kick that segued into a whole series of kicks and punches. None of them landed of course, but it was certainly a better show than most of the girls from the other night had given. "Be careful Hikari, the redhead's a fist type!"

"The name is Ranma, what's your's, or should I just call ya Purple? And what the heck are you wearing? Ya look like a female villain from Final Fantasy or something." Ranma said, before catching one of her hands in his, redirecting a small bolt of lightning away from him. His other hand lashed out in a punch that caught the girl in the shoulder.

Again however the girl moved with the blow, avoiding much of the force. Not much, it still deadened her arm, but enough to keep moving backwards rather than be flung aside like Ranma had intended. And she even had the breath to reply to Ranma's questions. "I'm Hibiki, that's Hikari, and um, as for the outfits, well we have to wear rubber since our powers sometimes go haywire in a fight, and um, these were designed by our Ashikabi, so..."

Ranma dodged another lightning blast, looking over at the other battle, noticing that Hikari was attempting to close the range with Akitsu. Not knowing how Akitsu was at hand to hand yet, Ranma flipped herself away from a last punch from Hibiki, landing in front of Hikari, her fists lashing out quicker than most humans would be able to follow. "Switch off Akitsu!"

While Hikari stumbled under the sudden assault, barely getting her hands up to defend, Akitsu complied with Ranma's order, turning her ice powers on Hibiki. Hibiki was still concentrating on Ranma however, trying to track his movements with her lightning, and never even saw the attack coming. "UGH!" One moment she was throwing a series of small lightning bolts after Ranma the next she was smashed backwards into the AC she and her sister had been hiding behind, frozen there.

"Hibiki!" Hikari shouted, turning towards her for just a second, her defense faltering.

Ranma's next blow caught her on the chin, throwing her backwards to skid across the rooftop on her rear. Hikari saw stars, shaking her head to clear it from the power of the blow. Before she could right herself, Ranma was straddling her chest, her legs on either side of Hikari's body, her fist flashing down.

Hikari closed her eyes, waiting for oblivion, only to open them a second later when the blow didn't come. Instead she felt a poke on her forehead, and looked up into the redhead's smirk. "We win."

"You're not going to end it?"

"Nope, don't feel like it, besides the idea of knocking you out of the game doesn't interest me. Though I have to say, for twins your teamwork sucks." Ranma pushed off the other girl, moving to stand by Akitsu, who continued to look at the lightning duo warily.

"Ugh, shut up," Hikari grumbled, pushing herself to her feet before going over to her sister, shattering the ice holding her in place with difficulty. "First you beat us and now you insult us too."

"We're too used to facing a single opponent at a time sister." Hikari said, shivering and leaning against her sister for warmth.

"Yeah well, not to rub it in or anything, but why exactly do you think I'm a Sekirei?" Ranma asked. "The last douchebag who thought that didn't say, and he wasn't the sort I wanted to hand around longer than the time it took to kick his ass."

"Seriously? Well besides your physical skills which just, you know, allowed you to beat us like we were inexperienced punks, something no human could do, there was a message sent out by MBI about a redhead just being released 'free for the taking'." Hibiki replied, actually holding up her fingers to make quote marks for the last three words.

"Huh, so it came from MBI itself huh, good to know, might have ta think about some way to get back at them for that. As to the rest though, I am not a Sekirei, I'm human, my skills come from sweat, blood and ten plus years of hard work." *And training with Miya, but I don't want to share that right now.* "I've been around a lot of Asia and let me tell you, there are dozens of humans out there that could fight you Sekirei like I do."

Shaking her head, Ranma was about to turn away, leaving the two twins there only stopping as she noticed that one of their attacks seemed to have ruptured a small water heater on the roof beside the one they had been fighting on. Steam was rising from a bit of water escaping from the ruptured tank, and she sighed in relief, eager to change back to his real body.

"Besides, I doubt you alien types have any members that can change their bodies with the touch of water." So saying, Ranma leaped across, and splashed herself with the water, sighing with pleasure as he returned to his male body. *My shoulders always feel stiff if I spend more than an hour in female form, stupid breasts.*

Turning back he saw Akitsu had followed him, holding their bags. The twins however were staring at him in shock. "Wh, what the hell!" they both shouted, the heretofore quite one nearly as loud as her sister. "How the hell, what just happened?!"

"Maaagiiicccc." Ranma drawled, before turning aside, facing the direction he and Akitsu had come from, going on in a

louder voice. "Sorry if I don't want to give you any more details, but this is my normal form. So all the Ashikabi out there are out of luck, I don't like dudes, and the next guy who tries to kiss me is gonna regret it."

"D-duly noted," said a male voice from that direction, a hand appearing around a sloped roof though the speaker, a young, somewhat rough sounding man, kept out of view. "Gonna have some nightmares now, no lie."

Ranma barked a laugh then shook his head. "Come on Akitsu, I've had enough of Tokyo proper for now." So saying, Akitsu and Ranma sped off over the roofs, leaving more than a few watchers wondering what the hell they had just seen.

OOOOOOO

Takami stared at the computer screen, then her eyes rolled back in her skull as she fainted dead away, her analytical mind unable to deal with Ranma's change. All around her a few of the techs were gibbering quietly to themselves or otherwise reacting very negatively to the phenomenon they had just witnessed.

Beside her however, Minaka stared at the screen, then began to laugh maniacally. "Oh what fun this will be!"

End Chapter

Above and beyond not starting this chapter before ATP28 was done and off to the beta reader, this chapter fought me the entire way. I had trouble getting into the Sekirei universe, and when I did, I just wasn't able to get most of the character interactions precisely the way I wanted to, and lost a bit of the plot I wanted in this chapter. For that reason I have removed this story as an option for the September poll (**which is up, go vote**). I won't say I am dropping this story, but I need to have a serious sit down with my Sekirei muse and the accompanying fanfic section to see if I can feed said muse before coming back to it.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4

I don't own Sekirei or Ranma. The one would have a better plot, the other a better female lead... actually those are kind of interchangeable for a given amount of both.

This work and Horse For the Force won this month's poll, and while some aspects of the Horse chapter is giving me issues, I thought to put this out now rather than wait to put both out at once.

This chapter brings back the ecchi, so you're hereby warned.

This chapter is dedicated to Anime Adventure. Alas I knew you well, but did not think to save anything from your bounty. DAMN IT.

Game Changer 4 Pissing People Off is An Art

As they were hopping home, Ranma frowned thinking hard about how to get back at MBI. *I don't care that it's a big company, I don't care about why they thought I was a Sekirei, sending guys on me out kiss me like that, it's gotta be paid for. And my old man has trained me a lot of stealth techniques over the years... I wonder why he's always hinting that there was one more technique he would never teach me?*

Shrugging that thought off before he could go down that all-too-familiar tangent Ranma paused for a moment, staring down at a hardware store. Then he began to smirk evilly but he continued on his way before Akitsu could question him about it. They were soon at the Tendo dojo, hopping over the outer wall as Ranma shouted, "We're back."

Kasumi came out onto the patio smiling at them both. "Welcome back, and I see you managed to pick up the groceries this time," she gently teased. "I'm grateful, as I said earlier, feeding the two of you and your father Ranma will take far more food than I keep on hand."

"Yeah, I know. If it were up to me we'd move in with Miya but I don't think my old man would go for that for many reasons."

Not least of which is the fact that he's rightly scared of her, and he really does seem hung up on this whole uniting the school thing, Ranma thought. Still, I have to say that it seems to have done Soun at least a world of good. And who knows, maybe eventually Soun will be able to remember how to do some of the techniques from his branch of the school and I'll learn something.

Genma chose that moment to come out as well, and he frowned at his son. "You've been in a fight," he stated taking in Ranma's slightly ruffled appearance. His eyes flicked over to Akitsu. "Her too."

"I told you there're a lot of weird martial artists around here, Oyaji, oh, I was able to find out a bit more of the story about Akitsu and them too. I'd like Nabiki's take on it though, she seems the most analytically minded of us all. Is she here?"

"I'm afraid not, she went over to a friend's house to help her study for something. Despite her extracurricular activities, Nabiki is still in the high 99th percentile at Furinkan" Kasumi said with a certain amount of pride.

"Gotcha," Ranma nodded. "And to answer your question Oyaji we ran into a few other Sekirei, these two chicks who used lightning attacks of all things. It's pretty obvious that the Sekirei are able to use element attacks far more easily than they've got any right to. I'm beginning to think that they're the equivalent of blood-based family technique."

Genma grunted irritably, then shook his head. "If that's true, then it's true. But we won't learn anything until we can figure out what we're actually seeing in their ki when they make those element attacks boy."

Ranma nodded agreement that, then patted his rumbling stomach. "I don't suppose we're in time for dinner?"

"You're just in time in fact, why don't you both get washed up, and I'll finish putting out the food?" Kasumi laughed. "Honestly, bottomless pits the three of you."

Inside Akane, who for some reason was dressed in her gi, looked up as Ranma and Akitsu sat down frowning at them both but shaking it off after a moment. She wasn't used to other people being around the house, and she couldn't say she liked Ranma all that much. But she didn't want to jump to conclusions again like she had that morning, despite

her instincts screaming that all boys had to be perverts. Instead she asked, "After dinner would you be up for a match Ranma?"

Pausing in the motion of sitting down Ranma cocked his head frowning. "Why? I thought we already had a match."

"Yeah but maybe this time you won't just hop around! Maybe you'll take me seriously!" Akane replied sharply.

Ranma's eyes narrowed at her tone, but he answered readily. "That's my martial arts style, move all the time, take to the air as often as possible, don't ever take a hit unless you really have to. And let's face it Akane, you're nowhere near my level." Akane's teeth ground noticeably at that, and he shook his head. "You can't just hop to the top you know, you have to work for it."

He suddenly smiled, touching Akitsu her shoulder, blushing lightly when she leaned into the touch. "Why don't you and Akitsu have a match instead? Just hand-to-hand, no special powers."

Akitsu turned to him, cocking her head to one side as Akane smirked, nodding her head in agreement. If the witch couldn't use her powers, then she was just a normal girl and Akane was the strongest girl in Nerima after all.

"Just because you are distance fighter doesn't mean you shouldn't trained in hand-to-hand Akitsu," Ranma said sternly at Akitsu's look. "What if someone closes the range on you, or is too fast for you to hit with your ice attacks? Unless you're telling you can tell you can actually freeze other people solid quickly it's still a danger."

That made too much sense, and Akitsu simply nodded. "Will you teach me Ranma-sama?" she said after a moment.

Smiling as he realized that Akitsu actually hadn't hesitated before speaking Ranma nodded. "Yep, both of us can train over at Miya's place. But training with Akane now will give me an idea of where you are and what you need to improve. Speaking of which Pops, remember what I said Miya wants to see you. We didn't have a match today, but she says she can tell that I've improved, and wants to talk about your training."

Again this faint praise did the trick, and he watched as Genma noticeably puffed up for a moment before nodding. "I already said I'd agree to meet her boy, leave off." He frowned then. "But I was serious too, Soun and I do need to go on a training trip, his counsel duties take up too much of his time, and has made him too soft." He then flicked his eyes over to Akane almost dismissively but not quite. "Once Soun gets back in shape girl, then we'll see to yours. But I like the idea of you two training together, it could be interesting."

"Indeed Akane," her father said speaking out for the first time and putting down some paperwork he had been looking over. "One should always take the opportunity to train against more opponents. I've heard of your training sessions at school with that Kuno boy and with the various martial arts clubs, but group tactics can only take you so far, and training against weak opponents won't make you any stronger. Sometimes losing is the best teacher."

And the sententious father up of the year award goes to... Ranma thought sardonically, exchanging a glance with Kasumi who smiled, rolling her eyes lightly when she saw his smirk. Normally Kasumi wouldn't share so much of her inner thoughts, but Ranma and Akitsu had wormed their way under her normal armor of airiness.

Almost as soon as the meal began Ranma and Genma both shouted "Match On!" Their chopsticks flashed smacking into one another in midair over the food, both the chopsticks and the hands that held them moving faster than most at the table could see. The noise of their meeting however, the sharp clacks and smacks were easily discernable.

Akane was the first to come out of her shock. "What the heck are you doing?"

"Speed training, everything can be turned into training girl, and we've been slacking since we arrived here!" Genma grunted, then grunted again as Ranma smacked his chopstick up high enough for his own to swoop down and grab a bit of rice. "Oh no you don't boy!"

When Kasumi spoke her voice was far more like Nabiki's Ice Queen tone than her father or youngest sister had ever heard from her. "I do not think the table is the proper place for speed training. It is most disrespectful to the food and to the one who prepared it to eat it so quickly after all, irrespective of the noise and disruption to the rest of us. If you wish to continue to use it as such please tell me, and I will stop setting out food for you at the table and instead make up two meals more fit for animals than people."

The chopsticks stopped in midair, and both combatants turned to her, their eyes wide and horrified. Ranma was the first to stop pulling back and eating slowly from his own rice bowl for a second, before bowing his head in apology to Kasumi. Genma seemed about to take advantage of this weakness, but caught Kasumi's glare and decided a life of bamboo loomed in his future if he didn't desist. With a Harumph he did so, grumbling occasionally even so.

Seeing this, Kasumi's glare disappeared, and she smiled sunnily at Ranma. "Now, Ranma, why don't you tell me about the best meal you had while abroad."

The rest of the dinner was dominated by a discussion between Ranma and Kasumi. Kasumi was interested in the different foods that Ranma and Genma had tried on their training journey, as well as delicately asking Ranma and Genma if they were willing to get jobs to help around the house.

Genma actually surprised Ranma by agreeing to get a part-time job, and had even lined one up already at the local doctor's office, mostly as a delivery person and general help around good office. "What he really needs is someone to bring in computers and some kind of system to organize his files." Genma said, which caused Ranma to laugh. "Mock all you want boy, and I'll be the first to admit I don't know the first thing about computers, but they are important for organizing names, and um, and stuff like that. He has books and books of files that all could be put on computers."

Ranma nodded at that, though he was still smirking at Genma who turned away with a harrumph sound, and Ranma turned to Kasumi. "I've already talked to Nabiki about getting a job, and she says she might be able line some small time stuff up for me, but we need to talk about that too. With whatever is going on with the Sekirei and MBI I don't want to get a full-time job but I can at least bring in some cash for the house."

From there the conversation segued into Nerima and what was going on there, with Soun actually leading the discussion for the most part. As a Nerima council member he knew more about the district than even Kasumi, who was rather a homebody, though not by preference, something none of her family seemed to realize. Hearing stories about Ranma and Genma's travels however seemed to put a smile on her face.

After dinner Ranma helped Kasumi cleanup, while Akane, Akitsu and the two fathers trooped into the dojo.

Genma stood in the center of the dojo, one hand raised. He looked at both girls, who nodded, though Akitsu noticeably waited until Akane did the same, seemingly not understanding how to signal that she was ready. Nonetheless she did so, and he stepped back smartly. "Start!"

Akane was the first to make a move, charging forward, her hands held in close to her upper body before thrusting out of punch but and then segueing into a triple combo to kicks with one punch. Watching this Genma frowned noting that the girls balance was horrible. *But at least she knows how to throw a punch accurately.*

Across from her Akitsu waited until Akane had thrown the first punch then smacked it to one side, returning her own punch but nearly getting her head taken off by Akane's follow-on kick, seemingly not having seen it coming. For her part however Akane was nearly spun around by the block to her arm, but came back with a stronger punch to the face that Akitsu barely ducked.

Frowning Akitsu jumped away, landing 20 feet away from Akane as she frowned. *I have to fight my instincts here, this is supposed to be a hand-to-hand match, I cannot use my ice. What would my Ashikabi do? Analyze my opponent, look for weaknesses,* she decided after a moment spent jumping away from Akane every time the blue haired girl closed on her.

For her part Akane was getting angrier and angrier. Why would these people not stand still! "Stop running away!" she shouted, thrusting forward with another straight punch.

"...Why? I do not want to get hit." Akitsu asked after a second of silent thought. Her voice was her normal one, making what she said a simple question rather than a sarcastic comment.

Nonetheless, it served to fuel Akane's anger, and she charged forward once more. "Stop making fun of me and fight!"

"...I am not making fun of you, I simply do not want to get hit." Akitsu said, again after taking a moment to think her way through what to say. Away from Ranma her normal hesitant manner of speech seemed to come back, but not as strong as it had been. Her hands came up quickly, smacking Akane's thrusting arm aside again, her leg coming up in a straight kick which drove into Akane with all the power of a pile driver.

She had telegraphed the move so much that Akane was able to get one hand down between her body and the blow, catching her foot and moving backwards with the blow. Her free hand grabbed onto Akitsu's leg, flipping the other girl away to land awkwardly on the ground. Akitsu however rolled with it, so when Akane charged forward, she met a hard palm thrust to the chest, which she didn't see coming. It knocked her breath out and would leave a bruise, but it wasn't enough to stop her charge.

She returned a punch to the shoulder that threw Akitsu back, but had to roll away from another kick. The Sekirei of

Ice frowned, moving her shoulders slightly as Akane backed away for a second, circling to Akitsu's left. *She is strong, not as strong as a hand-to-hand Sekirei would be I think, but still stronger than most humans. Stronger than me I have to say,* Akitsu set frowned at that thought. *My Ashikabi-sama is right, I need to train in this.*

By the time that thought finished percolating through Akitsu's mind Akane charged again. This time Akitsu moved to meet her, but she was still telegraphing her moves too much, and eventually the exchange ended, with Akane bringing up a knee into Akitsu's side before twisting away from a return blow grabbing the taller girl's arm and hurling her over her shoulder to slam back first into the ground.

Akitsu quickly raised her free hand to block the punch coming towards her head, but Genma shouted, "That's enough! Akane wins."

As Akane slowly backed away from her downed opponent, Genma shook his head. "My son was correct, you rely on your powers too much Akitsu, you're very fast which is good, and you've got decent enough strength and instincts. I suppose we can work with those."

He looked over to Soun, one eyebrow raised and Soun sighed softly. "Akane," the mustachioed man said formally. "Your strength is very good, but your form needs a **lot** of work. We'll start working on that immediately tomorrow, even as I am we can still work on that, though it will be painful..." He nearly sniffled for a moment, but flinched as his friend made to punch him in the arm and went on quickly. "Your anger however, **that** needs a lot of work. You can't allow your opponent's attitude or words to rattle you as you did. We'll start working on that eventually as well, but your stance and your balance will be the first things."

Surprisingly his daughter didn't take this criticism as badly as he had feared. She simply nodded, smiling brightly and stretching for a moment. "That's great daddy, but I think I'm going to go get a bath now." She sent Akitsu a smirk then left quickly, secure in the knowledge that she was still the strongest girl in Nerima. *Well natural girl anyway,* she thought as she exited, her thoughts souring slightly as Ranma passed her by.

Ranma spent a few moments talking to Akitsu and Genma and Soun about the match, then the two so-called adults left to play a game of shogi and Ranma looked at Akitsu. "Why don't you go get a bath Akitsu, you look like that match made you work up a sweat."

"Will you be bathing as well Ranma-sama?" she asked.

Ranma blushed again. "What've I told you about that Akitsu? We haven't known each other long enough to, to bathe together like that." Akitsu frowned, but Ranma went on quickly. "Besides, I have a little errand I want to do."

"I will come with you then," she said promptly, moving to his side and looking at him expectantly.

But Ranma again shook her head his head. "Sorry Akitsu, not this time. You can sneak up on me for some reason, but you're not actually good at stealth normally, and this is a stealthy job." Ranma chuckled evilly, rubbing his hands together. "Sick a bunch of hormonal pervs on me will you? We'll see about that."

Akitsu sighed but nodded, and Ranma patted her head. "I'll see ya when I get back, okay? Unless you're asleep, if you're tired go to sleep." He said after a seconds thought remembering how devoted Akitsu was to him. *She really needed more positive reinforcement.* He watched as Akitsu leaned into his hand for a moment, her manner drooping lightly when he took his hand away.

After another few moments chivvying Akitsu to the bath Ranma left quickly. Stopping in at the paint store he bought several dozen cans worth of various colored paints, which he balanced easily in his arms as he took to the rooftops again. He was close to Tokyo proper, the central area of the city, when he spotted Uzume sitting on a rooftop nearby. Seeing her body language even from here he paused, then moved in that direction. He crouched down next to her, poking her shoulder. "Hey Uzume."

The brunette nearly shrieked in surprise almost falling off the roof, and Ranma had to actually drop some of the paint cans for a moment to grab the back of her shirt and hold her steady before she could regain her balance. "Dammit Ranma! Don't sneak up on a girl like that!"

"I didn't sneak up on you, I just walked up to you or hopped up to you in this case." Ranma laughed, before sending a frown the brunette's way. "Something wrong? Did some asshole come after you after we left the mall?"

"Nothing like that Ranma, it's nothing, nothing you can help me with anyway." said Uzume, frowning and looking away. Doing so Uzume caught sight of the paint and cocked her head quizzically. "If those are for Izumo House I

have to tell you that Miya really won't like those colors together. Red and purple? No chance."

"Oh they ain't for that," Ranma laughed, an evil sort of chuckle that made Uzume's eyebrows rise and a smirk appear on her face. "You remember those morons they were trying to kiss me or whatever at the mall? Well apparently MBI sent out a message saying that I was a Sekirei. Now that's just not right y'know, so I figure I need to pay them back somehow."

Uzume looked from him to the paint and back again, her smile widening as she did. "Can I help?"

"I don't know, how good's your stealth?"

OOOOOO

Miya looked up from where she was sitting on her patio drinking tea and staring up at the sky as Uzume and Ranma appeared over the top of the outer wall. Not having expected Ranma back tonight, Miya frowned lightly and stood up slowly.

As soon as they touched down Uzume broke out into loud laughter, her entire body shaking as she fell to her knees pounding the ground. "Damn bro!" She shouted between laughs, "Just damn! It's a little childish, but Jesus is it funny! B-but how the hell did we get away with it!"

Ranma shrugged. "It's late, and you'd be surprised how few people actually look out their windows even during the day. And even less people look up. Once we were on the side of the building, it was pretty easy. Though I have to say thanks, I don't think I'd've been able to complete the entire design as quickly as we did without your help."

"No problem, bro." Uzume said, pulling him into a firm one-armed hug which Ranma returned with a laugh. "Seriously, if you ever want to do something like that again look me up, I haven't had this much fun in months!"

Miya blinked sitting back down abruptly, simply staring at them. *Good grief there's two of them and they're bad influences on one another.* "Do one of you want to fill me in on what you did?" she asked, not certain she wanted to know but feeling compelled to ask.

When told she simply blinked, then shook her head. "I, I honestly don't...What I should do is probably smack you with my ladle for being perverted, but on the other hand it is rather appropriate." She narrowed her eyes at them both, pointing an accusing finger at one and the other. "You two are bad influences on one another, and you're both bad influences on me!"

Ranma and Uzume looked at one another, then through their arms around one another again and leaned forward, both of them going into their version of the puppy dog eye attack. "But Miya-nee!"

Miya took one look at them and shuddered, turning away quickly. "Enough with the cuteness!" She sighed, shaking her head. "It's getting late Ranma, you should return to the Tendo Dojo."

Ranma sighed but nodded, squeezing Uzume around the shoulders once more before turning and with the final thanks to her and a promise to return tomorrow after school to Miya hopped away. Uzume looked after him still grinning, before turning to Miya. Sitting down next to her, Uzume leaned her head against the older woman's shoulder for a brief moment. "Damn, he is a lot of fun!"

Miya chuckled, pushing the girl away playfully. "Bad influences the both of you."

"Too right! Life's too short to be all gloom and doom."

"And with the two of you around it never will be." Miya said, trying to sound as if she was sad about that and failing miserably.

OOOOOO

The next day Takami got up, having slept through the night after having fallen comatose from watching Ranma's curse activate and she got up determined to just have a few hours of normality before tackling that issue. *But... her treacherous mind began, where does the mass go, how does it convert, is it a full change, is he fully functional in both forms?*

"Enough!" she shouted to her empty bedroom. "Enough. I will have a few hours of normality brain! Besides," she said as she splashed her face with some water, "we have a dozen adjustments to get started, and two more Sekirei to

release tonight. One of those adjustments I need to do personally, no way am I letting anyone else adjust Ku-chan!"

Takami nearly growled at the thought of the youngest Sekirei, angry Minaka hadn't listened to her diatribe about letting her out to join the game. "All the wings must be released Takami-chan, that's the whole point of the Game' my ass!" It took a moment for Takami to control herself, but she went on much more calmly. "She needs to retain a lot more of her strength than the older Sekirei's do. Or else she'll just be a victim."

Walking through the office corridors a moment later Takami frowned as she saw people rushing towards the elevator or the stairs. Grabbing one of them she asked, "What's going on, some emergency drill or something?"

"Nothing like that Ms." said the man, an accountant she thought, not recognizing the man but his lurid purple tag marked him out as one of that particularly irritating group of Minaka's flunkies. "But there's something going on outside, something's wrong with the building. Nothing dangerous, just some kind of graffiti or something. No one's saying what, but there's a lot of well laughing and exclamations going on I suppose and everyone's leaving to check it out."

Takami frowned, but followed the man outside, pushing her way through using elbows and clipboard to smack people aside. By the time she was outside a lot of the other people were as well, including all three members of the Disciplinary Squad and even their Ashikabi.

That part wasn't official yet, he'd only actually kissed Benitsubasa so far, but the others were reacting to Natsuo if only slightly just at the moment. That would change over the next few days as he interacted with them of course.

She wasn't surprised that whatever was making most of the crowd laugh was making Haihane break down entirely. She always tended to overreact to things she found funny, and she had a very odd sense of humor. The fact that Karasuba was also chuckling however was a bit of a surprise.

Finally was able to see the side of the building itself, and immediately she gaped in shock.

The first thing to hit her was the words. 'Minaka is an overcompensating prick'. Then the actual image began to percolate, someone had drawn a giant, if extremely crude, prick around the words taking up more than half the tower.

For a moment she was simply stunned, and the first thing that came out of her mouth wasn't a comment on what she was seeing, but the message itself. "Well, that is kind of true after all."

For a moment the people around her hadn't actually heard, except for Karasuba who turned to her with a smirk and a knowledgeable nod then the others turned, as if they couldn't believe that had left Takami's mouth. Realizing what she actually said Takami glared all around her and pointed dramatically hoping to take their attention off what she'd just said. "How did this happen!?" It might have been a very common rumor that she and Minaka had been involved years, but that was a different thing entirely from actually acknowledging it. "Where are the night security guards!?"

"None of them saw anything," Karasuba said with another chuckle. "Of course, they're supposed to guard the entrance and the interior of the building, not watch the exterior walls. And after all, this wasn't exactly a threat was it? It was evidently a message, and as you pointed out, it is true."

"Why aren't you taking this seriously!?! If someone could do this, couldn't they like plant a bomb or something?" shouted Benitsubasa.

She wilted noticeably as Karasuba turned to her, her eyes once again narrowed to their normal slits. "Be quiet, your jabbering irritates me."

One other person was of course aware of what had happened by this point. Minaka stared thoughtfully out over his city, then down at his defamed tower. "Somehow, I just know that that little redhead is behind this. Someone needs to learn who the real game master is it seems." Despite his mannerisms Minaka was not a man to allow others to make fun of him like this. "But how to go about it?"

OOOOOO

"Wake up boy, I said wake up!"

His father's voice percolated slowly into Ranma's mind while at the same time he felt something against his side as he stirred. "What's up old man, you'd normally just toss me out the window or throw somethin' at me."

Wiping at his eyes Ranma looked down and was not really surprised to find Akitsu had snuck in during the night,

curling up against his side. She wasn't holding onto him as tightly as the evening before, but that was because he was holding on to her, a fact that almost made him jolt out of the bed, his other hand flying up quickly from where it had been around her side. But Akitsu's hold on his other arm held him still. "Still sleepy," she muttered, nuzzling into his shoulder.

"Um, but I still have to wake up Akitsu. You can keep sleeping if you want but I have school remember?" Ranma said quietly, trying to extricate himself.

Standing at the foot of the bed Genma shook his head. "If she's going to keep doing this, we will have to start training after dinner rather than before breakfast. I refuse to cut back on your training boy."

"Not a problem Oyaji," Ranma said, smirking slightly as he extricated himself from the waking Akitsu. "And Akitsu, what did I say about sneaking in here?"

"You are my Ashikabi-sama," she said stubbornly, her mouth twitching slightly into her version of a scowl. "And I sleep better with you."

Ranma scowled at that shaking his head. "Uggh, again with the Ashikabi and -sama stuff Akitsu?" He stared at her, taking in her stubborn appearance, the fact that she still had a hold of his hand and sighed. "All right, if Kasumi says you can sleep in here with me, you can, but realize that's all we'll be doing okay? Just sleeping." *Hah, and if I read her right no way Kasumi'll say anything of the sort!*

The stubborn feeling around her faded quickly and Akitsu nodded, her face once again almost but not quite unemotional, a faint uptick of her lips signifying her smile. Ranma rolled his eyes. "Come on if you're up now let's go downstairs."

As the two of them followed Genma down, they heard a voice behind them. "Coooooofffffeeeeeee."

Ranma turned, and saw Nabiki at the top of the stairs stumbling down. Her eyes were closed, her hair frazzled, and her loose shirt was nearly falling off much to his blushing embarrassment. She looked as if she had just rolled out of bed, and needed about six or seven more hours of sleep to become fully human.

A second later Nabiki bumped into him as he stood there, muttering 'coffee' under her breath, seemingly on complete autopilot. "Heh, Akitsu, could you help Nabiki down the stairs? I'll go get her some coffee she looks as if she's going to hurt herself if she keeps on moving like that."

Akitsu nodded, quickly putting an arm between the two of them and pulling Nabiki to her. There was a little flash of jealousy for a moment in her eyes but it was gone before Ranma could notice it.

Entering the kitchen, Ranma looked around. "Hey Kasumi, do you have any coffee?"

Kasumi looked up from where she was cooking, nodding her head over to the pot. "It's over there. I normally have a cup already out and waiting for Nabiki on the small table in the upper hall between her room and Akane's, but with the three of you here it's taking me a little bit to get used to how much time it takes to cook."

"In that case, Akitsu can sleep in your room and you can get her up to help, that'll kill two birds with one stone," Ranma said with a grin, explaining how the woman in question had snuck into his bed again. "She keeps on trying to sleep in our room, but that's just not right, especially seeing as she tries to kick off her clothing doing it. My old man might die of blood loss if she actually succeeds one night."

"True, and I'd like the company in the evening it must be said," Kasumi mused, putting another checkmark next to Ranma's name. *He might be too young for my tastes, but he is a gentleman, if lacking in manners and prospects. He and Akane would get along like oil and water, but Nabiki might actually be a better match for him, if, that is Akitsu doesn't wrap him around her little finger first.*

Taking the coffee mug, Ranma joined Akitsu and Nabiki at the bottom of the stairs, the girl having stumbled several times with only Akitsu saving her from a fall. Waving the coffee mug under Nabiki nose he watched as life began to flicker in her face. Then her hand moved faster than even Ranma could see, and was suddenly holding the coffee mug, drinking it in long gulps, seemingly not even feeling the heat of it. "Wow Nabiki, you really need caffeine in the mornings don't you?"

Slowly Nabiki's eyes opened, and she frowned at Ranma for a moment then down at the cup. Her smile widened into a soft expression, the first such Ranma had seen on her face and it actually made her quite pretty if he was honest. "You know Ranma I might just have to keep you."

"I'll take that as a compliment Nabs," he said dryly.

"Don't call me that." Nabiki growled, smacking his chest with her free arm even as she gleefully sipped more coffee.

"Whatever." Ranma laughed, moving over to the dining table.

Nabiki smirked at his back, her eyes trailing down to his rear and back up again approvingly, before she looked over at Akitsu nudging her in the side. "Lucky girl." Akitsu looked at her blankly for a moment, but if someone looked closely there was a faint blush on her cheeks as she nodded noticeably before following Nabiki to the table.

After letting Nabiki drink some more coffee, Ranma told them all about what he'd learned the day before. He didn't say that he had talked directly to Miya, but that one of her tenants was a Sekirei. All of it confirmed what we had already been told, though Nabiki had to bit her tongue to keep from cursing when she heard that Akitsu had not gotten one of the special black cards that MBI was handing out to the Sekirei for their upkeep. "On the other hand, it's probably not so much for their upkeep but as a way to track them anyway."

"I don't like the idea that girls like Akitsu have been indoctrinated to follow the orders of their 'Ashikabi' like that." said Kasumi mildly. But her eyes were dark and there was a frown on her face, a deeper frown than any of her family had ever seen there before.

"I know," Ranma said with a nod. "I just hope that MBI has put some protection in place, some way to stop people from abusing their Sekirei. I don't honestly know if that could be enough though, not with the idea that numbers matter in this game anyway."

Shaking her head, Akane almost let out a chuckle. "I just hope Kuno and the other boys at school don't learn about this, they'd stop coming to school and start trying to hunt up Sekirei." Then she paused. "On the other hand, that would make my life a lot easier."

"Harsh little sister, but true" Nabiki shook her head before looking at Ranma. "On a simpler topic, you know Kuno's s going to be coming back today right?"

"After the beating I gave him?" Ranma whistled. "That guy's that durable?"

"Never underestimate the durability of perverts," Akane muttered getting up from the table. "I'm done thanks Kasumi."

"While that was a bit of an oversimplification, my little sister is accurate. Kuno can take a beating and keep on ticking. Or at least come back for more soon enough. So he'll come back, and you said you'd be willing to help me make a little money?" Ranma nodded, and Nabiki smirk. "Don't worry like I said it won't be anything bad. Here's the idea for this morning..."

OOOOOO

After once again having to convince Akitsu that she couldn't follow him school, Ranma and Akane once again left together, Nabiki having left earlier to put her plan in motion. When told of the plan Akane wasn't happy, but reminded herself that her father had already pointed out that sparring with the people from school wasn't really helping her get any better. And despite her victory over Akitsu, it was pretty obvious to Akane that she had to get it better to challenge Ranma.

When they reached the front gates of the school they found Tatewaki Kuno there, at the head of what Akane called the Pervert Brigade, all of the disparate clubs arrayed behind him like companies in an army. "So," he shouted pointing his wooden sword at Ranma, "the vile sorcerer returns! I will have my vengeance for your slanderous perfidious assault on myself."

"Slanderous, perfidious?" Ranma asked looking over at Akane.

"Don't bother he's not using those words right anyway." Akane replied, waving her hand in front of her face.

"My beauteous tigress, if thou wilt just wait a moment, I wilt date with thee anon! But first I might slay this miscreant. I attack!"

Ranma dodged Kuno's assault, slamming his hand against the back of Kuno's bokken, shoving it into the wall of the school directly behind him before leaping over him to land in front of the arrayed clubs waiting for him who charged him with a roar. *Looks like Nabiki was right, though I still don't get why they're all attacking me.*

Flipping himself up and over a charging sumo wrestler, Ranma kicked out, taking out two tennis players, before grabbing the bokken out of one of the users' hands, using it to smash several of the rest aside with a wide angle blast of pressurized air. "So what all's your beef with me?"

"We all know you are living with Akane!" shouted more than one voice, "we won't allow that!"

"We won't allow you and her to get together like in those old-school dramas!"

"Never, she's mine, I mean ours!"

"Down with the pretty boy!"

"Feel like I'm missing something here," Ranma muttered, slamming one fist into the back of one attacker's head so hard he cartwheeled forward into three more. "But whatever. You all want to fight, I'm cool with that."

By this point Kuno had pulled his sword out of the wall, and was attacking again, doing more damage to his erstwhile allies than to Ranma. For his part Ranma was simply having fun. He hadn't faced this many opponents in a while and while none of them or really all of them combined, were any threat, it was still fun to see if he could get through the entire fight without actually being hit, grabbed, or tripped.

He was doing alright until he suddenly felt the air began to freeze around him and he groaned, leaping out over an attack from Kuno, his leg lashing out to kick the man right in the face staggering him backwards several steps. At the same time, large spheres of ice about the size of small boulders slammed into the crowd, hurling people aside smashing into the earth, or simply smacking into people immediately freezing them in place. More than half of the crowd's weapons shattered, frozen solid, including Kuno's bokken.

A second later Akitsu landed in front of Ranma, her loose silk kimono, one of the things Miya had bought her that she had really liked yesterday, fluttering lightly around her legs as she glared at all of them. "You will not harm my Ashikabi." she said, her voice iron hard.

Ranma groaned, looking over to Nabiki who shrugged her shoulders as if to say she didn't see that one coming, before turning away and began to give orders to her subordinates to repay the people who had already bet on this morning's match: Called for account of outside interference. "The sentiments appreciated Akitsu, but I wasn't in any real danger. None of these idiots have any skill enough to..."

He was interrupted by Kuno who had somehow pulled out another wooden sword. "Who is this vision I see before me, a most beautiful Yuki-onna come amongst us! But forsooth her beauty is such that I will find it within myself to welcome her posthaste, Wait oh beautiful one, I will date thee!"

With that he charged, and Akitsu actually showed a lot of emotion for the first time. That emotion was majorly freaked out. She jumped away, her eyes wide and staring and her hands moving forward quickly, conjuring an ice wall between the two of them.

The madman smashed into it, at the same time Ranma pummeled him in the back of the head with a hard kick. "Hands off!" he growled, before grabbing Kuno and hurling him towards the school.

"The rest of you lot listen up!" Ranma shouted turning to the rest of the pervert brigade. "You can try again tomorrow if you want, I promise Akitsu won't interfere. But get it straight guys you're all barking up the wrong tree. A," he said holding up one finger, "I have no designs whatsoever on Akane! She's not my type... if I have a type I don't know really, I just know what I don't like."

He looked over to see Akane sizzling slightly at his choice of words, and went on quickly. "And B, if you want to date a girl, shouldn't you know try just asking her out? With flowers or something rather than try to beat her into the ground with numbers?"

With that Ranma shook his head, moving over to Akitsu placing a gentle arm around her shoulders seeing she was still looking a little freaked out. "Akitsu," he said softly, "I thought I ask you to stay at the Tendo place."

Akitsu nodded, lifting up a small box in a cloth napkin. "You forgot your lunch Ranma-sama." Akitsu he said softly, shuddering and looking away from Kuno and nuzzling into his shoulder smiling slightly but happily when Ranma didn't move away.

"Well in the future, leave it at home okay? I think you just got a little more trouble for yourself right now..."

OOOOOO

Later that day Kuno would prove Ranma a prophet. Standing in front of Nabiki's desk he slammed down a heavy wad of bills. "The beautiful Yuki-onna mercenary one, tell me whatever you can about her! What foul spell has Saotome used to enchant her so!"

Nabiki looked down at pile of cash, her fingers twitching for a moment before she pushed it away. No, no amount of money that Kuno at least could get her hands on was worth getting on the bad side of Ranma and Akitsu. "She's staying with us on request of MBI, and I have no idea why, only that she and Ranma are friendly. You know them? The company that now owns and has renamed this city? I'm not going to question their actions, and if you any sense you won't either."

"I have heard of this new age company," Kuno said disdainfully. "But they do not own the entire city Nabiki Tendo, just all the unimportant parts." In other words the parts beyond Nerima, which Kuno viewed as sort of his own personal fiefdom with Furinkan his castle. "Very well, I will have my servants look into it. If it is but some monetary transaction, it will be easy enough to make them see reason. And if not, then I will go to MBI myself, and lay out my case before them. Surely any with the meanest intelligence will be able to see that the Ice maiden should be with someone as handsome, intelligent and rich as myself rather than that vile sorcerer."

"What about my sister Kuno?" Nabiki asked snidely. "You're going to throw her over for Akitsu? She'll be so distraught."

For a moment Kuno seemed to stare into the distance before he shouted, "I must have them both!" Causing Nabiki to nearly fall out of her chair.

"Kuno take your delusions outside!" shouted the teacher.

OOOOOO

The rest of the day passed relatively uneventfully. Kuno attacked him again of course, shouting about how he would free Akane and the Ice Maiden from the vile sorcerer's grasp. But alone Kuno had no chance against Ranma, and frankly Ranma wasn't in the mood for him any longer. The moron wasn't taking the time to train between challenges, wasn't using any new attacks, and wasn't even learning from his losses. In other words he was an irritant, not a challenge.

So Ranma simply ended it quickly with a series of kicks to his chest that sent Kuno up and over the school building then went back to talking to Nabiki, agreeing to a few of her ideas for how to use his skills to make money. Martial arts construction was no new thing to him and Nabiki was even able to talk him into taking pictures of both his bodies, which she assured him would sell like hot cakes whatever price she put on them. "I don't know if you know Ranma, but you've already gotten a following, and this morning's little speech about the proper way to date girls will have gotten you even more."

"Great just what I need fan girls," Ranma grouched then nudged his shoulder against Nabiki's playfully. "Should I be worried that you're trying to sell pictures of your possible fiancé? Seem's to set a bad precedent."

Nabiki shook her head, smirking as she noticed a few of the nearby students looking at them in shock. Ranma was a lot friendlier to her than most people were around here, she did after all have a certain reputation. But Ranma didn't seem to care, and she to her surprise found herself enjoying it. *The fact that he's damn attractive is also a major plus, though the curse form is still weirding me out a bit.* "I thought you said we have two years Ranma, and if clever people like us can't think of a way to convince our parents it's a bad idea in that time, we don't deserve to. Besides, don't you already have Akitsu?"

Ranma blushed, looking away. "I, er I guess, it's just I'm still a little leery about this whole Ashikabi/Sekirei thing, I mean she's cute, um **really** cute and all, and I do like her put it just is kind of sudden you know."

"No I don't know, but I can at least understand," Nabiki said dryly. "It's like being suddenly told that you might have to marry someone that you're going to meet for the first time in a few hours."

"Riiight, remember I didn't know about that so you can't blame me for it." Ranma chuckled quietly. "So when do you want ta do to the pictures?"

"How about this weekend? We can take them over at this Miya's place, that way my little sister won't bother us with her anti-perversion rants, and I'll get to see this woman that impressed you so much. And I bet her presence will

make you more comfortable about the entire thing that's three birds with one stone."

"Deal," Ranma said with a nod. "We might even get Uzume to join in. Trust me, she makes my female form look like a little girl, the pervs around here will love it."

OOOOOO

"Achoo!" Uzume sneezed loudly. "Ugh, am I getting a cold?"

Across from her Kagari gagged, grabbing up a napkin and wiping his face as Miya chuckled behind one raised hand. "You know there is a Japanese saying that if you sneeze someone's talking about you?"

"Heh, with this bod I'd be sneezing all the time if that were true Miya!" Uzume laughed, waving her off.

OOOOOO

After school ended, with yet another attack on Ranma by Kuno as he was trying to leave the school, Ranma met up with Akitsu at home and the two of them headed over to Miya. He wanted to talk to her again, more about Akitsu and her weird docile nature than anything else, hoping that Miya had some ideas on how to break her out of it.

That thought however left his head as he hopped over the outer wall up to find Miya already standing in her garden. Her eyes were closed and as he watched her sword sheath whipped out in a move that made lightning seem slow intersecting a few dozen falling leaves. Instead of simply smacking into the leaves, the sheath, which didn't have any sort of edge, bisected each leaf right down the middle.

After the last bits of leaf fell Miya opened her eyes looking at Ranma, smiling lightly. "Hello Ranma, would you like a match? I have been looking forward to see how your training has progressed."

"Akitsu why don't you go inside for a moment?" Ranma said cracking his knuckles. "Miya and I are going to be a bit busy for a while." Without waiting for Akitsu to nod in response he charged forward, fists a blur as he took to the air lashing out with kick as he moved to one side.

Akitsu walked around the two combatants, moving to sit down on the patio, but was stopped by a hand landing on her shoulder. "Come on girl, they're going to be busy for a bit. Besides, I think I have some things you might be interested in trying on." Uzume said, smirking. Akitsu cocked her head quizzically, and Uzume leaned in whispering, "I bet your bro will love them on you."

That sold Akitsu, and she obediently followed the brunette inside.

Ranma pushed aside one slash barely dodging a cut that would've taken his arm off a second later returning fire with a kick that Miya seemed to simply glide around, her free hand coming up to lately smack the interior of his leg to the side, lifting him around. It had looked like a light smack but with Miya's pure strength any kind of touch was a powerful one.

Miya replied by nearly elbowing him in the side. But Ranma used the momentum from that to flip himself backwards towards a tree, spring-boarding off it and over Miya's head to try and take her from behind. Miya turned quickly, her sword coming up in a swift slash that would've bisected Ranma if he had landed where he had intended.

But with the skill Genma had drilled into him as a practitioner of the Aerial style of Anything Goes Ranma change direction in midair. His fist lashed out nearly touching Miya's hair for a moment as she dodged to the side.

His hand was still outstretched for just a millisecond too long and Miya grabbed it, twirling for a second to hurl him aside. "I think that is enough hand-to-hand from you," Miya said tartly.

"You said you had kept up your swords skills as well," she said kneeling down to the ground and picking up a stick, while throwing her sword sheath towards Ranma. Let's see if that's the case shall we?"

Ranma grabbed this sheath out of the air, idly wondering where the blade was but not asking about it right now. He held the sheath taking a stance with one hand thrust forward, the sword poised over one shoulder as he crouched lightly.

Across from him Miya simply stood there, her equivalent of his 'not a stance', a sign of contempt almost, but not actually a sign of a lack of defense. Their eyes met and they both went still for a second, gauging one another for a long, long moment before Ranma suddenly moved like lightning, sliding to one side and bringing his sword up and

around in a cut to attack Miya's side.

At the same time Miya had taken three short sharp steps forward, her sword coming up in a straight thrust to his former position before quickly coming back into a guard, blocking his blow in a move even Ranma could barely track. From there the fight began in earnest and continued for around 40 minutes, before Ranma was thrown backwards by another riposte, the sheath flying into the air to be caught by Miya as she pointed down at him with her stick.

"That was fun," she said smiling down at him which made Ranma laugh, flipping himself up to his feet when she removed the stick from his neck.

He was a little battered and bruised around the edges, and quite sweaty, that forty minute workout had been more intense than two or three hours of sparring with his old man. "At least I made you work for at this time, at least a little bit?"

"Yes a little bit," Miya smirked, which looked very odd on her normally serene face, yet also totally right. The sight caused Ranma to laugh, picking her up and whirling her around for a moment before setting her down as she admonished him.

Miya was in fact sweating very slightly, and her clothing had been ripped in a few places but that was all. In return Ranma had been practically battered into the ground. *Not that you could tell from his expression*, Miya thought fondly as she looked at Ranma's smile.

"We have much to work on of course. But you have indeed made quite a bit of progress. Your adaptability and learning curve have also become even greater. I am quite proud of you actually," she said thoughtfully, reaching forward to ruffle Ranma's hair causing him to smile even wider. "I still wonder many things about your father, but the fact that he at least is an adequate trainer is not among them."

"You know, you two've mentioned bro's father a lot, but never his mother, why's that? Did they separate or something?"

Ranma turned, and immediately blushed. "Akitsu," he said slowly, "what are you wearing?"

Akitsu was now dressed in a white and black French maid outfit. It was quite a bit shorter than Ranma would've liked, and quite a bit tighter yet at the same time too open around her chest, showing the top of her breasts off to very good effect. She also wore chains bound around her body for some reason, wrapped over her shoulders and around her midriff and below her chest, further emphasizing her breasts.

Uzume smirked, moving over to pull Ranma into a one armed hug. "What do you think of your ice maiden now bro? She's hot enough to melt the Arctic!"

Ranma could only nod at that. "But then again Akitsu was always beautiful." Then he looked at all of their expressions, even Miya was smirking happily at him while Akitsu blushed, her cheeks decidedly pink as she looked at the ground. "I just said that aloud didn't I?"

"Yep, guess you do have a libido somewhere in there." Uzume laughed. "Now we just need to bring out the beast!"

"Did Uzume put you up to wearing that Akitsu?" Ranma asked, pushing Uzume away lightly.

To his surprise Akitsu simply shook her head. "I like it," she said softly shaking her chains lightly and kneeling beside him on the patio, looking up at him.

"Er, really?" Ranma said still blushing and looking at her out of the corner of his eye even as he began to playfully push Uzume away who was trying to pull him into another hug, this time trying to bury his head into her chest. "Um, each to his own I guess. Anyway, I wanted to start patrolling the city," he said seriously, looking over at Miya and then to Uzume and Akitsu. "I want to stop anyone trying to forcefully wing Sekirei. That's not right, it's like slavery!"

Miya nodded her head. "For some strange reason no Ashikabi seems to want to operate here in the north, I can't imagine why." She continued speaking as Uzume and Ranma scoffed in unison ignoring them regally. "But I have heard rumors about what is going on elsewhere in the city, and I applaud your attempts to stop such. Before you go however, could you look around and see if there's anything you can do for inn? Our water is taking longer and longer every week to heat up both in the bath and in the kitchen. And we also have several loose floorboards in places."

"No problem," Ranma laughing and hopping to his feet. "This place is more my home than any other place I've ever been, fixing it up is just part of the deal you know?"

Miya's smile changed slightly from an approving one to a fond one. "That's always nice to hear Ranma."

Ranma went around the building quickly, finding three floorboards in the guest rooms that weren't being used, seven in Kagari's and four in Uzume's which needed new nails, or had weakened slightly in places.

The heater was a different matter entirely. One the one hand it was simply getting old, and needed a thorough cleaning. But there was also another problem.

"This is weird Miya-nee," he said, pulling at his ponytail as he pulled himself out from behind the heater. "There are few spliced lines here taking power from the electrical lines that are running the heater. They're taking a lot of juice, which makes the heater work harder to meet your demands on it. I'll want to see if I can find where those lines're going before doing anything with this. To do that I'll need a special tool, but I can pick that up quickly enough."

Miya stiffened slightly, but shook her head. "Do what you can for now Ranma, and come back to it tomorrow. You did say you wanted to patrol the city correct? By the way, you should probably talk to Kagari about that. He is another Sekirei, and has made it his mission to stop as many forced wingings as he can." Miya felt no remorse in sharing Kagari's secret with Ranma, it was obvious the two of them didn't have any attraction towards one another, and frankly Kagari pushed himself too hard for her liking anyway.

"I'll talk to them later then. For now though, I've got a list of things will need, Akitsu, Uzume can I trust you to pick this stuff up for me while I go on patrol?" Ranma asked, handing a piece of paper to the brunette.

"I will go with you Ranma-sama." Akitsu said looking at him quickly.

"Nope. Consider this punishment for interrupting my flight this morning Akitsu." Ranma chuckled, ruffling her hair. "You can come with me the next time, but I want to do this one on my own."

Akitsu looked rebellious, though again, it would've been very tough to tell anyone else why that phrase came to his mind. It wasn't like her face changed. But Ranma met her stubbornness with his own, and eventually she sighed and nodded. Ranma nodded with her. "If I don't come back here after the meeting by say 11 o'clock, meet me at home okay?"

Akitsu nodded again even more morosely, her chains clinking lightly as she slumped and Ranma quickly turned away before he gave into the sheer cuteness that she was giving him. Exiting the inn he quickly hopped away over the rooftops.

Ranma really should have thought however that leaving Akitsu behind with Uzume was a bad idea...

OOOOOO

Leaping over the city Ranma began to get a feel for the terrain, noting where the higher building were, the areas which looked like natural battlegrounds, and the sheer amount of cameras scattered around the city. But to his surprise, he didn't see a lot of action going around. He saw a few Sekirei versus Sekirei fights, but as they all were one-on-one, and he saw two men in the background every time, he let them go.

Once he stopped and stared for a moment before hopping down landing next to a guy dressed like a biker almost, who was watching two Sekirei fighting it out in front of them, while another guy sat across from them. But the reason why Ranma stopped was because this guy had three other Sekirei lined up behind them. One of them a somewhat young girl, 13 or 14 at best with tan skin was playing on a Gameboy as she waited, and the other two were lounging around looking bored.

"Yo," he said, startling all of the watchers. "You're not going to gang up on her anything?" Ranma asked, not even introducing himself just yet while the three Sekirei turned, taking up combat stances quickly.

The biker turned to him looking Ranma up and down before grinning. "You're the one with the weird curse right? Man I have never seen any news make the rounds on the forums as quickly as that, complete with pictures. Reminded me of this American movie, where some guy was dressing up as a woman police detective and he was hot is a girl you know, so all the other police officers had fantasized about her and..."

"I get the picture thanks." Ranma interrupted scowling. "And I don't really care if I crushed any fantasies, that's their problem not mine. So you're not going to gang up on those two?"

"Nope, actually me and Oosumi're friends, but Kaho-chan's a weapon user, and most of my Sekirei aren't. So I figured it would be a good practice for both of us."

"Smart," Ranma said with a nod. *Can't really say I approve of sending Sekirei to fight at all, especially when most people aren't willing to fight alongside them but at least this guy's got some morals and seems to respect his Sekirei.* "All right, that's all I wanted to..."

"Hey wait, is it true that you're just a martial artist? I mean, how'd you even get up here anyway? Just being a martial artist, that can't be the only reason why you're so good."

"I've been a martial artist since before I could walk I think," Ranma shrugged. "What normal people call martial artists I'd call amateurs. I've devoted my entire life, practically every waking moment getting better in the art, I've fought and bled to be as good as I am."

"You sure you don't have some Sekirei blood you are something?" the guy joked but froze as Ranma glared at him.

"Don't joke. I've gotten as good as I am because I've put in the effort. The very idea that someone could be as good as me without doing that, or because of some forking leg up pisses me off."

"Gotcha," the man said looking away quickly as his Sekirei, who had relaxed when the guy talked to Ranma, bristled again at Ranma's attitude towards their Ashikabi.

Ranma ignored them and simply nodded before leaving without another word hopping away over the rooftops. About an hour or so later Ranma dropped down to a hardware store to grab the tool he'd need to follow the weird electrical runs coming away from the inn's heater. As he was leaving he saw a small crowd around an arcade, and, curious, made his way over there.

Pushing his way through the crowd easily, Ranma entered the arcade to find a woman sitting at the controls of some kind of elaborate strategy game in the center of the room. It had ten different systems all linked together, and large screens facing each of the users, showing what looked like a map of Europe and various armies moving across it. This was interspersed by scenes of combat. The combat looked real-time, while the strategy portion looked turn-based but with a time limiter.

The whole thing was damn elaborate, and frankly more tech than Ranma had seen at any point on his training trip but that wasn't what grabbed his attention. That was the young woman, who he felt just had to be a Sekirei. She looked rather incongruous in the arcade, dressed in a semi-professional looking purple outfit of some kind with frills around the neck and under her chest, which looked like they were just as large as Akitsu's, a major clue in Ranma's opinion to her Sekirei status. She had short gray hair and wore what Ranma would term school marm glasses, red half-moon glasses connected to a bit of rope behind her neck. She also had a blue dot right in the center of her chest.

Her smile however showed she was enjoying herself taking years off her face, and her eyes behind those glasses seemed to flash as her hands moved over the controls, controlling the tactical screen for a moment. Judging from the various colors it was obvious that the girl was beating all the other players, despite a few of them having teamed up in an effort to take her on.

Ranma, moving through the crowd to stand directly behind her, looked at the screen seeing she was fighting the Russian army controlled by one of the other players. "Huh, so you're playing as... Britain right? So this game is sort of like World War 2 but with it being a free-for-all rather than Allies versus Axis?"

"Somewhat yes," the woman replied distractedly not looking up from the screen. "There's no equivalent of America though, most of it's unit types have been given out to the UK and other European countries to keep the action in Europe and so the game didn't need to include a lot of water power units. The next upgrade though is going to change that while enlarging the map."

"Does the game allow you to use terrain?"

"No, that would be far too hard to program into this primitive operating system, it's mostly about types of troops, logistics and numbers."

"Hmm... the troops would be some kind of Jan-ken-pon thing, or something more realistic?"

"The programmers tried to create a system that would be somewhat realistic, but there is a bit of 'this unit always does better against this unit but is weak against unit three', true. Now if you don't mind, I'm busy."

Ranma nodded, looking toward the doorway where the crowd where he spotted four obvious Sekirei trying to force their way into the building. One of whom Ranma recognized, the green-haired girl who had been ganging up on Blondie a few days ago. They couldn't quite get through the crowd yet, but from the green-haired girl's face it was

pretty obvious she was close to simply forcing her way through. "Well, that's nice and all, but yer a Sekirei right?"

As the grey-haired woman stiffened, Ranma went on unhurriedly. "Because if ya are, it looks as if yer in trouble, unless you want ta be taken by some of your already winged sisters and forced to join them?"

The girls eyes flicked up and around from the game for the first time, her smile fading as she noticed the foursome by the door. Neither she nor Ranma noticed one of the other players stand up and try to move through the crowd around the game toward them. "Hmm... Toyotama, #16, and Sai, #31. Can't make out the other two. Damn it." She turned to look up at Ranma, her eyes narrowing slightly behind her half-moon glasses. "But why..." those eyes widened as they took in Ranma's appearance for the first time. "The anomaly!"

"Heh, yeah I bet MBI is calling me that now. Still if ya want to remain free and make your own decisions, I think we should get ready to fight."

The woman shook her head. "I'm not a combat type, I'm a brain type, I'd have trouble against any one of those girls, let alone four. Unless you're saying you can face all four yourself?"

"Probably could, but not without trashing this place big time. No, let's get out of here and if they follow us I can ambush them somewhere else." With that Ranma reached down and pulled the girl to her feet before throwing her over his shoulder in a fireman's carry. The crowd around him muttered in shock, and the player who had been making to round the game opened his mouth to shout, but Ranma had already turned away, leaping up and over the crowd, ignoring his passenger's shouts of surprise and anger.

At the same moment Toyotama had pushed her way through the crowd and saw Ranma leaping away with the girl. "Damn it!" With a sweep of her spear she smashed several people out of her way, causing screams of pain and fear to go through the crowd who hurried out of her way. With the way clear she hurled her spear forward, following it quickly as the other Sekirei with her entered the arcade, rushing forward over the bodies of the crowd most of whom had gone to ground quickly.

Ranma turned swiftly, smashing the spear up into the ceiling with a sweeping blow from his free hand. At the same time he mule kicked out backwards, smashing the emergency exit door off it's hinges and out into the alleyway beyond. "Nice try Greenie!" He laughed running through the now open door and leaping up and away.

Surprisingly the four Sekirei in the arcade paused, looking over at the player who had been moving to talk to the gray-haired Sekirei. He was a young man in his early twenties with black hair, eyes and glasses who wore a very good suit, standing out among the arcade goers just as much as the woman had. He shook his head as the four looked at him, three obviously asking for orders while Toyotama simply sneered at him. "Well that's one plan that didn't go right, well what are you waiting for after them! If I can't trick Kocho into bonding with me, we need to at least capture her for Higa-san!"

Toyotama smirked, and rushed out the door followed by the others. The man looked after them, scowling as he pushed his glasses up his nose. Ignoring the moans of the wounded and the rising noise from the crowd which began to get to their feet he left by the door, pulling out a phone at the same time. "Higa-san, I regret to report that Plan A to secure the brain type has failed due to outside interference. Toyotama is on their trail now to pursue Plan B, but given what we have already seen and learned about the anomaly, I only give them a fifty/fifty chance of succeeding in securing the brain type for us."

That was actually overstating the case severely. Ranma had quickly left behind his pursuers despite the woman he was carrying thumping his back and demanding he set her down. Several dozen rooftops away he did so, dumping her unceremoniously on her ass. "Alright, that's enough lady, I just saved ya from being winged or whatever against yer will, and what thanks do I get?"

The woman scowled her arms around her chest in such a way to thrust her breasts even further forward, something Ranma did his best not to notice. "You could have done it more elegantly, carried me in your arms rather than like a sack of wheat!" She then sighed, looking away, pushing her glasses back in place with her palm. "But thank you anyway I could not have gotten out of that without your aid. My name is Kocho, what's yours?"

"You're welcome, and the name's Ranma." Ranma replied, before turning and staring back over the rooftops they'd traversed. "But I suggest we move. I'd like nothin' better than to fight these losers, but I don't know if I could do that and protect you too. I take it a 'brain type' is weaker than element or straight up combat types?"

"While all Sekirei are uniformly stronger than humans..." the woman trailed off shaking her head as she stood up next to Ranma. "Most humans anyway, brain types have no special skill set or offensive powers that are applicable in

direct combat. Instead we specialize on manipulation of electrical appliances, technology, and gathering information. So to answer your question, yes, we need to get a move on."

Ranma nodded and turned gesturing the girl to follow him and they leaped away just as Toyotama and her fellows came into view several rooftops back. They tried to keep up, but Ranma and Kocho soon left them in the dust, losing them among the skyscrapers before turning towards the North.

Moving in a straight line across the city rather than trying to taking the sites and memorize the terrain Ranma and Kocho were back near Izumo House within a bare ten minutes. Kocho occasionally sent him glances over her glasses apparently shocked at his speed, which threatened to leave her behind easily.

But Ranma had seen several of the Sekirei moving at pretty much the same sort of speed, so he didn't know why she was shocked at it. *Unless this is another example of Sekirei looking down on humans, thinking we can't measure up to them? Feh, stupid of them, there might not be many of us martial artists but even so its not like they've got a monopoly on weird powers*

When they arrived Miya opened the door a bare few seconds after Ranma rang the doorbell. Cocking her head quizzically to the side she looked at the woman Ranma had standing behind Ranma. *Don't tell me he's already found another Sekirei? Akitsu will be heartbroken if she has to share him with someone who can Bond with him so quickly.* "Hello Ranma, who is this?"

"I am Kocho, Sekirei #22 a brain type, Asama-sama," the woman replied, bowing formally from the waist, her eyes behind her red rimmed glasses locked on the landlady. It was a both respectful and very wary look.

Miya's eyebrows rose. "Ara, and how would one such as you know an old widow woman like me?" Though the question came out rather bland, Miya's own eyes narrowed slightly, and the first hints of her hanya mask begun to appear over her shoulder.

"D-During my adjustments with MBI, I was allowed to use my powers for them in various ways Asama-sama. Your name came up in the security footage for the northern area of the city. Many of the security people are afraid of you, and I think a lot of the higher ups too." Kocho replied, flinching slightly.

"I wonder why," Ranma mused sarcastically, winking at Miya. "Anyway, I ran into her in an arcade about ta be ambushed by some of the same losers that attacked Blondie a few days ago, and she wanted a safe place to stay, so..."

At that some of the tension seemed to evaporate from the scene, and Miya nodded. "In any event, all are welcome here so long as you follow the rules. One of those rules is there is no violence in Izumo House. Well," she amended looking at Ranma with her own little smile, "outside of sparring at any rate. And you have to pay for meals and lodging. Further, I do not accept MBIA cards here."

"I have three offshore bank accounts at present." The woman said blandly, smirking now as she pushed her glasses up her nose. "I did say that I was allowed access to MBI's computer systems. Further, I would be willing to get it job in the local area, so long as I do not need to leave the territory you guard."

At Miya's raised eyebrow she went on. "I've no wish to join this game one way or the other. I am a brain type, either I would my skills would be abused in some fashion, or I would become an easy target. Neither situation appeals."

"Besides your skill with computers, do you are you able to do anything else?"

"I have been told I am somewhat of a cook, though I have only ever cooked for my adjuster and our Sekirei brethren," she frowned for a moment, cocking her head to one side and suddenly looking much younger than she had been, as young as she had looked playing the strategy game when Ranma first spotted her. "Or should that be sisters, considering how many of us are women, aren't we more like a sisterhood than anything else?"

"I don't know." Ranma asked cocking his head to one side and they both turned to look at Miya.

"How am I supposed to now? I'm just an,"

"Old widow-woman." said Ranma and Uzume from where she had walked up behind Miya. Akitsu too had shown up and now stood behind Ranma, but this time he had seen her coming.

"Now you're just ganging up on me," Miya pouted lightly, shaking her head before once again turning to Kocho. "I will allow you to use those offshore accounts of yours to pay for the first two weeks of rent and utilities. But that money

still comes from MBI and I want nothing to do with them

Kocho nodded rapidly and Ranma smiled looking over at Akitsu. "In that case, I think it's time we had back to the Tendo place. Kasumi wanted us home for dinner. See you tomorrow Miya-nee."

Miya nodded, gesturing and Kocho followed as the two of them turned away, hopping off and over the rooftops away.

OOOOOO

The next day Ranma woke up with Akitsu once again in her bed. 'Her' bed because Ranma had sort of anticipated this, and figured that if they were both girls, there was much less likelihood of anything bad happening between them.

This didn't stop his father from attempting to throw ice cold water over them, and Akitsu's automatic attempt to protect them by freezing the water backfired badly, but neither were injured much. They later watched Nabiki 2.0 come online thanks to its intake of coffee, as amusing a sight from the sidelines as it had been yesterday. She scowled at them both, but Ranma was certain it was a playful one.

Kuno was again a bother at school, but nothing that Ranma couldn't deal with. His shouts about returning his "Most beautiful Yuki-onna, who the very heavens must have sent to be mine bride" got on Ranma's nerves very quickly however. And whenever Ranma remembered Akitsu's look of shock and fear he was tempted to do something... permanent... to the bastard.

Surprisingly the boys of the 'beat Akane to date her club' seemed to have gotten the hint yesterday, or at least one of the hints he dropped because none of them even gave Ranma a second glance, but they were all still there attacking Akane rather than trying to get a date the normal way.

This allowed Ranma to beat up Kuno and head up to the Nabiki's classroom. She had set up a microphone for him, and Ranma began to do commentary on the fight between the pervert brigade and Akane. This color commentary allowed Nabiki to actually start charging the entire student body for watching, not much of course, just 200 yen. But considering the size of the audience this added up fast, and allowed Nabiki to make in a single morning enough to cover the house's food expenses for two days.

Akane was of two minds about this. On the one hand, Akane didn't want anyone to fight her battles for her. On the other it was getting really irritating, and her father's comments about it not doing her overall skills any good remained in the back of her head.

After school Ranma once again picked up Akitsu from the Tendo place, and the two of them made their way to Miya after picking up the device he needed to trace the electrical lines taking power from the heater.

Running the device over the walls, he marked the spot then went inside, heading up to the second floor where he paused, cocking his head and staring at the far wall. "Huh..."

Uzume was behind Akitsu, and looked over her shoulder at Ranma. "What?"

"Who put that there?" Ranma asked pointing in front of him towards the blank wall at the far end of the second floor hallway.

Uzume quickly looked away not knowing how Miya wanted to handle their other tenant. "I don't know what you're talking about bro, but what where?"

"That hidden doorway over there. It's so badly done I can spot it right away."

Miya, who was behind Uzume, chuckled, 'fufufu' sound. "I'll remember to tell the person who put it in that you said that Ranma, he became our handyman after you left, a friend of my husband's named Seo. Seo's trash, utterly and completely trash always living off the handouts of others."

"Gotcha," Ranma said with a nod. "Whoever is in there though is using more than half the juice that should be going to the heater. If ya want to keep powering whoever's in there, ya should rewire everything so she takes it off the main electrical runs into the house rather than from the heater. That'd take time, but it would not only be safer, but also more energy efficient."

"I will think about it Ranma. Could you do the work?" Miya asked, ushering them all downstairs to sit in the dining table, where Akitsu set out tea for them all, having been shown how to brew it by Miya while Ranma was busy with his tool.

"Does whoever lives behind that door at least pay you rent and for the electricity he/she/it's usin'?" Ranma asked, sitting down.

Miya chuckled quietly, one hand over her mouth as she did, before nodding thanks to Akitsu. "Come to think of it I don't think she does. Something I must look into. I can't have one of my tenants be too much a burden after all, or else I'd have no choice but to throw them out."

There was a sudden squawk from the direction of the small side table that held the phone. On it stood a little porcelain duck that for some reason Miya kept there for some reason which had rocked for just a moment. Ranma looked at it quizzically, but Miya waved off his look.

"So she's a, what's the word, a hikikomori?" Ranma asked.

"Something like that, almost exactly like that. Certainly she's just as much a freeloader as those poor souls. Though I imagine she, like they at least have some redeeming qualities I cannot bring any to mind right now." Miya chuckled, once again hiding her mouth behind one hand.

That caused more squawks from the direction of the side table but Ranma simply shrugged. "Well, if you ever want to make her pay rent I've heard of a job in Nerima. I've not seen any sign of Sekireis or MBI influence there." He had easily connected Miya already housing two Sekirei to a possible third, and then figured out she might have, like Uzume, left MBI before they would have willingly let her out. "As long as she's actually good with computers anyway. Unless you want it Kocho?" he asked, looking over at the gray haired young woman.

"No thanks." Kocho replied, shaking her head quickly. "Sorry, but I'm not interested in leaving this safe zone. Just because the Sekirei Plan hasn't spread to Nerima doesn't mean it won't." She looked over seriously at Miya, one hand stroking a box holding a brand new laptop set on the floor beside her. "Whoever is behind the door, Ranma said he or she uses up a lot of electricity, what about the internet bandwidth?"

"That I'm afraid you'll have to take up with them," Miya said shrugging. "I don't use the internet."

"I will," Kocho said, her fingers now clenching and unclenching. "I must have access to the Internet! I refuse to quit playing my games just because someone else is too greedy to share."

After that, Ranma sparred with Miya for a time. Miya also took the time to train Akitsu for a bit, before the two of them went out on patrol, Akitsu joining Ranma this time.

This patrol was much more work than before, because Ranma wanted to go further around the city, and he wanted to stay out longer too. But for the first few hours of the patrol it looked like nothing was going to happen today. This changed when they both heard some loud shouts in the distance and a series of thumps. "Damn it leave me alone! I told you I already found someone I'm reacting to!"

"Do we look like we care? Our Ashikabi-sama has ordered us to capture any un-winged Sekirei and we're going to do just that. Once you kiss him you'll see things our way!"

Ranma and Akitsu made their way toward the sound, finding three Sekirei attacking one, who was pinned down in an alleyway, unable to get past her attackers to freedom. The girl pinned at the far end of the alleyway wore a purple and white leotard of some kind with a white cloth wrapped around her waist with long red stockings and gloves. She had long brown hair tied into a long tail at the back and wielded a huge halberd, a liability in an enclosed space like the alleyway. Indeed, it had already been caught in the side of the building next to her, the halberd's edge having gotten stuck in the wall of the building to her right.

The three Sekirei who were facing her were three Ranma hadn't seen before though as he and Akitsu moved forward Ranma also noticed that there didn't seem to be any guy around, so their Ashikabi must have sent them out on their own. *Damn, that's worse than just watching them fight your just ordering them around like troops? That's really sad, and cowardly.*

Two of the attackers looked like they were twins with blonde hair tied into two long ponytails sticking out from the sides of their head and similar features. They even wore the same outfit, a one piece dress that fell to mid-calf with a long yellow stripe down the center and long black stockings. One of them was wielding a whip, while the other seemed to have several long strings tied to her fingers twirling them around in the air.

Both of them were attacking the girl in the leotard vigorously, moving in sync and shouting instructions to one another. "Get her left leg with your whip Mitsuha, I'll get her arms with my strings! Remember we can't hurt her too hard,

Mikogami-sama doesn't want damaged toys."

"I know that Mitsuki, mind your own business! Try to pull that halberd out of her hands, with out it capturing her will be easy!"

The last girl was dressed in a long kimono with no sleeves tied with a wide sash around her waist, and had her black hair pulled to one side of head. She didn't look as enthusiastic as the other two but neither was there any hesitation in her attack. She didn't seem to use any weapons, attacking with a style that looked like an offensive tai-chi style than anything else. Her hands flashed out in quick chops and punches before she retreated out of the way of the others.

Ranma noticed all of this within a few seconds of him and Akitsu's arrival and now he leaped forward, kicking out toward the girl with the whip. "Akitsu, take out the black haired girl!"

The whip user turned, barely in dodging to one side Ranma's initial kick staring at him in surprise as she ducked away. "Wh, why the hell're you getting in ouGAAH!" She didn't dodge Ranma's next punch, which caught her in the stomach which hurled her back and away into the wall. Before she could push herself away Ranma was on her, pummeling her into the concrete with a series of punches. Mitsuha blocked a few of them, but she wasn't fast enough or strong enough to stop the assault, and one blow got in, smashing into her temple with enough strength to send her senseless to the street.

Ranma turned from his opponent to see the one name Mitsuki be dealt with by the girl who she and the other two had been attacking. Mitsuki had turned toward Ranma and Akitsu, but had already wrapped some of her thin ropes around the girl's halberd. Instead of Mitsuki pulling it out of her grip the other woman pulled her into the air. Off balance and halfway turned away there was no way Mitsuki could protect herself from a full-body palm thrust the girl threw forward with all her might, smashing into the blonde's side with enough power to hurl her out and into the air over the main street to slam into a building on the other side.

The other attacker, the one in the kimono, was frozen solid trapped against the wall of the building on the alleyway's left. She was still alive, and Ranma could see her eyes flicking around, but it was obvious the girl couldn't break the ice encasing her without more in the way of leverage. Akitsu stood next to her demurely, staring hard between the down Mitsuha and the girl in the leotard.

That worthy turned to them both smiling and bowing politely. "Thank you for your help! I'm Namiji, they were trying to take me to be winged by their Ashikabi, but I have already met someone I am reacting too. Indeed I was travelling to his school to meet him when they attacked me."

"That's nice I suppose, though I still have questions about this whole reacting thing. I'm Ranma and this is Akitsu, we're trying to stop forced wingings from happening, as much as we can anyway." Ranma shrugged. "Can't be everywhere after all, but we'll do what we can. You okay now?"

Namiji nodded, but her attention had turned to Akitsu. She stared at the mark on her forehead for a moment, then over to Ranma before smiling brightly, moving forward to hug the Sekirei of ice in a sisterly fashion. She whispered into her ear, "Even if your ability to bond was taken from you it looks like you found your Ashikabi! Congrats!"

"Ahh... yes." Akitsu replied, blushing ever so slightly as she spoke hesitantly, before hugging the other girl back for a brief second.

Releasing her hug Namiji turned back to Ranma, gesturing at their opponents. "What do you want to do with them?"

Ranma shrugged reaching down to grab the girl he'd down and toss her upward to land limply on the rooftop to their left. He then moved over to Akitsu's former opponent, shattering the ice over her head with a single controlled punch. The girl stared at him, but remained silent and he nodded at her. "Ya lost, but I ain't gonna 'terminate' ya or whatever it's called when you Sekirei are so hurt your marks disappear. I don't like killing, and that sounds way too close to killing for my liking. But you tell yer master, he's that little shrimp, the rich boy right?"

"Y, yes, he is. Who, I mean you're really human?! I read some of the posts and saw a video of your curse, but I didn't really believe it, you're the same person as the redhead right?"

"Yep that's me, and yep I'm human. Just something to keep in mind in the future."

Behind him Namiji nodded. "There are other humans out there that are as talented as Sekirei. My senpai at St. Hebereke High school is one of them."

Ranma turned to her quizzically, noting the girl did look as if she could possibly pass for a high school student, unlike

Akitsu or Kocho. "Wait, you go to school?"

"Of course, ever since we were told about them I wanted to go to school, it sounded fun, and St. Hebereke has the best women Gymnastics teams in the country." Namiji replied proudly. "I could wish the school was coed so I could spend more time with my possible Ashikabi, but even so it's been a lot of fun." She laughed suddenly. "I've even started to learn how to cook without setting off the fire alarm."

"Huh." Ranma shook his head before turning back to the trapped girl. "Anyway, back on topic, so I'm not going to terminate you, and I'll leave the blonde twins up top for you to find later, when we leave Akitsu will stop pumping power into the ice and you should escape easily after that. But I want ya ta tell the brat that he should stop trying to collect Sekirei like they're Pokémon okay?"

The girl looked torn. On the one hand she should defend her Ashikabi, who most definitely was not a brat, and always took care of them, paying for anything they wanted out of his own pocket and they all lived happily in his mansion. On the other hand, he did sometimes seem to treat some of them like they were troops or toys rather than companions. But the more sisters they had, the better their odds would be, so she saw his point even if she didn't like it. So she simply settled for making a noncommittal noise, before thanking the human, a thought she was still having trouble with, for not terminating her.

Ranma smirked at her, patted the girl on the head before turning to Namiji. "You alright now?"

"I should be, I'm only a few minutes away from where Taka-chan goes to school, and after this I think I'll ask him to wing me right away. That should be enough to stop girls like this from coming after me." With a final bow to her saviors Namiji turned, leaping up and off over the rooftops.

Ranma and Akitsu stayed there to gather up the other blonde girl, setting her next to her sister before leaving the scene themselves.

After several blocks, Akitsu spoke up as they were hopping from one roof to another. "Master, do you prefer leotards to maid uniforms?"

Ranma lost his footing and crashed down into the alleyway below, straight into the side of a dumpster, which dented under the impact. "What kind of question is that?"

"A serious one master."

"Don't care either way about them." Grumbling and blushing Ranma rejoined Akitsu on the roof, then scowled as the first raindrops began to fall from. Moments later the rain began in earnest and Ranma scowled further. "Great, just great."

The rain seemed to put a damper on most people's willingness to fight, and the rest of the night passed uneventfully. Ranma sighed shaking her head and wringing out her hair for a moment as the two of them took shelter underneath the awning of a restaurant's entrance. "I think we can call it a night Akitsu, let's head back to the Tendo place, we're closer to Nerima than we are to Miya's district, she'll understand with this rain pouring down."

Akitsu nodded then looked away when her stomach began to rumble loudly. "Food?" she asked plaintively.

"That's right," Ranma groaned, smacking her forehead. "Kasumi said she and her father would be out at a council meeting tonight. And it's too late to go to Miya's for dinner. Don't suppose you have any cash on you?"

Akitsu gave the redhead a deadpan stare, and when Akitsu gave you a stare like that, boy did she ever.

But Ranma just shrugged her shoulders. "Thought not. Well I could always mooch food somewhere I guess, I've done it a few times since I got this body."

"You there!" said a loud female voice from further back along the road. Would you be, ah you are! Excellent." Ranma and Akitsu both turned to see a statuesque blonde woman walking through the rain as if it didn't bother her. It was only when she got close that Ranma realized the blond looked only slightly damp. It was as if the rain bent around her or at least her clothing.

Ranma also realized she knew the blonde. "You're the woman from a few days, Tsukiumi right, what's up?"

"When you left so quickly I did not have the time to thank you properly," Tsukiumi said in return. "I dislike being in debt to anyone, and I did hear at least some of your conversation. Would a meal even the score between us?"

Ranma and Akitsu exchanged a glance before both of them nodded. Tsukiumi stared at Akitsu for a moment examining her closely which Akitsu returned blandly. "I see, there were rumors that one of our sisters had her bonds unnaturally broken. I actually envy you. You will never have to face the indignity of becoming subservient to some over-evolved monkey."

"I resemble that remark, some of it anyway." Ranma said mildly then gestured at the restaurant behind them. "Since you're the one paying, you get to choose where we're going."

Tsukiumi nodded imperiously, and stalked past Akitsu to stare at the menu before shaking her head quickly. "No, this will not do. There is a very nice Italian restaurant a few blocks down follow me."

The three of them were soon ensconced in a booth at the restaurant, with Tsukiumi ordering them some lemonade, along with bread and oil. As they waited for the reader to come back with that and for their mean orders, Ranma looked at Tsukiumi. "So, have any more troubles of the gang up kind since we last met?"

"Not at all, though I do not know if that is because no one wishes to try their luck against me again, or because I've been more careful moving around the city. The east of the city and the south are the centers for that kind of conflict." Her hands clenched where they lay on the table for a moment and she threw back her head angrily staring at Ranma challengingly a sign that brought an answering smirk to his face. "I would take on anyone one-on-one, that is the only true way of proving your strength, but this game seems to be emphasizing numbers and teams over individual skill. The larger flocks have an advantage, but I will not become subservient to some stupid monkey, regardless of the prize!"

"You mentioned that before and given how Akitsu and I get along I can understand where you're coming from. But does that mean you don't believe in this whole 'Bond' thing?"

"Of course not!" Tsukiumi said just a little too quickly for Ranma to believe her while by the redhead's side Akitsu's eyes narrowed slightly, as she stared at Ranma. "The very idea that any monkey who could somehow claim my lips through guile or trickery and become my eternal beloved is a fallacy! But why do you speak as if it is not your problem, I see no broken mark on you? Or do you still believe you are a human?"

"I don't think it, I know it. Trust me," Ranma frowned for a moment thinking of how to prove that she was human without resorting to the curse. After all, that might not work, and frankly given the blonde's views about humans and in particular guys, it might not be the best idea. *Certainly not in a crowded restaurant...* "Have you Sekirei ever been allowed to leave Tokyo? Have any of you been overseas?"

"Of course not, MBI keeps our leashes tight." Tsukiumi scowled.

"Well, I've been overseas. I've been to China, to Vietnam, to Tibet, to the Koreas, even crossed into Mongolia for a bit. I can speak Chinese well enough, and get by in a few other languages, at least well enough to get my point across. I could describe some of the tourist traps in them to you if you want me to. I also have a father, he's a waste of space most of the time, but he's a really good martial artist. He's one of the two that trained me, the other lives up in the north of the city."

Akitsu nodded. "He is good," she said softly, wishing to back up her Ranma-sama. "Genma and I trained today, and if I cannot keep my distance, I have no chance of victory."

"If monkeys could fight that well, why would they have to resort to Sekirei?" Tsukiumi asked skeptically. "No, all monkeys are weak and want to enslave us so they can trick themselves into thinking they're strong."

"Don't look at me when you say that," Ranma replied mildly. "I don't want to enslave anyone, I'm not even happy with the way Akitsu treats me."

At that Akitsu's eyes narrowed again and she shifted, bumping her thigh against Ranma's for a moment before settling again, staring at the redhead.

Tsukiumi looked at Akitsu for a moment then back to the redhead. "...I could almost believe you are human even if it does sound fantastical that any human could match a Sekirei. But the way Akitsu looks at you, that is the way a Sekirei would look at her master rather than another Sekirei."

"Whether you believe or not is up to you." Ranma said with a shrug. "I can't say I'm happy to have you think that I cheated to get as good as I am, but whatever."

"Cheated, what do you mean?"

"You Sekirei are all born with your abilities. You didn't earn them like I had to with years of hard training, sweat and more than a bit of pain. So, cheating."

Tsukiumi glared at Ranma, her teeth clenched angrily, and when she spoke it hissed out between those clenched teeth, accompanied by the water in their glasses trembling for a moment as if it was about to leap out. "I trained every day for hours on end to get as good as I am with water manipulation. Yes, I might have been born with the ability to use water in the first place, but it is only through exertion and time devoted to the effort that have made me as good as I am with it. Do not call me a cheat!"

Ranma frowned for a moment then nodded her head. "All right, I'll apologize for that one, though I will say that a lot of your fellow Sekirei seem to not have the same attitude."

"Apology accepted and yes, I suppose there are Sekirei like that." Tsukiumi said nodding her head crisply. So, tell me of your own training."

The two of them talked for a while, with Akitsu generally keeping silent, looking at Ranma and Tsukiumi intently but not interjecting often. The waiter soon arrived with their bread and drinks and they all quickly ordered, sending him off before turning back to the discussion, which at that moment was about how tactics could be effected by the environment around you.

Eventually Ranma shook her head. "The long-range techniques I saw you use in that fight and what you've told me about the rest of your bag of tricks sound devastating, but you really need some skill in hand-to-hand just in case someone can close with you, especially in an urban environment. Most of the time in a city you're fighting in close or at mid-range at best. Maybe a water sword or something, could you do that?"

"Certainly, nothing is beyond my ability!" Tsukiumi said haughtily, but she was looking thoughtful as she said it. "You said that one of your trainers lives in the city, this Miya person. Would she be willing to have a match with me? Not," she added hastily. "That I will learn anything truly useful, but experience is always a benefit, and perhaps I could come up with new tactics while sparring with her."

That made Ranma pause for a moment, but he nodded. *My curse'll come out sooner or later, best it be where Miya can step in and keep things peaceful.* "Yeah, she might not be willing to train you, but she would at least let us use your backyard, and that way we could spar together. Akitsu here is going to learn hand-to-hand for me and from my old man, but I don't think I want to introduce you to him just yet. I think your personalities would clash badly." Ranma said understating things, but thankfully Tsukiumi did not pursue that.

Just then the food arrived. With food in front of them all three of them fell to their food ravenously. Ranma interrupted his meal for a moment pointing at Tsukiumi. "By the way, there are at least three other Sekirei living there, but none of them are interested in the actual Sekirei Game. One of them is a guy, I don't know if he's got a master yet but I don't think so. One of them has no interest in a master or playing the game, she's a brain type, and doesn't want to fight anyone in this game. The other is a brunette named Uzume, but her master is in the hospital for some reason, and it's a touchy subject with her."

Tsukiumi nodded. "Thank you for telling me," she said graciously. "The male and I might come into conflict, but I certainly won't start anything with the other two. If they start something with me however all bets are off."

"There is no violence in Izumo House." Akitsu spoke up. "They will not start anything outside of sparring."

Ranma nodded. "Miya keeps a very tight hold on that kind of thing. We'll be by tomorrow, hopefully to train the entire day away, Tsukiumi," Ranma said, after writing down directions to Miya's house. "Will we see you there?"

"Perhaps. For now, I have lodgings in a hotel nearby, and if the weather tomorrow is like this, even I would prefer to stay inside." At Ranma's look Tsukiumi shot the redhead a superior smirk. "My powers allow me some control over water of all sorts, which allows me to keep the rain away from me for a time, but it is rather exhausting."

The rest of the meal passed uneventfully, with Ranma telling the two of them about his training trip Tsukiumi replied with a few stories of her own training, with Akitsu occasionally speaking up but for the most part remaining quiet. Their training had a lot more to do with observation and computer electronics than anything Ranma recognized as training but it seemed to have worked for them.

Beyond that, Tsukiumi and Ranma were alike in many ways. Both had a certain arrogance, though Ranma softened his with humor, both wanted to be the best, or as Tsukiumi put it, the strongest. But Ranma was far worldlier than the

Sekirei of Water, who in turn was much less flexible than Ranma when it came to her opinions about things, such as humans.

Eventually the meal ended, and Tsukiumi picked up the bill with her MBI card. Spotting that Ranma frowned slightly, but shrugged her shoulders it wasn't any of her business after all.

They parted company outside, where Ranma and Akitsu once again braved the rain leaping up and away over the rooftops. Tsukiumi stared after them for a moment smiling slightly. *Well, at least at this female of the species is nicer to deal with the male ones.*

OOOOOOO

Minaka smirked at the five men he'd chosen. All of them were ex-special ops from various countries. They didn't like one another, but they had proven in the past to be able to work together. He had spent the past two days looking up old legends and stories of China, trying to figure out where Ranma had come about his odd gender changing curse and had finally narrowed it down to the Bayakala range and one of four or five odd legends set in that zone.

"Now remember, I just want samples of the water from these 'cursed springs'. Don't try to investigate the area or the water yourself, and whatever you do, don't get involved with anything local. If I'm right, even a little bit of this water can add a bit of needed excitement to the game!"

With that he began to cackle, causing the hardened soldiers in front of him to exchange glances before sighing as one. The things they'd do for money...

OOOOOOO

By the time Ranma and Akitsu were back at the Tendo place it was well past midnight and even Akitsu was uncomfortable. The Sekirei of Ice might be able to use ice, and she usually didn't have any trouble with temperatures, but being wet on top of being cold was a different matter. The little redhead however was actually shivering, so when Ranma told Akitsu she could have a bath first Akitsu refused, her entire body once again radiating a surprising amount of stubbornness. "Go get dry clothing Ranma-sama, I will start the bath."

Ranma didn't even try to fight her and gratefully snuck into his room for a clean, and above all dry, set of clothing before heading into the bathing area. Stripping off her wet clothing she let them all drop with wet plops to the ground of the changing area, before entering the bath itself, sighing as the heat of the room hit her.

It was a few seconds before Ranma realized she wasn't alone. Akitsu stood by the doorway clad only in a towel wrapped around her middle, barely covering her chest at the top and her thighs at the bottom, but it was enough to keep Ranma from having an immediate nosebleed moment™. Instead Ranma squeaked slightly, turning away rapidly. "Akitsu, what have I told you about this!? Boys and girls don't bath together!"

"I am not a girl, Ranma-sama, I am a Sekirei. Besides, I feel we need to talk about things of this nature." Akitsu replied, moving forward to take the shorter redhead's hand. "Please Ranma-sama, let's get you warm."

Ranma found herself unable to protest as the other girl pulled her lightly over to the washing area, plopping her down on one of the stools there. Akitsu turned picking up a pail and filling it with warm water before pouring it over the redhead's head, changing her into him quickly. Ranma was about to tell Akitsu to wash herself, when the porcelain-skinned woman moved behind him. There was a swishing noise and then the sound of something hitting the ground and he began to turn around only for Akitsu to dump another bucket of water over his head.

Through his matted hair Ranma could tell that Akitsu had pulled off her towel, and Ranma could feel his body heating up, despite still being somewhat cold from their rush home, his heart beginning to beat almost as fast as it would be in a fight. The woman was truly beautiful her skin glistening with water, her breasts heaving slightly, her cheery red nipples standing out so much they almost grabbed his attention and wouldn't let go. "A-Akitsu, what..." he said in a strangled sort of tone, turning away with an effort of will. "What are you doing, I told you I ..."

He trailed off as Akitsu gently pressed into his back, her arms just as gently encircling him for a moment. "Shhh..." she said gently, her voice strangely more assertive than normal despite her soft tone. "We need to talk Ranma-sama, and this way is the best way I can think of to show you that I am serious."

For a moment Ranma fought several different instincts, a few of which he didn't even know he had. Some wanted him to run, some wanted him to blush, stutter and possibly die from blood loss. Others, the new ones, wanted him to turn and do things to Akitsu he only really knew about in a very academic sort of way but which now had suddenly

become far more **interesting**.

Eventually he simply nodded. "Stop calling me sama, and I'll, I'll stay put. But so does the towel, okay?"

"Ahh... okay, Ranma," Akitsu replied, slipping back into her old habit of needing to pause and think before speaking. But she did actually drop the -sama so Ranma counted it as a win despite still being mildly close to a complete brain-freeze because of her pressing her breasts, so soft and so **enticing**, into his back.

As if sensing this, Akitsu moved away slightly one hand resting on the back of Ranma's neck as she turned away. There was the sound of a splash, and Ranma turned his neck to stare as Akitsu lathered her front with soap before pushing her breasts back into Ranma's back. He couldn't stop a low groan from escaping and his face and body flushed further. "A, Akitsu, what..."

"Uzume-san had several books which showed men enjoying this. Please stay still Ranma I want to get you clean."

That damn big-titted pervert! Ranma howled, most of his mind consumed with thoughts of getting her back for this somehow. Though there was that tiny part of his mind which was wondering how to thank her... But the sheer sensation of what Akitsu was doing to him soon overwhelmed Ranma's ability to think at all, his instincts to flee or even to keep a certain distance between him and Akitsu gone for now.

Akitsu didn't speak for a moment, her entire being concentrating on cleaning Ranma. She used her breasts to wash his back, her breath beginning to come in short gasps as the friction of her nipples and breasts against Ranma's chiseled back began to have an effect. But Akitsu was more concerned about actually cleaning Ranma than her own pleasure, and she moved away slightly, using her hands to wash Ranma's sides.

She moved to his sides, washing his arms one after another before kneeling directly between Ranma's legs, washing them as well, once more using her breasts as Uzume's book had shown up until his knees. The sensation once again caused her to gasp, while Ranma threw his head back, shuddering and trying hard not to stare at what was going on.

From there and up she used her hands, but when she began to reach under Ranma's towel his brain came back online. Blushing hotly and trying desperately to concentrate on Akitsu's face rather than the vision of her chest so close he took her hands in his, pushing them away. "E, enough Akitsu, ya, ya said you wanted to talk a-about something serious, so talk."

"This is what I wanted to talk about, Ranma." Akitsu said, reaching up with a gentle, pale hand to turn Ranma's face back to her when he looked away. When their eyes locked, blue on light gray she paused, almost visibly martialing her thoughts despite pressing her breasts into Ranma's stomach in a way that was distracting both of them. "Sekirei might be somewhat submissive to their Ashikabi, but to me, it is also a personal choice."

Ranma made to interrupt but Akitsu covered his mouth very gently, before going back to wash his chest, blushing very visibly now as her hands caressed his chest. Ranma didn't have a lot of heavy muscles, but he had a wiry strength that was frankly incredible, like steel cables underneath a thin covering of skin. His skin felt amazing under her fingers, his muscles twitching under her touch like nothing she had ever felt before.

But when she spoke her voice was still serious. "I want to serve you Ranma it is just, the books Uzume-san called it a fetish, a personal preference. But that is not the only reason I wish to be close to you, wish to obey you."

She paused again, marshaling her thoughts once more. "Ahh... I was indoctrinated like all my sisters to obey my Ashikabi. But as a lower number, I could still disobey a command, I have a strong will Ranma, do not doubt that." She looked up, and her grey eyes found Ranma's once again, and he nodded after only a second.

When he did, she smiled and went on. "But you have to understand, after my ability to Bond was broken, I was lost, alone in a very cold, dark world. You gave me warmth again when you offered to help me, to be my Ashikabi regardless of my being Broken."

"Stop that!" Ranma said almost angrily, reaching down to grab both of Akitsu's hands in one of his as he gripped her chin, forcing her to look him in the eyes this time. "Stop saying you're broken, you're not broken, there's nothing wrong with you! Someone else might have done something to your ki to block it up, but that can be fixed, don't let the idea that its permanent effect your mind or how you act Akitsu."

For a moment Akitsu was silent, staring into Ranma's eyes, then nodded. When Ranma let go of her chin, looking away with a blush at his forwardness, Akitsu leaned her head forward against Ranma's chest. "You see Ranma, you make me **warm**. You care about me, when others, like that little boy from when we first met, would only care about

me as a tool."

The two of them were quiet for a few minutes then Akitsu moved back slightly. Standing up, Akitsu pulled Ranma to his feet, pulling him over to the bath. She entered first, and motioned Ranma to sit in front of her in the bath. For a moment Ranma hesitated then at Akitsu's pleading expression he nodded and, very carefully holding his towel in place, stepped into the bath, leaning back against Akitsu. He stiffened when he felt her pebble hard nipples rubbing against his back, and heard her low moaning sigh. But he settled down when all Akitsu did was hold him lightly.

After a moment she spoke again. "Ranma, I do not know if I love you as humans understand things. The Bond is supposed to tell us who we care for, who our destined one is. Without it, all I have is my own emotions and desires. I do know I care and am attracted to you Ranma, and I enjoy being close to you like this. I am a Sekirei, we desire to be close to others, to our Ashikabi, or in this case the individual I care for, you. I am not a normal woman, who would desire to get to know you better or take my time, I already know all I need to about you and with this game I know our time together might be short."

"Not if I have anything to say about it." Ranma growled. "Don't set that in stone in your mind either Akitsu-chan, okay?"

She nodded, hugging Ranma to her slightly tighter for a moment. They were silent for a moment then Akitsu spoke up again. "I won't push too far Ranma-sama, but I would like to serve you like this when we bathe, and be close to you physically otherwise."

"I, I suppose I can go along with that. Just, just don't push, and, when you have something to say, speak up please?" Ranma asked, taking her hands in his and twinging their fingers together. "If we're going to do this, if you want me to be your Ashikabi now and when we figure out a way to heal your ability to Bond, whatever the heck that really is or means, then I want you to be your own person, not just a slave."

"Ahh...My preferences will not change Ranma..." Akitsu sighed, but nodded. "But elsewhere, I will try to speak up more."

The two of them soaked for about fifteen minutes in silence, but it wasn't an uncomfortable one, despite Ranma still blushing at their close contact. It was with a surprising amount of reluctance that Ranma pushed himself out of the water, holding his towel in place once more. It slipped as he lifted his leg out of the bath though, and Akitsu let loose a little gasp. "Big..."

Ranma turned to look at her, eyebrow raised, but Akitsu didn't reply simply blushing slightly and standing up, causing Ranma to look away again. This time however Akitsu knew he had looked and liked it. She was content with that, a small smile appearing on her face as the two of them left the bathing area. When they left the bathing area Ranma looked at her, then up the stairs and into the sitting room before sighing. "Come on Akitsu-chan, let's head to bed."

Akitsu's eyes widened slightly and she followed Ranma with her smile widening as she did.

OOOOOO

"Excuse me sir, but could you tell me where to go to get Tokyo?"

End Chapter

Remember this Ranma hasn't been programmed to run at moments like this, and he also knows, at least somewhat, about boys and girls, he just has no idea what to do with those feelings. And no, Taka-chan is NOT Tatewaki, it is for Namiji's canon Ashikabi, Takano Kouji.

Other than that I have to say that this story isn't going quite as I thought it would. I am getting bogged down somewhat in the character interactions, and the main plot is going slowly both because of that, and because I have to space out the plot points in terms of time to allow a more thorough integration of the two worlds. I think I need to rework my overall timeline before taking this story up again, so I won't be putting it on the poll for next month. It might be back in December unless one of the other stories grabs my attention and won't let go.

The next poll will be up this weekend, so be on the look out for it. Other than that, I am still having more DNS issues than I would like (hate Windows Ten, seriously) so if you spot any mistakes, please include them in your review or PM me.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5

I do not own Sekirei (which lets face it, has one of the worst main plots ever, of all time) or Ranma.

Further announcements will be at the end of the chapter.

This chapter has been betaed by [ultimaflare0](#).

Chapter 5 Chaos Comes in Many Forms

Grumbling irritably Genma pushed himself out of his futon. He'd decided to see if he could get in a dawn attack on his boy this morning by waking up before dawn. *Hopefully he's not only alone, but vulnerable. I can't let the boy go soft, not after all of the effort I put into training him up to this point. And if I train with him in the afternoon, that cuts down on the time I can spend whipping Soun into shape. I still can't believe Soun's let himself go so far, he can't even roofhop anymore!*

Setting that line of thought aside Genma got out of his futon, preparing to move over to Ranma's futon. He took a brief second to look outside, noticing that it was still raining, and it didn't look like it would be letting up anytime soon. When he turned back to Ranma's bed he stopped, his face flushing, unseen in the dark, as blood rushed up to his brain and down to other areas he had considered unimportant for years.

Not only had Ranma not slept alone, but Akitsu had somehow wriggled out of all her clothing this time. That alone would have been enough to cause Genma to stop. But she had also just stood up, rolling out of futon for a moment and moving towards the door completely naked.

Genma's movement had roused Akitsu from her almost somnambulistic walk. She turned and saw the older Saotome looking at her and felt not irritation, not fright, but something else, something she couldn't quite put her name on as the man looked at her. It wasn't a good feeling whatever it was, and as blood erupted from the man's nose she lashed out with the full force of her power.

Suddenly that entire section of the room was covered in a solid block of ice, capturing the older martial artist in its icy grip. Before the spray of blood from his nose could start to fall Genma was trapped within the ice along with his futon and the wall behind him. The sudden cold of the ice could be felt in the main bedroom on the other side of that wall. There Soun actually shuddered in his sleep, rolling away from the wall quickly.

After regaining control of herself Akitsu went on her way to the toilet then came back and paused frowning before getting back into bed with her Ashikabi. Genma was still there, still trapped in the ice, his blood frozen and part of the surrounding ice. The splash of red was actually rather pretty in comparison to the rest of the quite ugly statue.

But Genma was still facing towards her and Ranma's futon and Akitsu realized that she didn't like that. To correct this Akitsu reached forward, the ice subsiding around most of the room only remaining in a block form around Genma and the blood from his nose. With that done Akitsu gently picked up the statue, and turned it around so that Genma faced the wall before getting back into the futon.

So, so cold... Genma thought, even as he began to try to break out of the ice. But it was so close he couldn't get any leverage, and without that he lacked the strength to break out all at once. He still began to free his hands and toes however, and the ice slowly began to melt now that Akitsu was no longer concentrating on it.

This was the scene Kasumi walked into about an hour later, intent on finding Akitsu and getting her to help make breakfast. Akitsu had proven to be a quick study in the kitchen, and given the amount of food the three guests ate, Kasumi only felt it right to ask Akitsu to help, especially since Kasumi's younger siblings were so ill-suited to the task.

Kasumi halted a step into the room, staring first at the ice statue, then over to the futon. Sighing faintly she put two and two together quickly, and moved over to shake Ranma gently, since he had again hugged Akitsu to him, currently her, with Ranma's arms lightly clasped around the taller girl's waist. "Akitsu, it's time to get up."

If anyone else had tried this, they would've found themselves either implanted in a nearby wall, or in a chokehold slowly losing consciousness. Kasumi however simply gave off no dangerous vibes at all, and so was able to slip past Ranma's normal sleep-fu defense, though Akitsu glaring at her for waking her up almost made up for it. Kasumi however merely smiled at the other woman, and said softly, "Come on, I need your help with breakfast, and later you and I are going to have a talk Akitsu-chan. It's not appropriate to let someone look at you like that."

Akitsu blinked. "Why?"

Kasumi actually smiled for a moment, gesturing back over her shoulder at the now rapidly thawing Genma. "Well, did it make you feel good when Genma-san looked at you? I presume that's what happened last night?"

Akitsu too glanced at the statue, frowning and holding out her hand, renewing her power just in case he tried to break out. Slowly she got out of futon very, very reluctantly, the movement of her body slowly waking up Ranma to the feel of her breasts pressing into her own and then down her body.

Oh my God what, how'd she get naked!? One panicking part of Ranma's mind thought, while another part sensed another person in the room. *Oh please let that be Kasumi and not Akane!*

This hope was actually proven true a second later to Ranma's great relief as he heard Kasumi's voice. "That feeling is called shame, or perhaps shyness. It is why it is inappropriate for you to be walking around naked, or as you have done at least twice without your underwear."

Akitsu shook her head, her voice somewhat back to hit's hesitant manner, but not quite. "Ahh, I understand. But why can I not sleep with my Ashikabi-sama? What is wrong with that?"

"That ties back into the idea of shyness, as well as the twin topics of modesty and appropriate behavior." Kasumi said while holding out some of the clothing Akitsu had discarded in the night. Akitsu took it and began to dress as Kasumi continued speaking. "There isn't anything technically wrong with it, except your relationship is so new."

"I understand that relationships among Sekirei are different than among humans," the honey-colored brunette said, holding up a hand as Akitsu made to speak. "But this is a human house, and thus you should abide by human rules. And even if you had been dating for months, you still shouldn't sleep naked, not until you're married. Moreover, you're not alone in this room," Kasumi finished, gesturing again towards the statue which had again begun to thaw as Genma was now once more trying to break out. "You not only have to think about your own feelings, but the feelings of the other people around you and how they will react to you."

Akitsu frowned thoughtfully. "He attacks my Ashikabi," she said, trying a different tack.

"He's done that my whole life Akitsu," Ranma said softly from behind her, causing Akitsu to turn, moving to the side of the futon quickly to take her normal place beside her. Ranma actually smiled slightly at that, patting one of her hands as she pushed herself upright to stare over Akitsu's head at the statue of his father with the amusing amount of blood coming out of his nose frozen solid. "The bloods rather pretty like that, the rest not so much," the redhead quipped.

Kasumi giggled, while the still immobile Genma vowed vengeance. "But, er, while I don't mind, that is I kinda like sleeping with you, er, just sleeping with you, or, um or else I wouldn't have, have offered to let you join me last night," Ranma went on, now somewhat stuttering her words. Talking about emotions and attraction and stuff like that was still very foreign to him, despite Miya's having helped him become so much better expressing himself in junior high. "But this isn't just my room, and I don't want you to be uncomfortable or make other people uncomfortable, okay?"

Akitsu paused, staring at her then over to Kasumi before looking back at Ranma and slowly nodding, looking somehow depressed despite her face not changing at all. "All right. I will no longer try to sleep in your futon."

"Good," Kasumi said with a clap of her hands. "Now, come with me, we need to start on breakfast." That perked Akitsu right up as Kasumi had hoped and the Ice Sekirei stood up, before looking at her master.

"I'll try to free Genma here and see you two downstairs," Ranma said moving over to the statue.

Akitsu nodded, and moved to the door. Kasumi made to follow and Ranma said swiftly, "Kasumi, I swear, she wasn't naked when we went to bed last night. I just, I thought she needed some, um, some affection, I guess, because of a talk we had last night."

"I understand and I'm not judging," Kasumi replied. "I just don't want her naked with you in alone in the room. It's not appropriate." She giggled, winking at the younger 'girl'. "Not yet anyway."

With that Kasumi left the now spluttering Ranma and followed Akitsu out the door. Once alone Ranma turned to her old man, scratching at her chin thoughtfully. "So Pops, should I leave you like that, break you out or take pictures and then break you out?"

The ice block seemed to rumble in place for a moment, and Ranma grinned, pulling out a small camera from her bag. "Take pictures then break you out it is."

About half an hour later Nabiki stumbled out of her room in her normal pre-coffee Zombie mode, stumbling down the stairs as her primitive higher functions couldn't detect any coffee on the small table outside her room. She tripped further down the staircase, missing a step when there was a loud crash and a banging sound elsewhere in the house. "You'll pay for that boy!"

She would have tumbled forward but she was caught by Akitsu, who Kasumi had sent up the stairs with a cup of coffee a bare minute before. Akitsu held the cup of coffee under Nabiki's nose, watching as the girl's face seemed to slowly regain some life, then Nabiki's hands flashed faster than Akitsu could track, grabbing the cup and raising it to her lips greedily. Once more Nabiki seemed able to ignore the scalding nature of the coffee, which had actually been rather too hot for Akitsu's hands, though Akitsu bore it stoically.

A few seconds later, actual intelligence returned to Nabiki eyes, and she smiled thankfully at Akitsu. "Thanks Akitsu, honestly, I don't know why but mornings are **really** hard."

She took the cup from Akitsu and began to sip at it further as Akitsu nodded, about to turn away before she turned back, a thought occurring to her given Kasumi's lecture earlier. She gestured at Nabiki's chest. "Modesty," she said simply then turned away.

Nabiki blinked before glancing down at herself realizing not only that she was not wearing a bra underneath her overly large button up shirt, said shirt had opened in the front, giving any man there a very decent glimpse of her cleavage, and one of her nipples to boot. She quickly pulled it shut, looking around her with a blush on her face, breathing deeply as she realized that Ranma hadn't been with Akitsu.

Highly unusual, but I'm not about to look a gift horse in the mouth. Nabiki paused at that, then laughed quietly, shaking her head while her free hand worked on her shirt button.

At just that moment Ranma came in, still in his female form but now drenched and grumbling to herself. Nabiki noticed that the redhead wasn't exactly being modest at the moment either, her clothing literally stuck to her form in a way that left little to the imagination, showing off a pair of breasts that a lot of grown women Nabiki knew would commit murder for. She paused, looking at Nabiki, and nodding. "If you're out here I hope that means the bath's free?"

Nabiki nodded then paused holding up a hand. "Wait, I'll go check first, I've already heard one loud crash today... I think..." she paused. "That happened before I had my coffee intake, so I'm not certain. But I really don't want the house damaged or anything if Akane is in there and takes offense."

The redhead shivered a little, then leaped forward dramatically hugged Nabiki. "B, but, you'll save me won't you?!" *Hmm, might have been spending too much time with Uzume, essh, she's already effecting my sense of humor, not good.*

Nabiki gave Ranma a very deadpan look, and the shorter redhead pouted up at her before hopping away with a smirk on her face. "I'll agree to that in the interest of intra-family peace I suppose," Nabiki replied after a moment with her own smirk.

"Akane really needs to grow out of the idea that she's any kind of real threat, or that I'm a pervert. I don't like the way she sometimes glares at Akitsu and me." Ranma replied, somewhat more seriously.

"I have a theory that she was dropped on her head at some point as a toddler but that's just me," Nabiki said, walking away still smirking and shaking her head at the other girl.

Luckily the bathroom was free, and Ranma was both able to change back into his male form, and actually had a peaceful breakfast, staring out into the rain still coming down. "Ugh, I think I'm gonna call in sick today..."

"Don't bother, the school's closed," Nabiki said, shaking her head as she looked up from where she had just been on the phone. "Tornado warning apparently, a mild one, but given the damage your last two fights with Kuno did to the main building, they probably want the extra day to repair the school anyway."

She shook her head, smirking over at Ranma. "I wish I had known that, we could have sold your Martial Arts construction technique and made both a killing and good publicity. People would pay even better for a girl being able to do that kind of thing, especially in the rain."

"Don't even think it, I already agreed to let you take pictures of my female form, I am not going to do more than that," Ranma replied quickly. "Still, since I'm not due to be at Miya's until later, and I'm in no hurry to go out in this at all let

alone where Kuno or any would be Ashikabi could see me, what should we do for the day?"

"Go back to bed?" Nabiki replied seriously.

"Train?" Genma 'suggested' poking his son in the shoulder, who grinned at the older man, turning with a nod.

Akane looked up from her own meal eagerly. "Does that mean you can train with me too?"

"Hmm, let's have you and Akitsu spar together a few times. Your father and I will interrupt and correct your forms as you go." Genma said. "We'll intersperse each match between you two with one between me and the boy."

Akane scowled at the idea of interrupting her spars like that, but nodded anyway, eager to get whatever kind of instruction she could get. "Good let's get to it then, right after breakfast!" *I'll catch up to Ranma soon enough, and then prove I'm the strongest girl in Nerima, real or no!*

This thought stayed with her for the rest of the weekend, which was dominated by a near constant downpour. Every day she would spar with Akitsu, most of the time winning, though it began to get harder as time went on. Her instruction didn't go very well a lot of the time, Akane's temper getting in the way of listening to either parent, so the plan changed to give her and Akitsu the morning to spar, with Soun alone watching as referee, while Genma and Ranma trained together.

They would then break and instruct the two girls for a time until Ranma and Akitsu left to head to Miya's. In the evenings they would return for dinner, where they talked with Kasumi and afterward watched movies with the Tendo sisters as the old men drank the house dry.

The rain never became a full-fledged tornado, but it was certainly a very wet, damp and somewhat miserable weekend. The rain even put a damper on the Sekirei Plan, not a single fight occurred that weekend and only two wingings. Even Izumo House was effected, though there was still one incident, which occurred when Ranma decided to repair the splice tied into the heater's power unit.

He and Akitsu arrived, with Akitsu helpfully carrying the equipment he would need. Miya met them at the door and Ranma explained what he wanted to do, carefully setting aside the umbrella which had allowed him to retain his male body. "Since I know ya won't train with me outside, and I don't honestly want to either. Although, ya could come back with me and meet the Tendos at their place..."

Miya chuckled, one hand covering her mouth as she did, shaking her head. "I think not Ranma. I would feel remiss in my duties to my tenants if I left like that, and besides, I would much rather meet your father again on my own ground rather than possibly friendly ground towards him." There was also the fact Miya knew such a move on her part would have MBI screaming in fear and possibly overreacting to her leaving the north of the city and going so far away from Izumo House.

Ranma nodded, and asked, "So, have you decided if I should just cut off all that power, or figure out a way to add another few runs to the rest of the house's electrical runs? I still don't know why someone, you said his name was Seo? I still don't know why they did it the way they did."

"When that individual moved in, hiding her presence was a necessity even her power usage might well have told MBI where she was." Miya replied. "It is still an issue in many ways, but not nearly as much as it once was."

And if MBI wishes to take Matsu or the jinki from me, they are welcome to try. I am no longer so grief stricken I could not act in her defense, so long as I believed it was warranted at any rate.

Just then their talk was interrupted by a shout from the second floor. "I know you're in there! God dammit stop taking up so much of the bandwidth you hentai pervert!"

"That sounded almost like Kocho," Ranma mused, moving after Miya as she made her way down the hall toward the stair case.

They found the silver-haired woman pounding on the wall of the second-floor corridor, her mannerisms a stark contrast to her normal mature-seeming appearance. "Come on! I can't even download my games! You're not the only one who needs access to the internet anymore!"

"There's no one here!" shouted a voice from inside, sounding querulous and harried. "And even if there were, what I'm doing with the bandwidth is far more important than what you would be doing with it you gamer otaku!"

"Better a gamer than a hentai!" Kocho shot back, her glasses gleaming for some reason as she glared at the wall and presumably through it to whoever she was talking to. "I know precisely what you're doing, you think your firewall is able to stop me from seeing your video downloads or worse what sites you're visiting!?"

"Ararara, this sounds like an interesting discussion," Miya said, one hand on her chin as she walked up behind Kocho on silent feet. "Perhaps we should talk about it in more depth. Matsu-san, come out here please."

"M, Miya-sama, I swear I don't know what she's talking about!" Stammered the voice. "And, and you know I can't be seen during the day!"

"If MBI has any surveillance cameras currently trained on us I will destroy them, but I wish to speak to you face to face, not face to door." Miya replied firmly. "Now get out here, or else I'm coming in there."

Without waiting for the voice to reply Ranma gripped the door and looked at Miya, who nodded and he pulled the door open. The hidden latch broke under his pull, and the door flew wide. Ranma made a mental note to repair that later as he peered inside.

The room beyond the doorway was very dimly lit by the light of several computer screens, without a single window, but one overhead light which was currently off. In the center of this mass of electronics and wires was a bed, upon which a woman with large coke-bottle glasses and a white shift of some kind knelt facing the door. "Gah, why'd you do that!"

"Miya-nee asked you to come out, now come out and take yer punishment. Then maybe we can sit down and figure out how to share whatever this bandwidth is as well as the inn's electricity fairly, rather than stealing it and not lettin' anyone else share." Ranma replied dryly.

"Thank you for that Ranma-san, now if you could go and cut that power source off, I wish to talk to Matsu-san here about what she's been doing while living under my roof..." Miya said, the Hanya mask appearing behind her as she stalked into the room.

Later that day, Ranma was formally introduced to Matsu, Sekirei number 2, who was hiding here for reasons he didn't care to inquire about after learning she wasn't interested in physical combat. She and Kocho had an hour long argument about who had the better claim to the limited electricity of the house, with Ranma and Uzume watching with amusement as Miya tried to mediate. Finally Matsu was forced to agree to share the bandwidth for the internet equally, and to shut down two of her five computers to save electricity while Ranma agreed to set up more permanent runs to her room and an extra to Kocho's, as well as putting up a new cable box. In return both she and Kocho had to pay half again as much rent on a monthly basis.

Throughout this discussion, Matsu kept glancing at Ranma, not as if she was reacting to him, but as if she couldn't figure him out. Which, Miya supposed, made sense, given how she hadn't ever seen anything about him beyond his scholastic record.

Ranma too noticed the glances, as did Akitsu near the end of the discussion, though she did not realize what was behind them. In reply Akitsu's power reached out, making the air around the table grow cold for a moment as she moved to sit almost in Ranma's lap as she stared across at Matsu.

"Ara, none of that Akitsu-chan," Miya said smacking the ice Sekirei upside the head with her ladle lightly. "I don't think Matsu-san is reacting to Ranma, are you?"

"Gah, no! I'd never react to a Luddite like him! I doubt he's ever owned a cell phone in his life, let alone would know what to with a hacker like me." Matsu replied, before smirking slightly and throwing her chest out. "Or a woman like me, unless you've already taken care of that Aki-chan?"

Akitsu's face remained blank, but the temperature dropped once more. "Do not call me Aki-chan." She replied, and Ranma smiled. Wasn't so long ago that Akitsu wouldn't have said anything, now she was speaking up and willing to threaten someone else on so small a thing as a nickname.

"Now is that because you don't like the name, or because you don't want anyone to call you that but bro here?" Uzume teased.

"Both," Akitsu replied quickly, moving back to retake her position slightly behind and to one side of Ranma as Uzume laughed.

Ranma blushed but remained looking back across the table at Matsu. "So you got a problem with me because I don't

like technology? Or because of something else?"

Matsu looked away, growling. She didn't like to admit that she had no knowledge whatever about Ranma before he showed up here. She hadn't even known he had interacted with Miya and Takehito before that. He and his father had both come out of nowhere, and now she was being forced to reevaluate a lot of urban myths, rumors and tall tales to see if there was anything behind them. Worse however was the curse. "I, your curse, I'm sort of a scientist as well as a tech geek, and the idea of magic bothers me even knowing about Sekirei powers."

"Ah, gotcha. No worries there," Ranma replied, buying it completely. "You're not the first to say something about that aspect of my curse. Though I can't say I can see much of a difference between what you all can do and the curse."

Matsu nodded, having already had that argument with herself. "It'll just take some getting used to, and I'm honestly not that good with meeting new people anyway." Her face then turned perverted, her hands coming up and making grasping motions. "Huhuhuhu, Although I'd love to experiment on you, see if you're as... endowed as a man as you are gifted in your female form..."

Akitsu's eyes narrowed even as she fought a blush. She could, after all have answered that question in the affirmative. Nonetheless she would have acted and possibly skewered the perverted technomancer with ice spears except that Miya's Hanya mask had just appeared behind the landlady, and to a level heretofore unforeseen.

It now bled blood from the eyes, and there was a sound barely discernible of clacking wooden slates as the mask seemed to loom over Miya. Who, in turn, had stood up over Matsu, her eyes now shadowed by her hair. "Illicit activities are forbidden in Izumo House!" *Especialy between you and the boy who is my younger brother in all but blood you hentai Megane!*

Everyone, even Ranma had backed away at this new manifestation, with Uzume leaping over the table to hide behind the pigtailed martial artist. Akitsu had already taken cover there, burrowing into his back, while Uzume started to rock in place muttering, "Oh my god, what's with the noise, seriously what's with the noise!?"

The individual who was the actual target of Miya's terror technique had gone bleach white, and was now kowtowing as fast as she could, squealing, "I'm Sorry, I'm sorry, it was a joke, it was just a joke, I won't do anything, I promise!"

Miya continued to glare at Matsu for a few moments before the hanya mask disappeared. "Very good. If you do try anything, or break my rules again, I will not hesitate to tossing you out of Izumo House, is that understood?" Matsu nodded, her forehead still pressed into the floor and the discussion continued.

The animosity between the two technomancers flared up later that evening, forcing Miya to once again come between them, as they had taken to attacking one another's systems via the shared internet connection. Ranma however came up with a solution: an information and wargame battle. The two would compete and they each had to score a outright victory over the other in one another's areas of strength. This shut them both down, since while Matsu had more talent in hacking, she was absolute pants at most strategy games. Kocho in turn was not quite as good as Matsu was at hacking or defending her own systems from attack.

Ranma knew this was a short term solution, the two girls seemed to have a genuine, if rather childlike dislike of one another, but it kept the peace in the inn which was all Miya cared about. Ranma couldn't care less about their issues with one another so long as they didn't make more work for him which would take time away from training. If it did, Ranma warned that he would feel justified in destroying the computers they were so fond of. Much screaming and shouting later, they had both agreed to his terms.

Still, that was the only incident over the weekend and Ranma and the others of the Tendo household woke up Monday morning eager to see a sky that didn't have torrential rain falling on them from it. Others two went into school that Monday with a chipper attitude, though theirs were only peripherally based on the lack of rain.

OOOOOO

Namiji was on cloud nine as she practically danced into school Monday. Her prospective lover Takano Koji had allowed her to move in with him! And winged her right there on his couch after an **amazingly** romantic dinner! And then, because of the amount of rain they had gotten, the two of them had stayed inside for all of Friday and the rest of the weekend. Their bonding had reached its logical conclusion, and she had left him dehydrated and unconscious that morning.

Nothing can harsh my buzz right now! She thought happily, waving enthusiastically at the friends she had made her way over the damp ground toward St. Hebereke's main building.

"Oho, you seem happy this morning Namiji-chan," said a voice behind her

Namiji turned, bowing quickly. "Kodachi-senpai! How are you this morning?" Namiji replied respectfully, looking at the slightly older student that had addressed her.

Kodachi Kuno was a tallish girl built with the same athletic, svelte frame as Namiji. She was currently wearing the same uniform as Namiji, a brown skirt and white blouse combo that in the Sekirei's opinion was designed to be about as sexual as a paper bag, her long black hair done up in a long ponytail that trailed along her back. Kodachi's eyes were sharp and assessing, her expression currently somewhere between its normal haughty expression and amused as she stared at the younger girl, one well-manicured eyebrow raised in query.

"I'm quite happy today actually, though perhaps that is just your reflected glory," Kodachi said archly, taking her kohai by the elbow and gently turning her around back towards the school. "What has you in such a good mood Namiji-chan? Have you finally broken that boy, Takano was it, out of his rather silly concept that you would be enslaving yourself to him if he let you kiss him?"

While like her fellow Sekirei Namiji had been told to keep the Sekirei Plan a secret, it had proven impossible. Kodachi had called her out on her more than human physical abilities, coupled with a severe lack of education and formal training after drubbing Namiji in a sparring match a week after she joined the rhythmic gymnastics team. Once tied up in ribbon that was stronger than steel and dangling from the roof, Namiji had found it remarkably easy to tell Kodachi of her inhuman status. To her surprise the older girl didn't care at all about it, only that she had skill in Rhythmic Gymnastics and was willing to put in the effort to become even better.

"Y-Yes! I was able to convince him, and we spent the entire weekend together, it was so romantic!" Namiji gushed nodding at a few of her other teammates on the rhythmic gymnastics team as they came over to listen. "I could have wished that it took more than my being attacked yesterday to do it but..."

"Wait!" Kodachi said sharply, grabbing Namiji's arm again and turning Namiji around to stare at her face. "You were attacked! Are you hurt, where did it happen?"

"Oh don't worry senpai! It didn't amount to anything. I was rescued by two people passing by." Namiji replied hurriedly. While Kodachi recognized fighting was a necessary part of the Sekirei game, she was not happy at the thought of her most promising student/team member injuring herself outside sanctioned Rhythmic martial arts matches. She had even made noises about hunting any such attackers down before this.

"You were attacked by other Sekirei such as yourself and you were then saved by two regular citizens?" Kodachi asked, noticeably confused.

"Yes, I can understand why that would sound strange, though they weren't normal by any means. It went like this..." From there Namiji went on to explain what it happened the day before, with the ice Sekirei Akitsu showing up along with her apparent boyfriend-nee Ashikabi.

"And you say this ice Sekirei would not be able to truly bond like your people can? That's rather sad," Kodachi said cocking her head thoughtfully.

She was ambivalent about the whole Sekirei situation. Yes, they were well above human norm, but that was all they were. They seemed normal mentally outside the odd fixation on their Ashikabi. And she had yet to meet many of them anyway. Her little kohai was the only one on the rhythmic gymnastics team to give Kodachi a run for her money because she was a bit faster and a bit stronger, but those natural abilities didn't automatically mean Namiji was actually **better** than Kodachi.

She was not as skilled as Kodachi, and she was completely unable to hide weapons like Kodachi could. The concept of a ki space, which was one of the things that Kodachi had learned when becoming serious about rhythmic gymnastics from her teacher before she died, seemed to elude Namiji entirely.

"I don't think so, but then again senpai I didn't think humans could hide weapons as long as their forearms in a skirt pocket," Namiji replied with a smirk on her face. "So who knows, maybe someone will be able to fix Akitsu's ability to bond."

"Of course you're amazed by that, everything about me is amazing Namiji-chan, HOHOhohoho!" Kodachi replied, laughing and turning her nose up haughtily.

Namiji giggled taking Kodachi's attitude in stride, and the two of them entered the building as the other members of

the team came forward. They too had questions, though they centered more on Namiji's new Ashikabi and what they had been doing that weekend.

While the questions became rather vulgar in her opinion Kodachi tuned them out, thinking hard about what she'd just heard. She'd rather like to have a boyfriend, Kodachi had never had one and romance and such like was of course interesting to her as a girl. *Pity, this Ranma fellows sounded interesting, but if he has already met a Sekirei, I doubt I would have much luck.*

Kodachi knew she was good looking, that was not up for debate. But she certainly wasn't up to Sekirei level. *Their race seems to have a special understanding with gravity when it came to its impact on the body. If I had breasts like that one I saw two nights past in that rather daring purple outfit my back would be crippled within a week.*

Still, it couldn't help to look into the two them, if only to thank them for helping my kohai. And if it looks as if this Ice-wielding Sekirei hasn't truly staked a claim, then perhaps this Ranma will be interesting enough to earn my actual attention...

OOOOOO

That morning Nabiki didn't have anything planned at school so walked with Ranma and Akane talking to Ranma as he walked along the top of the fence post, while Akane walked on Nabiki's other side.

Akane was watching the two of them like a hawk, scowling irritably at Ranma occasionally, still annoyed by how often Ranma did things that showed off his talents, and that those talents were well beyond her abilities. *Put it out of your mind Akane, she thought to herself. Remember, daddy's already begun training you, you'll catch up in no time. You'll catch up to them soon.*

But putting that point aside only made her see how much Ranma seemed to favor hanging around Nabiki over her despite Akane being the martial artist in the family. Not that she wanted Ranma to pay attention to her like that of course. But it just didn't make sense to her unless he wanted to do perverted things to Nabiki, hence why Akane was currently watching him like a hawk.

"Why are you up there anyway?" Nabiki asked, looking up at where Ranma was balancing on the rail of the fence beside her. She had watched him move just as easily over that thin rail as the heavy stone walls beside it, and she couldn't help but be impressed.

Ranma shrugged. "A few reasons. One is balance practice as you can see," he said, flipping to his hands and moving along on them as easily as he had on his feet.

"Show off." Akane muttered.

"So does that mean you could do it little sister and you're just choosing not to, or..." Nabiki drawled, breaking off with a smirk sent Akane's way as her younger sister glared at her, before turning back to Ranma. "And the other reasons?"

"Habit's a bit of it I suppose, this is how my old man trained me for as long as I can remember. Then there's the fact that up here I can see more of the area around me, always an important thing if I think I might have trouble. And I like the view too." Ranma sent a upside down smirk at Nabiki when he said that. "Not everything's about martial arts with me, just most things."

This caused her to blush slightly but then she realized that he hadn't meant the comment to be taken like that. In a desperate attempt to change the subject before her younger sister could notice her blush however, Nabiki asked quickly, "How long would it take someone like me to learn that?"

After flipping himself upright and walking on his feet once more Ranma looked Nabiki up and down. "Well you're in really good shape, like I've said before, so there's no physical reason you shouldn't be able to balance like this eventually unless you have issues with balance normally. And I don't think you do, at least I've seen no sign of that kind of thing outside of when your coffee-less in the morning."

Nabiki laughed then gasped as Ranma suddenly jumped down behind her, lifting her up by her waist and hopping back up onto the fence post. "Try it now. Don't worry, I'll be here if ya need me" he said, stepping back slightly his arms going from around her waist to just resting his hand on her waist.

There was nothing even flirtatious about that touch really given the Furinkan uniform and how still Ranma kept his hands. But Nabiki could not remember the last time a boy had ever touched her and found herself blushing slightly.

"Go on," Ranma said, cocking his head quizzically at her, "walk."

Shaking her head again at the idea of anyone being so familiar with her like this Nabiki began to walk forward along the fence post. Below them Akane continued to glare up at them, her fingers twitching. Her sister's blush and glare her way was the only thing stopping Akane from attacking Ranma for being a pervert grabbing her sister like that. That, and the little voice in her head telling her that Ranma actually hadn't done anything perverted. Stupid and rather sudden, yes, but that was just Ranma being Ranma.

The three of them continued on their way silently as Ranma continued to hold Nabiki by the waist, letting her walk forward, getting used to balancing and how to put one foot in front of the other. "Okay, now I'm going to let go," he said after they finished a small turn on the fence. "I'm still right here, you won't fall."

Nabiki slowly sent a nod over her shoulder, having actually been enjoying this, and not just the feel of Ranma's hands on her sides like that. A few steps on however she stopped, frowning. "I just realized, I'm wearing a skirt!"

"So?" Ranma asked, frowning. "What's the point of that? There's no one down below you or anything."

"True but if I fall..."

"You won't fall," Ranma interrupted shaking his head. "I'm right here, I'll catch you."

Again Nabiki blushed slightly at how those words sounded, shaking her head internally. *God, what is he doing to me! Is it just because he's a guy who's paying attention to me like that? He hasn't done a single thing that he really meant as flirtatious except maybe touching my calf that one time at school. But even then it was more innocent than anything else. It's just his words and his attention that's all!* But after having a lifetime of having no romantic interests whatsoever, it was still making her blush. *Gah!*

Akane's watching them was also causing Nabiki issues, making her want to burst out into laughter. Teasing Akane was easily one of her favorite pastimes and she could see Akane slowly coming to a boil, the sight of a boy touching Nabiki at all, and possibly the slightly flirtatious nature of the moment, beginning to overwhelm Akane's very limited self-control. *You would think after the past few days she would have learned not to lash out, but I'd bet a hundred yen that she'll lash out in under four minutes...*

"Now go a little faster," Ranma said. "Eventually you'll get to the point where you can run and still concentrate on your balance, then you'll start to not need to concentrate on your balance at all when you're walking, then slowly going faster and faster at naturally as possible."

"Pretty good for a first day at least," he said, obviously jinxing Nabiki since a mere second later she put a foot slightly wrong. She began to totter, and he quickly moved forward, his hands again grabbing her waist holding her steady. "See, I told you I wouldn't let you fall."

"You two need to cool off!" Akane shouted suddenly, grabbing a ladle from an old woman they just passed and splashing the ladle towards Ranma's face. Luckily for Akane her aim was true only catching Ranma in the face rather than both of them.

Nabiki felt the arm around her waist shift, becoming thinner and smaller, the heart muscled back pressing into hers so nicely suddenly becoming two protuberances pressed into her, and she shook her head. "That is really weird," she said, "I don't blame you or anything for it Ranma, either getting it or changing forms right now. But actually feeling the change like that is beyond bizarre."

"Heh, you should see what it feels like from in here." Ranma said pointing at her own head before hopping down with Nabiki still in her arms. She sighed, wiping at her wet face. "I really, **really** do not want to show up at school and this form! I don't want to see Kuno's response to it given how he's chasing after Akitsu and Akane already."

Even Akane looked a little green around the gills at that and she shook her head. "I'm going to go ahead and deal with the pervert brigade. Without interference this time," she said glaring at Ranma. "I suppose I, I also have to apologize, I thought you'd grabbed something else there when Nabiki lost her balance," she said, each word coming out as if it was like pulling teeth.

"Oh...I guess from your angle it might've looked like that..." he said diplomatically, knowing it really hadn't, but willing to go along with things.

Nabiki looked as if she wasn't so willing, but she wasn't wet either, and she eventually sighed, waving her sister on.

Come on, I'll show you too Dr. Tofu."

"The guy that my old man's working with?"

"That's him. He's been our family doctor for since I was..." Nabiki paused, thinking. "Six or seven I think. Come on its on the way to school anyway."

"What is your sister's problem with me? I mean, I'm getting the impression there's a lot more behind her attitude towards me than just her irritation at my curse and my being better at in martial arts." Ranma asked, the two girls now walking side-by-side down a little side street towards the clinic in the distance with Akane nowhere in sight.

"It's not you, at least not beyond the facts you've already noticed. It's the boys at school and Akane's own preconceived notions." Nabiki replied coolly. She **really** didn't want to talk about her sister, but she knew Ranma had a right to know.

"I have no idea where it began, or which began first, Kuno's announcement to the school, or her own notions of what constituted perversion. But it is there, and you have to be aware of it, she will lash out and attack anything she sees as perverted, and you've seen her anger issues, that's been around at least since she was twelve or so I think."

"That doesn't tell me anything I didn't already know. So there's nothing I can do about her irritation towards me?" Ranma asked.

"Short of convincing your father to let you move out, no," Nabiki drawled. "She's going to keep watching you like a hawk because you're a boy and near her own age. Just be grateful she doesn't think you're getting up to anything perverted with your own female form. And that Akane thinks that Akitsu isn't so much a threat since she can beat her in hand to hand."

Ranma was about to answer but instead he suddenly turned, her hand flashing out with a punch that shattered a skeleton which had been sneaking up behind her. "W, what the heck!"

Behind the skeleton a young man, somewhere in his early thirties perhaps, crouched looking up with slightly wide eyes behind a pair of glasses. "Sorry about that," he said sheepishly. "I was only trying to sneak up on you, you had no reason to destroy Betty like that."

"Betty?" Ranma asked blankly. "You **named** a skeleton?"

"Actually I think it was Akane who named it or perhaps Kasumi when she was a freshman at Furinkan," Nabiki said dryly. Then as the two men looked at her, or rather two men and one currently 'wo'man she held up her fingers in front of her chest, bowing her head in prayer. "Alas, poor Betty I knew her well."

"I see you still have your snarky sense of humor Nabiki," Dr. Tofu said, standing up and looking at the redhead thoughtfully. Tofu thought he had completely erased his presence, but the redhead's skill at sensing had surprised him. She was evidently a martial artist, he'd known that before trying to sneak up on her, but the redhead's senses were just as keen as her body seemed to be.

Ranma for her part was also looking at Dr. Tofu in interest. "You're a martial artist," she said bluntly nodding her head.

"Only a dabbler," Dr. Tofu said smiling and watched Ranma's eyes narrow, allowing a small smile to appear on his own face. "Can I ask what you two are here for, considering that schools going to start in..." he looked at his watch "About 10 minutes."

"Ranma here needs some hot water," Nabiki said before looking over at Ranma. "When was the last time you had a physical?"

"A few years ago," Ranma said with a shrug. "I've never been sick a day in my life, so I don't really see the point of worrying about it, and if you're asking if I'm going to have a physical in this form, you can think again!"

"This form?" Dr. Tofu asked, leading the way into his clinic. He quickly gave Ranma a small glass of hot water, then watched in shock as the curse activated, watching as the redhead grew at least a foot and a half in height and her shoulders widened rather dramatically.

Ranma looked down at himself, frowning thoughtfully. "I might have to do more sword training in my female form, I hadn't noticed before but I am noticeably weaker in the shoulders and arms in that body."

"Why not turn it into an advantage?" Nabiki asked. "Train one body for speed one body for strength. Then when you switch, you can throw off your opponents."

"I was already doing that," Ranma said with a nod at Nabiki's grasp of tactics. "But a swordsman's muscles are slightly different than normal muscles, not much but slightly enough to be noticeable. It might slow me down if I am using a weapon at the time I change."

Nabiki shrugged ignorance. Just because she was a daughter of two martial artists hadn't made her an expert on such things, merely a decent observer. That had always been Akane's area of interest, or at least that was what Nabiki told herself. She shook off the odd memory of her father ignoring her in favor of training Akane, of losing any enthusiasm when her initial interest in it was not encouraged, ignored and overlooked by her father in favor of Akane's greater aptitude.

Instead she looked over at Dr. Tofu. "Have you ever seen anything like that before?" she asked. "I know you've traveled a lot."

Dr. Tofu shook his head. "I've seen a lot of interesting and even amazing things, and I have heard of Jusenkyou, but I've never seen one cursed there in person. Indeed, I thought them a myth, despite knowing that magic still existed in places."

"Don't suppose you've ever heard of a cure for it?" Ranma asked hopefully. Even if he had asked the guide and gotten a negative there except with a specific and long lost item coupled with the water of drowned man, it never hurt to ask.

"I'm afraid not, and I would be very, very careful about looking for one. The cursed springs are powerful phenomenon, it would take a lot of power to remove any such curse. You might find yourself in a worse position." Dr. Tofu warned, and Ranma nodded, having heard the same thing from the guide. "Was there anything else you wanted?"

"Actually doc now that you mention it, I'd like to bring someone else by. I'd like you to give her a physical." He looked over at Nabiki. "I'm not certain I trust MBI to have given Akitsu a physical, and if they well implanted anything I want to know about it."

"What made you think of that?" Nabiki asked surprised and rather impressed.

Ranma shrugged. "I've seen TV shows where they implant things in animals that monitor them in the wild, and the way MBI seems to look at the Akitsu and the others is sort of like they think of them as dangerous animals."

"Sekirei correct?" Dr. Tofu asked. "I've seen a few of them around outside of Nerima when I go to a few of my clients in the next ward over. They don't come into Nerima itself for some reason, though that might be because MBI doesn't own it outright like it does the rest of the city, certainly they never tried to get me to sell my lease to my clinic. Is there anything you want me to look at exactly?"

"My friend can use her ki, but she can't seem to access it all. There's some kind of block on it, coupled with a weird tattoo inscribed on her forehead. But if you can look at it, maybe we'll discover more."

When Dr. Tofu made to open his mouth, possibly to say something along the lines of not believing that ki existed Ranma held up a hand pointing a finger at him. "And don't give me that shit about you not believing in ki or anything like that, I can sense ki in you. Heck I bet you could even do a ki attack yourself if you tried."

Dr. Tofu sighed faintly, looking at Nabiki and Ranma, who had an interested look on her face. "I've seen Ranma do a ki attack Doctor, I know it exists."

The doctor nodded and held up a hand, which suddenly glowed slightly along one finger. "Yes, I can use some ki moves, no attacks though, that would go against my Hippocratic Oath. This tattoo you mention, how fine is the work on it? Can you see any symbols or anything of that nature within the tattoo itself?"

"No, nothing like that," Ranma said shaking his head.

"Interesting, there was a way to use tattoos inscribed directly over acupuncture points to stimulate those points or shut them down, but I haven't heard about anything matching your description. Well I'm not certain I'll be able to help, but bring her around on Thursday next week. I'll have several hours free, and we can do both of your physicals at once."

He held up a hand in turn when Ranma made to speak and the martial artist paused, allowing Tofu to go on. "If you

haven't had a physical in a few years which means you're due, especially at your age Ranma. Your body is still growing, and you need to be aware of any problems as they arise."

"Fine," Ranma groused, turning to leave. "We'll see you then."

Listening to this Nabiki felt a tiny twinge of jealousy, a feeling she knew all too well thanks to her Akane being daddy's little darling. *Oh hell no, It's been less than two weeks since he arrived! No way could I have feelings for him already, nothing more than interest anyway.* "You're awfully concerned about Akitsu," she said, injecting a note of teasing rather than anger in her tone easily, smacking Ranma on the shoulder. "The ice maiden slowly thawing you out?"

Ranma blushed hotly looking away. "I, I know what, you know, attraction is." He smirked suddenly shaking his head. "I had the hugest crush on this anime character when I was growing up, and I know Akitsu's attractive and I know, I mean I like her well enough but I'm unwilling to go as fast as she wants to because I'm really worried about it only being because she latched onto me as the first person to accept her with that mark on her forehead."

Nabiki looked at him blankly, her feeling of jealousy subsiding quickly. "Moron."

"What, what did I say?" Ranma asked as the two of them walked out of the clinic.

"Nothing. I'm just feeling tired all of a sudden." Nabiki said shaking her head wearily. *If you think that, you are really dense, like concrete dense!* She thought as she led the way to school via an alternate route that might get them there before the gates closed if they were quick.

OOOOOO

The two of them were of course seen entering the school together, and rumors began to circulate about how friendly the two of them were even faster than they had been doing already. A few of Nabiki's friends, both girls and boys were confused, startled and rather happy that Nabiki was showing interest in a guy. A few other girls were irritated that it meant Ranma was most definitely off the market. They might have been willing to chance things with just Akitsu, given the lack of information about their relationship, but not Nabiki.

Ranma forced himself to stay up for it the first few classes which after three days without the irritation of going to school was rather hard. He was even forced to use a bit of pencil at one point to keep awake by propping them open, knowing that Miya would be displeased with him, if she found out somehow that he was falling behind asleep again and unwilling to chance it. The fact that she was as close to a mother figure that he had coupled with the fact that Miya could withhold training gave her quite a big stick to beat him with even when she wasn't physically present.

Because of this, and the fact that Ranma had already learned he was behind in language arts class, math and science classes, Ranma was in a bit of a mood when lunch came around. Not even looking in Akane's direction or replying to anyone's attempt to talk to him, Ranma hopped out the window towards the same tree he'd been eating at since arriving at Furinkan, then up into its boughs.

Nabiki met him there, frowning up at where Ranma sat up in the tree growling to himself. "What's wrong?" She wondered if Ranma had been dealing with the same issues as she had fielding questions, both innocent and not about if they were together.

But no one had actually been brave enough to approach Ranma about that. His strength and seeming disinterest in making friends at school had kept most people from becoming interested in getting to know him. The girls were interested in his good looks but none were really interested in Ranma himself. There were also a few boys were interested in befriending him so as to get pictures of Akane at home, Nabiki's prices being far too high for all of them except on very rare occasions, but that was all.

Ranma shook his head. "I'm behind in my three of my classes. I couldn't even follow some of the things the teacher was saying in math class, and I have four chapters I need to read by next Monday to catch up! And essays I have to write for Language arts too, I've never even written an essay before!"

"Prepare for five paragraph hell," Nabiki said consolingly, reaching up to pat him on the leg as she shook her head. "If you need help with your essays, talk to Kasumi. She's really quite an excellent writer though you'll have to try hard to get her to admit it. I'll warn you now to not try to foist the work off on her somehow. Both Akane and I tried to get her to do our work for us a time or two, and trust me, the punishments Kasumi came up were worse than doing the work in the first place."

Ranma nodded morosely. "I wouldn't have even thought about doing that, but it'll cut into my training time," he

whined, complete with a full on pout on his face.

The sight of this caused Nabiki to throw back her head with a laugh, startling several people nearby and Akane who had been moving towards them, scowling irritably and intent on questioning the two about their relationship. She stopped, staring at the sight of her sister laughing like that, then moved away quickly when she noticed Kuno moving toward them from their other side.

"There you are my sorcerous foe! Your attempt to hide yourself from my righteous wrath has failed again! Ever will I find you as long as you are on the hallowed grounds of this institution! Just as I will fight to free the glorious ice maiden's soul is long as you hold it in your grip!"

Ranma scowled angrily, hopping out of the tree, eager to have an outlet for his angry. "How long does it take you to set up your bets?" he asked, moving towards where Kuno was still spouting nonsense.

Nabiki's eyes flicked around the area noting where her factors were in the gathering crowd before she replied. "About ten minutes or so."

"Then you better bet on ten minutes 15 seconds." Ranma answered, looking up at the clock which was set in the wall of the school's main building above the entrance. "I'm in no mood for Kuno's shIIIT!"

Just then he pushed Nabiki to the side, jumping away himself as the sword user slashed the air in front of him sending a wind blade through the area the two of them had been standing in. "Right that's it!" Ranma growled, only to be held back by Nabiki's flinging a nearby rock at the back of his head.

She glared at him, and Ranma glared right back while dodging another attack as Kuno closed in before nodding, understanding her point. 'Ten minutes and 15 seconds', he mouthed back.

Luckily his head had been turned away by most of the crowd, so no one noticed and Nabiki quickly rounded up a few of her factors telling them the plan. They got really good odds for the bet. No one was willing to admit that Ranma was so good as to beat Kuno in that little a time, despite the number of times he already beaten him.

For the next ten minutes Ranma kept on dodging, using his hands occasionally to redirect or block an attack, but mostly just dodging around, getting a feel for Kuno's speed once more as well as analyzing his long range wind attack. *There's nothing to learn here, nothing to take away from this ass hole! He keeps on attacking me in the same old way, he hasn't even been training as far as I can tell, and certainly hasn't added anything new to his repertoire. Even a new weapon would've been **something!***

Ranma was so above Kuno in skill he could keep one eye on the clock above the schoolhouse and still dodge just as easily. When the clock struck ten minutes after the fight had begun, Ranma jumped forward. He batted aside the latest attack with one hand, before grabbing the sword right before Kuno tried to swing it backwards. By that point ten seconds had passed since he had begun his attack, and the next second found his fist slamming into Kuno's chest with enough force to lift him off and shoot him backwards, through the outer wall of the school and out the other side.

"You don't learn! You haven't learned from the very beginning! Don't fight me again until you have something new to try, and don't ever fight me with other people around! We're martial artists, were supposed to defend other people not put them in danger, which you've done several times now!" He shouted, before turning away, tossing his ponytail over his shoulder contemptuously as he moved towards the school building.

He never noticed the looks he was getting from various women there. Nor did he see Nabiki's taking a brief moment to glance his way while orchestrating her various factors to collect the money they had just won. *That was... hmmm... Ranma really is something else...*

OOOOOO

Later that day as they were walking home from school Nabiki shook her head as Ranma indicated the fence. "Too many people around, sorry. Besides, I wanted to ask you a question about whether or not you'd decided on modeling for me."

"I said I would, so yeah," Ranma said with a shrug. "Do you want to do it today?" He grinned suddenly. "You might want to come over to Izumo anyway: I want to introduce you all to Miya-nee if that's okay. I think she and Kasumi would get on great so she was my first choice but if you want to come over and do it today that's fine too." He frowned a little shaking his head. "As for the pictures I'd be more comfortable if I had Miya there. No offense, but I know her better than I know you, and I feel more at home at her place."

"That's fine," Nabiki said with a smile, the genuine nature of which would have startled anyone who knew her save Kasumi. "I'd like to meet this woman who had such an impact on you anyway."

"Good," Ranma replied and then smirked. "You might even see a little bit of a floor show. I don't want to ruin it for you now by telling you though."

"If it's more of your sparring or whatever I don't care so much, I've already gotten rather tired of the noise in evenings," Nabiki said dryly. Then she looked away as Ranma laughed, pushing her in the shoulder gently before hopping back up onto the fence.

Akane had stayed behind to help one of the clubs that she routinely helped out. She was the star of many of them, Akane's physical skills and above all strength putting her head and shoulders above normal girls. The school had taken home several dozen trophies in the past few years thanks to her, and the teachers and principal, whoever the heck he was, Nabiki had never seen the man, wanted that to continue.

This left the two of them alone, and they talked quietly all the way home, Ranma asking Nabiki what she would have Ranma do as a model, and sharing some money making ideas of his own. Normally Ranma wouldn't have cared about that kind of thing, but the amount of food Akitsu, Ranma and Genma ate was enough to bankrupt the Tendos in short order. Soun's job as a councilman didn't bring in much and Genma was being paid barely enough to cover his own food expenses.

The idea of selling Ranma's martial arts construction skills to pay for any damages done in battles Ranma witnessed was a good one Nabiki had to admit, but then she expanded on it. "I think before we do that we should also use your skills in some kind of exhibition of martial arts construction, advertise that you'll work on whatever was damaged, then sell tickets or let people make wagers on first if you can or not and then how long it takes you to finish."

"After three or four exhibitions like that we could then start to charge the owners. Between paying you or going further into debt to MBI at twice the price say I bet a lot of people would pay that no doubt. Right there might make more money than all of my schemes at school." Nabiki shook her head ruefully. "If we do that, we could pay for the house's extended food bill for a month with, say two jobs depending on the size? After that it would be pure profit, though I think we should keep going."

Her head continued to shake from side to side ruefully. "If we get as much money as I think that scheme can net us, I know a few ways to broker it into even more, a long range investment if you would. There are a few things going on in America that I think are going to have a huge impact on the local economy, just as much as MBI has in Japan, but without any of the negative side of things or the Sekirei Plan."

Ranma shrugged. "I've never cared about that kind of thing before. But if you're so sure about it, give me the information. I'll talk to Miya and one of her tenants about it, Kagari seems the type to notice stuff like that and have an opinion. If they think it's a good idea I'll let you invest my money too. As for how we split them money, let's say straight up split for a few months, then after that 75-25 split me-you? I mean, I'll be the one doing most of the physical labor so..."

"That's actually very generous considering everything Ranma," Nabiki said warmly, banishing the reactions of anyone at school to the idea of someone trusting with their money like that, before sighing and looking away. Ranma was looking more and more like a diamond in the rough to her in many ways, and she wondered if maybe this whole engagement thing might turn out to be workable after all, despite her initial reaction to his curse.

The physical attraction was there obviously, after all in both forms Ranma was **hot!** Nabiki didn't consider herself bisexual by any means, but it didn't actually turn her off like it obviously her little sister. But Nabiki wasn't one to act just on physical attraction. Yet on top of that she was beginning to like Ranma as a person more and more.

It's not love, it is not even a crush, but I could seriously see it becoming either one in time. But then where does Akitsu fit in this? The attraction between the two of them is obvious and it goes way beyond the physical. Akitsu has had a hard life, she deserves some happiness, and the two of them have a lot in common, certainly more than me and Ranma anyway. Shaking her head Nabiki decided set those thoughts aside to look at later. Right now, she was just going to have some fun later today, take some pictures and make some money.

At home they found Genma and Soun sparring with Akitsu. Soun seemed to only barely be able to keep up with Akitsu physically, though in skill he easily surpassed her despite being incredibly rusty in Ranma's opinion. His father on the other hand simply surpassed both of them in skill, style, speed, strength and was obviously holding back.

"We have to find one a close combat type Sekirei to join us in these spars," Ranma said as he stepped out onto the

covered pathway leading to the dojo. Behind him Nabiki went upstairs to change, as well as grab a few items she thought would both fit Ranma and look amazing for the pictures.

Akitsu stopped fighting immediately, moving over toward Ranma only to find herself suddenly on her back, Genma's fist hovering an inch over her face. "Do not look away from a spar!" he said sternly. "Until the spar is ended, treat it like an actual battle, understood?"

Akitsu nodded then froze the area around him solid, before he could break away. "Understood," she said simply, standing up and moving around the semi-frozen man even as he began to smash the ice to pieces around him.

Shaking his head, Soun turned away, as the frozen water and ice around his old friend went to work changing him into a panda. "Why do you say we need to find another Sekirei?"

"Akitsu is an element user but others seem to specialize in weapons or hand-to-hand. I've fought some of those already, but while they weren't a threat, I'd be interested to see how quickly they can learn things." Ranma replied. Of course he also knew that Miya was more than a threat she was a freaking mountain in comparison to him, but Ranma didn't consider her a normal example of the Sekirei race. Indeed, he wondered if she was something entirely different because her power eclipsed that of any other Sekirei in the city.

"Interesting," Soun said nodding in what he thought was a sagely manner.

Ranma thought he looked rather ridiculous but he didn't comment, instead turning to his old man. "Anyway, Nabs and I are..." he paused ducking under a thrown shoe, turning to shout up at Nabiki's open window. "Who throws a shoe, honestly!"

"Don't call me Nabs damn it!" Nabiki's voice reached him.

Rolling his eyes, Ranma turned back to his father. "Anyway, I will be taking Nabiki and Akitsu over to Izumo. She has something she wanted to talk to one of the tenants there about." Ranma was not going to tell his father Nabiki had talked her into posing for her pictures. "Are you still planning to come over Friday night and then leave with Soun on a training trip?"

Soun scowled at Ranma calling him by his first name, a sign of disrespect from a young student to a master. But Genma didn't leap to his defense, and he subsided, knowing that as he was, Soun had no chance of beating Ranma in a match. Even at full strength Soun knew from watching the boy his speed and strength might be above Soun's own.

"Yes boy, I said I would, didn't I?" Genma-panda signed back, while Akitsu watched closely trying to figure out what he was doing with the signs to make the different messages appear on the same sign just by flipping it around.

"Cool, just making sure. I'll tell Miya to expect ya," Ranma replied, while inside he was cackling eagerly. Oh boy was that meeting going to be fun! "Anyway, I better tell Kasumi we're heading out."

Kasumi of course agreed to come and meet Miya and help Ranma with his language arts studies in the evenings after dinner, provided he concentrated on it as she expected. If Ranma wasn't willing to take his studies seriously she wasn't willing to help him. She also decided they should put off her coming over to meet Miya until Ranma was caught up.

A few moments later, Ranma was carrying Nabiki on his back as he and Akitsu hopped over the rooftops towards the northern section of the city. Nabiki was blushing hotly, feeling her chest pressing into Ranma's back, her arms and legs wrapped around Ranma's body. But the view of the city as they were hopping along took her breath away. "This is fun," she said into his ear. "I've never seen the city from this angle."

"You should see it from on high!" Ranma said with a laugh, lifting one hand to point up at Tokyo Tower. "I've been up there a few times, though not since I got back admittedly. The view from up there is amazing."

"I've seen it from the inside, I can't imagine it's too different from the outside from up there Ranma," Nabiki said somewhat bemusedly. "But seeing the city like this from so close, yet from an entirely different angle is very strange and fun. That and the speed we're going!"

Ranma shrugged his shoulders, before cocking his head quizzically. "Is it still called Tokyo Tower?"

"Yes, there was a mass protest when the head of MBI tried to make need Shin Tower."

"Do you know if MBI ever tried to buy out Nerima like it bought the rest of the city? Hell, I don't even know what that really means."

"I could explain it to you, but I really don't want you to fall asleep right now..." Nabiki drawled, causing Ranma to toss her to Akitsu who caught her as Nabiki shrieked in fury. "Damn it Ranma!"

"Heh, don't tease the guy holding ya in midair, that should be somewhere in the common sense handbook." Ranma said turning and now facing Akitsu and Nabiki as they continued on. "Now, try to explain it to me."

"Stocks, land and businesses. Some businesses, small ones, don't have stocks of course but they own their buildings and have agreements in place with distribution companies elsewhere." Nabiki replied, leaning her head back against Akitsu's chest. "Hmmm, this is more comfortable than your back Ranma, I have to say. MBI bought out the stocks of all publicly and even most of the privately owned businesses in Tokyo, the only exception being a few almost equally large privately owned companies.

"Then they bought out all the government-owned land, the utilities and then all the lands and buildings they could." Nabiki shook her head. "There was a major public campaign against that, but MBI won a lot of support after renovating the fire and police department's vehicles gratis. Then they offered to subsidize all the small businesses in return for ownership of the buildings they were in. That is all that I know about that process anyway."

"I still wonder how the hell they were allowed to do all that, I mean yeah I can see them getting some public support for the police thing, but the rest? Weird. But anyway, they didn't try all that with Nerima?"

"They did, but they didn't succeed. Kuno's family owns most of Nerima in various ways, and he refused to sell, and what they don't own is privately owned going back generations, like the Tendo house. My father's family has lived there since the Meiji Era. Heh, I can still remember Daddy's reaction to their attempt to make him sell. Funniest thing I've ever seen, he did that big head attack of his then fell into one of his weeping fits while still using the technique." Nabiki replied.

Ranma laughed and the trip continued. Akitsu and Ranma began discussing further training ideas for her power, with Nabiki interjecting occasionally. She wasn't a martial artist, but she was a very good observer, and had a natural, if untrained, tactical mind.

When they arrived at Izumo House Uzume answered the door, dressed for once thankfully. The clothes in question were a pair of jeans which looked painted on and a tight shirt with a star on the front over her chest, but at least her clothing covered all the important bits.

Staring at the slightly older brunette Nabiki shook her head. "You have got to be a Sekirei with proportions like that," she said bluntly. "What God or Goddess have you all made a deal with to get bodies like that?"

Behind Uzume Miya giggled slightly, covering her mouth with her hand as she moved forward while Uzume simply grinned. "Jealous?" she asked striking a pose.

"Not hardly," Nabiki said, standing straight and crossing her arms under her own chest, cocking her hips at the same time. Nabiki was proud of her body, and wasn't about to be jealous of some alien woman. "There seems to be a significant downside to being a Sekirei. After all, I'm no fighter."

You might not be a fighter in the physical sense but I can tell you've got spirit at least Miya thought, but did not say aloud. "You must be Nabiki yes, the middle one? Ranma has told me about you and your sisters. Please be welcome in my home."

Nabiki bowed politely, looking interestedly at the purple-haired woman. There was nothing in her manners that indicated she was a martial artist to her mind, except for her confident stance and mannerisms, not cockiness, but simple self-contained confidence. Nabiki had no ki sense, so couldn't feel the frankly insanely terrifying pillar of power that Miya was in terms of her life energy. All she saw was a beautiful woman whose serene manner put Kasumi's best mask to shame.

"Did you actually ask him to pose for you?" Uzume asked. The idea of that had come up while the duo was doing their work on MBI tower.

"Yes I did, in fact he mentioned you to me, and having seen you in person I have to agree, you' be a major hit. Would you like to join us? I'll give you 25% of the profits of the pictures?" Nabiki said, knowing that any picture with Uzume in it would sell like octopus balls at a matsuri.

"Deal," Uzume said with a grin, knowing the money would be really useful soon, not for her, but her Ashikabi. "This is gonna be fun."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Ranma muttered, following Miya and the others up to Uzume's room.

OOOOOO

Kodachi chuckled to herself as she hopped along the rooftops, still dressed in her all girls uniform, though she was wearing her leotard underneath it as per usual. *I don't particularly enjoy seeing my brother outside of our house but my kohai's tail of Ranma was interesting enough to make it worth my while.*

But first, I think I will stop and get a bite to eat. With that thought Kodachi hopped down from the roof, landing easily on the street below, ignoring with regal disdain the shouts of shock from the plebes around her. She walked inside a café, ordering a small salad for herself as well as a large glass of tea before sitting down to work on a bit of her homework. Despite her standing in Rhythmic gymnastics, the school demanded she keep her grades up, which given Kodachi's intelligence was no real hardship.

As she finished eating something caught her eye outside the café. A tall, exceptionally handsome looking young man, possibly of college age had just come out of a store across the street from the café. He was, talking into a cell phone in public which was admittedly rather rude in her opinion, but that wasn't what had caught her attention. What had was his light brown hair, which gave him a slight gaijin appearance which was rather striking, and his general body frame. *A swordsman, and a very good one.*

Kodachi of course knew a swordsman when she saw one. The House of Kuno was an ancient samurai house, and there had been swordsman in it going back centuries. Tatewaki was merely the latest, and, in Kodachi's opinion the saddest of the lot. *This man might be built along the same lines as my brother, but I doubt he has the same mental issues which so plague him. And he is a most handsome fellow...*

A moment later Kodachi noticed two girls wearing leotards, yellow and black ugly looking things in her opinion, hop down from the rooftops. They talked quietly to the man, before looking toward the cafe. *Those two look somewhat like two of the group my kohai described to me. Hmm, which means they might well have set their sights on me, assuming I am a Sekirei ripe for the plucking. Such arrogance, to not only attack Kodachi Kuno, but to not have learned from the drubbing this Ranma fellow and the Ice Sekirei gave them. I think they require chastisement.*

For a moment Kodachi debated lingering over her tea in order to irritate her watchers, but decided against it, simply standing up paying the meal and moving towards the door. Then she looked out locking eyes with one of the girls and actually winking at her before backing away and moving towards the entrance to the kitchen.

"Excuse me," she said politely, pushing the man standing behind the café's bar out of the way when he tried to stop her. Then she was through, ignoring his a shout to stop, as well as other people trying to stop her with lordly disdain, smacking them aside with ease if they got her way. Between one step and the next she had pulled off her school uniform, tucking it into her ki space and pulled out her combat ribbon, as well as a baton.

The moment she was outside the servant's entrance to the café she flicked her ribbon up, catching a light that was hanging off of the rooftop above. Using her ribbon she pulled herself up and over it to land on one of the nearby flattop roofs, racing away as she looked for a place to turn and ambush her followers.

As she had expected, the two girls from earlier were after her quickly, with the handsome young man somewhere else no doubt watching, waiting to step in if need be. *I wonder if he is their Ashikabi, that would be most disappointing, someone willing to let his women do his fighting for him would be most unworthy of having them in the first place, no matter how handsome he is or how irritated it would make my brother if I started dating someone of obvious mixed blood.*

Kodachi eventually stopped on a large roof belonging to some kind of large clothing store. There she turned, waiting, her ribbon cracking in the air.

A second later her two followers landed next to her, glaring at her. "All right little lost bird!" one of them said, arrogantly. "Why don't you come along with us quietly? You'll get to live in the lap of luxury and play the game for the winning side."

"Is that some kind of recruitment speech?" Kodachi asked archly, shaking her head internally at the arrogance of the girl in front of her. "For your information, my family is already rich enough for me to live in the lap of luxury, and I certainly won't have to work for a day in my life once I leave school."

For a moment the two of them paused, confused by her words and one of them shook her head. "She's lying, on no human can move like she can."

"HOHOHOHOHO! I would argue that, and wonder about your stupidity given the fact a human helped to defeat your attack on Namiji but you tried to treat my kohai most poorly. As her senpai, it falls upon me to chastise you." Kodachi said.

With that she attacked a fact which startled the two girls so much so that the whip wielding one couldn't get her weapon up and cracking towards Kodachi before Kodachi's own ribbon caught her wrist. Kodachi pulled hard, and her mace 'thunked' with bone crunching force into that girls chest, hurling her backwards.

Then Kodachi turned, bringing her leg around into a kick that blocked the other girl's own kick towards her. The two of them pushed off one another, and the girl charged thinking Kodachi would try to gain some range, punching forward hard as possible, thinking to disable Kodachi.

But then she gaped as the ribbon which had caught her friend's wrist suddenly hardened into something approaching steel, coming down on her outstretched arm as Kodachi leaped backward. She screamed in pain as her wrist broke, and then had to throw herself aside as the baton in Kodachi's other hand came up in a vicious arc which would've caught her in the chin.

The blond girl backpedaled quickly, but couldn't stop the kick which came out of nowhere hammering into her abdomen and doubling her over. A second later the ribbon staff came down on the back of her head, knocking her unconscious to the roof.

"Now," Kodachi said, twirling the ribbon as it was again changed into a ribbon "What to do with you two?"

"How about nothing?" said a voice, and she turned, watching as the man she had seen earlier appeared on the rooftop. He looked over at the unconscious and rather beaten duo and shook his head. "It's not been a good week for you two. Anyway, if you're un-winged, could you please come with me?"

"Who is asking, handsome one?" Kodachi asked, still twirling her baton. This one was dangerous, far beyond the other two. He also had not evidently been close enough to hear Kodachi's earlier proclamation of having a family or anything else.'

"I am, my name is Mutsu, and I am a Sekirei pledged to Hayato Mikogami."

Kodachi thought she recognized the name. A rich merchant family of some sort, but of course since they were mere merchant and not from the samurai class they were beneath her notice. Hayato was the son of the family she thought, a young boy of around 11 at best. Still, that gave her some information. "I see, and what does this master of yours want with me?"

Then she paused, struck by something, and blood began to rush to her face. "Wait, Hayato is a boy's name, does that mean you and he..." Kodachi trailed off, torn between horror that such a handsome man swung that way and yaoi fantasies featuring Mutsu and a young boy.

"Gah, no! I'm straight thank you, he winged me by accident, and I decided to roll with it!" Mutsu shouted back, shaking his head. "For reasons I won't go into it actually worked in my favor." He took a second to compose himself, having had to answer that question far too often for his liking before going on. "Anyway, if you are un-winged, will you come and meet Hayato? I promise you will be well treated, cared for and looked after. I'd rather not bring you in by force if I can help it."

Handsome he may be, but I think he is of rather low intelligence and class to assume I, a scion of the house of Kuno, could be kept like some pet. That might be simply because he still thinks I am a Sekirei, but even that speaks poorly of his race. But playing along will allow me to meet the mind behind the attack on my kohai and this uncouth plan to forcibly 'wing' Sekirei.

"Hmm, well, I suppose I can at least agree to meeting your master, handsome one. Show me the way."

Mutsu nodded, grateful for not needing to take the girl by force. He picked up Mitsuha onto one shoulder, happy to see that this new Sekirei was rather strong for her type. Her joining them would give them a major boost in fighting power. "What's your name by the way, and your number?"

"Kodachi is my name Mutsu-san, as for my number, you will have to guess." Kodachi said coquettishly, moving over to take one of his arms with her own.

Flushing slightly at that Mutsu moved to pick up the other girl and led the way over the rooftops. Kodachi continued to flirt with Mutsu verbally as the trip went on, causing him to become more and more uncomfortable, wondering why a Sekirei would flirt with another Sekirei, thinking it rather perverse. Not that she was unattractive but Kodachi was one of the younger looking Sekirei he had seen and he was a grown man, setting aside the fact they were both Sekirei.

About ten minutes after Kodachi dealt with the two blonde girls, they arrived at the outer fence surrounding a large mansion. Kodachi looked it over with a jaundiced eye, noticing the property looked somewhat smaller than the Kuno estate, though the mansion looked to have at least another story to it than the Kuno mansion, and a full wing larger as well.

Mutsu noticed how blasé she seemed about the mansion, but decided not to comment on it, simply handing off the two sisters to another Sekirei, a young girl who looked like she was wearing robes fit for a noblewoman in a Noh play. She and a few others stopped before leaving the mansion to take the sisters, though one of them who was wielding a scythe, sneered at the two downed Sekirei. "Tsk, two on one and you lose, again? Honestly, your such weaklings it reflects badly on our Ashikabi! Hahahah, If I had been sent this girl here would've been brought in a much more... pliable state to Hayato-sama."

"OHOOHOHO! You think that you could defeat the great Kodachi little girl, with your ridiculous scythe? I am no peasant to be intimidated by such I assure you. If you wish to try your luck, please do so." Kodachi said, her ribbon coming down from where she had looped it around her forearm to start twirling in the air beside her leg.

The girl, one Yomi by name, scowled at her and made to attack but Mutsu pushed between them. "Enough. Kodachi might be joining us and becoming a comrade of ours Yomi, don't provoke her. As for you Kodachi, once you join us you will learn there is a pecking order around here, and you'll have to earn your place."

"Hmm, well if you say so my handsome man, I will go along with things." Kodachi replied, reaching out to caress Mutsu's jaw, watching in amusement as the other Sekirei looked rather astonished and appalled by her flirtatious attitude with 'another' Sekirei. *Oh, this farce is most amusing. And honestly, the hubris of these Sekirei to assume that any who are beyond the norm is among their number. I would have thought Ranma would have already broken them of that, but I suppose it is somewhat understandable.*

Yomi shivered at what she was seeing, but bowed to Mutsu's command. With a flounce in her steps she moved off with the others to drop the two blondes with the incredible bad luck in the hospital wing before heading out on patrol.

As they did, Mutsu led Kodachi through the mansion up to Hayato's office. It actually was his father's office, but since he and his mother were in India at present trying to broker a trade deal they weren't going to be back anytime soon. Especially if, as Mutsu knew it would, the city was placed on lockdown, with no one allowed to come or go.

Hayato looked up from behind the desk, having been working on a map of some sort. "Mutsu, you've brought a new girl awesome! Any idea what her power is."

As Kodachi raised a sardonic eyebrow at a mere descendant of merchants talking down like that to a scion of the house of Kuno, but said nothing for a moment, merely turning her head slightly to one side as if examining the décor, secretly dabbing some of her special lipstick on, before turning the other way to examine the fourth person in the room. She was a tall, silver haired woman with a very decent, if somewhat soft looking body. She too was looking at Kodachi with interest, coupled with some suspicion as well.

"She seems able to change the type of matter in her ribbon from cloth to steel, and is extremely skilled in both that and blending in. She was wearing a uniform when I caught sight of her leaping down from a rooftop downtown." Mutsu replied.

"That would be because it was indeed my school uniform," Kodachi replied, chuckling throatily, deciding it was time to bring this mummer's farce to an end. From one pocket on her leotard, she tossed her ID to Mutsu.

He caught it, and looked at it frowning. "Kodachi Kuno, age 17, St. Hebereke, A group?"

"That would be I." As Mutsu had been reading her ID, Kodachi had moved forward, placing a bouquet of roses on the table. The woman, as Kodachi had expected, quickly grabbed it up suspiciously, getting it away from the boy only to get a face full of gas from the bouquet, which put her on her rear.

Mutsu scowled, moving toward her, but Kodachi closed the distance, her arms going around his neck and pulling him down into a kiss. "Pity that you already have been winged handsome one, what fun we would have..." Then she

kissed him, and her black lipstick did its work.

Mutsu was a single number. He was stronger, faster and far less susceptible to the mental indoctrination the higher numbers had been subjected to. He did not however have any extra defense to toxins induced to his system via touch, or in this case saliva. He fell backwards, twitching as the toxin did its work.

"Wh, what the heck!" Hayato gasped, then reached for an intercom button on his desk only for his hand to be caught by Kodachi's ribbon. He then found himself pulled into the air and over the desk, where she caught him easily.

"Now, you rude little boy, I have to tell you something. Point one, not everybody who is able to jump around rooftops or perform amazing feats is a Sekirei. Not only you, but your Sekirei should learn this, and this will certainly teach you to leave your betters alone! Point two, using your Sekirei like they are peons, toys to be disposed of or used is dishonorable in the extreme. But even that pales in comparison to collecting them by force as if they are those ridiculous Poke-creatures!"

So saying Kodachi sat down in a chair, flipping Hayato around so that he was laying on her lap, his rear up in the air. "What, What are you!?"

Hayato's words were interrupted by a slapping sound and he yelped as Kodachi's hand smacked into his rear. "HOHOHoho, I believe the proper punishment for a little brat is a good paddling, and if the handsome one over there is unable or unwilling to do so, it falls upon your betters to provide! Now repeat after me, I will not try to collect Sekirei anymore."

"Damn it you crazy bitch get off me! MutsuUUUU!" Hayato's words segued into a squeal as Kodachi's palm once more met his rear.

"Be glad I have allowed you to retain some dignity along with your pants." Kodachi said archly. "Now, again, repeat after me, I will not try to collect Sekirei anymore."

"It, its part of the game, you have to collect as many as possible, it'll give you a leg up in later stagesSSS! Mutsu tried again, only to feel the stinging retort of Kodachi's palm once more.

"Tut, tut, tut. I see someone is a rather slow learner. But never let it be said Kodachi of the house of Kuno gives up on challenges." With that Kodachi continued to smack Hayato's bottom, until he was reduced to simply whimpering.

"There," she said, pushing him off her waist and standing up laughing. "Hohohohoho! That will teach you. The next time you try to treat random people as pawns in your game, do recall that they don't have to go along with it, and some do have power to strike back, yes?"

With that she turned, leaving Hayato whimpering and holding his rear. Ignoring him, Kodachi turned moving over to Mutsu, who was slowly overcoming the paralysis of her kiss.

She quickly renewed it before whispering, "A pity indeed handsome one. Still, I think we can still have some fun together. I will be seeing you around. HOhohohoh!" Still laughing Kodachi opened the window and leaped out into the trees beyond, making her way out of the Mikogami compound.

Moments later Mutsu, whose body was quickly growing immune to Kodachi's paralysis compound, stood up. He moved over to his Ashikabi, who was still rubbing at his rear and whimpering and then Taki before shaking his head. "What the hell is going on with the game? First that man the night with the ice Sekirei now that crazy bitch! Where are all these weird humans coming from anyway!?"

OOOOOO

Ranma looked up from where he had been looking askance at a few costumes Uzume had frowning. Most of them were huge, looking like those worn by mascots or those American children would wear on Halloween. And all of them were very well made. Nabiki too was looking at them all in amazement, though she quickly concentrated on the clothing and more normal outfits Uzume possessed. But none of that, even the risqué lingerie Uzume had held up proudly before a hanya attack™, was the cause of his thoughtful frown.

"What's wrong Ranma-sama?" Akitsu asked quickly.

"I just got the feeling that someone else just ran into trouble before it could find me. Strange, it's a feeling I've never had before, but one I could seriously get used to." Ranma mused.

"Whatever, here Ranma, try this on." Nabiki said, holding up a swimsuit. Miya had nixed several of Uzume's various outfits, and even a few of Nabiki's, but this one, one of Nabiki's, Miya had felt was appropriate. It was a white one piece suit which looked somewhat like a school racing swimsuit, except that it's sides had large bits cut out.

Ranma nodded, leaving the room and heading towards the bathroom. When Ranma, now in his female form, came back to the sitting room Uzume had changed into her own suit, one that was only slightly more risqué than Ranma's despite Uzume wanting to wear a barely there bikini. She was still pouting about that when Nabiki began to direct her and Ranma into taking various poses.

Once more, Miya, watching this from the corner, stepped in occasionally to stop it from becoming too illicit. But to Miya's surprise, Nabiki actually didn't go for that many 'cheesecake' poses, despite Uzume doing her best to push for them. Indeed, the poses she used were mostly taken from Sports Illustrated. While some of these were definitely sensual, and certainly enough to make Ranma blush a near solid red, they weren't quite objectionable enough for Miya to step in.

"Okay, let's move on to some of the other outfits." Nabiki said after taking ten photos each of Uzume and Ranma. "I'll go through those and pick out three with which to end the packets with. Now, let's get some around the house shots."

Ranma nodded, leaving to change quickly, until Uzume reached out, burying the redhead's head in her generous (read ginormous) bust. "Aw, does that mean I won't be able to make bro here try to imitate a tomato? Still, don't worry bro, if you ever want to see me in a swimsuit, all you need to do is ask..."

Instead of responding verbally Ranma's fingers found Uzume's side, tickling mercilessly and forcing the busty Sekirei to leap away with a whoop. Ranma shook her head, gasping. "Couldn't breathe Uzume, jeez, you could kill someone with those things."

"Heh, but what a way to go huh bro?" Uzume said with a grin, sharing a chuckle with Nabiki while Miya debated using her ladle or her hanya mask before deciding that yes, for this moment the ladle was more appropriate.

While Uume and Nabiki were nursing their heads Ranma turned to Akitsu, shaking her head. "Sorry about this Akitsu, I know just waiting around while we're having pictures taken is rather boring."

"Why doesn't Icy-chan join us then?" Uzume asked. "She's certainly hot enough."

"Quit trying to corrupt her Uzume, you've already done more than enough in that area! Besides, Akitsu's already got one madman trying to chase her down at times. I doubt she wants anymore, right Akitsu?" Ranma said, cocking her head at the tan-haired woman.

Akitsu actually shuddered a little at the reminder before nodding her head and smiling her small smile at her master's kindness. "Thank you, Ranma-sama, and yes I would rather not take part," she said softly. "If you asked me to I would but I would rather not."

Akitsu was slowly realizing that Ranma really did want her to speak her mind often. While she still had a submissive streak as she had said during their time in the baths several days ago, she was becoming more willing to speak her mind at times.

"Excuse me?" Miya asked, looking up quickly. "What was that?"

"I mentioned Kuno to you right?" Ranma paused, looking over at Nabiki. "What was his first name again?"

"Tatewaki," Nabiki supplied. "Don't worry, everyone just calls him by his last name anyway. He thinks it's a sign of respect but it's actually a sign of extreme disrespect."

Ranma nodded. "Anyway, Kuno came onto Akitsu pretty strongly when she showed up at school during lunch. Since then he's always attacking me because I live with the Tendo's and he's after the younger sister there and apparently because I've also in 'ensorcelled' Akitsu somehow."

"Oh my," Miya said, shaking her head, one hand rising to cup her cheek, though her eyes had hardened somewhat. "And this person calls himself a swordsman? I would most definitely like to have words with him at some point then."

Akitsu is still one of my feathers. Even if I am no longer the pillar she and her sisters are still under my protection as little as I can do myself. Although, come to think of it, I think Ranma has inadvertently taken up some of my duties... in his own way of course, and within the bounds of the present day.

"Enough talk about the moron," Nabiki said clapping her hands ones and gesturing Ranma. "Ranma, put this on."

Ranma looked at the outfit Nabiki handed her, then sighed and moved over to the bathroom once more, changing quickly looking at herself in the mirror and blushing. The outfit wasn't all that bad, just a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, but the T-shirt was really tight and the pants would accent her rear something fierce. "This looks like something Uzume would wear, I think I'm beginning to regret introducing the two you."

"Hehy, bro you say the nicest things." Uzume replied, moving to the staircase and up to her room. She came back wearing a outfit that matched Ranma's, except possibly being even tighter against her body than his.

"Excellent! Now, come on, let's..." Nabiki began, only to be interrupted.

"Hold on, why don't you join us for some of these pictures?" Uzume said, moving forward to take one of Nabiki's arms.

"Because unlike Ranma I can't hide in another body, and unlike you, I actually go to school with some of the horndogs who will be buying these pictures." Nabiki replied logically. "Now come on. I think for this first set, I'll want you both in the shot at once."

About an hour later the ordeal ended and Ranma removed himself to change back into his original body. "All right I'm going to go out on patrol. Akitsu, can you take Nabiki home? And don't pout," he finished, even though Akitsu's face hadn't changed at all. He was getting better at reading her expressions, and he reached over, and ruffling her hair gently. "Ya know she can't roofhop, **so** one of us has to see her home."

Again Nabiki felt something like jealousy stirring within her, before tramping it down ruthlessly. There was just no way she, Nabiki Tendo, the Ice Queen of Nerima, could be falling for a guy this quickly.

"I'll do it," said Uzume, throwing her arm around the somewhat shorter and much less busty brunette.

Nabiki smiled thinly, shaking her head. "Actually, if you don't mind Ranma I'd like to stay here for a bit." She looked over at Miya, who looked back, smiling politely. "I'd like to get to know your friends if that's all right?"

Ranma nodded, not having anything that Miya could tell Nabiki that he didn't want her to know. He also figured that the two of them had been getting along so well it was all right. He turned to Miya, cocking his head thoughtfully as another thought occurred to him. "Where is your other tenant anyway?"

"Kagari-san is sleeping," Miya said, shaking her head. "He works at night, and also goes out to patrol at night."

"You mentioned that before," Ranma replied, pulling at his pigtail thoughtfully. "What power does he have? Or is he a fist fighter?" he asked, looking a little skeptical. Kagari didn't have the right build for a hand to hand combatant.

"He is not a fist fighter as you well know," Miya said with a laugh, holding one hand above her mouth is always, a sight that Ranma was getting a little irritated by. It was as if she didn't want people to know she was laughing or having fun.

"He is in fact an elements user," she said after a moment thinking about what she could tell Ranma about Kagari without breaking his confidence. "A fire user. That is however all I will tell you without consulting him first."

"Is he still freaked out about the whole magic thing?" Ranma asked. "It feels like he's kind of avoiding me."

"I am still freaked out about the whole magic thing," Nabiki said shaking her head. "And I live in Nerima for God sakes! I'm used to martial artists being able to cut through concrete with wind pressure, smash bricks, hop on roofs, or shut people down with a bare touch of a finger. But magic still bothers me."

"Yeah but they're aliens or something right?" Ranma said, before quickly reaching out to pull Akitsu into a one-armed hug having somehow again felt that the girl had become distressed at his word choice for some reason. "Shouldn't they already be used to the unusual?"

"Speaking as one of those aliens, no were not," Uzume said dryly shaking her head. "I mean we're not exactly normal ourselves, but there is a reason for why our powers exist, why we're different. Magic is..." she stumbled frowning for a moment.

"Inherently incomprehensible?" Nabiki suggested and the older girl gave her a grateful squeeze not having removed her arm from around her earlier.

Nabiki however moved slightly to the side now, and Uzume pouted, shaking her head at the girl. "I'm not going to steal you from bro, don't worry," she said smirking.

"How can you steal me from him when we're not even together? I'm not used to people being so touchy-feely," Nabiki said shaking her head.

"Anyway, I'm heading out now," Ranma said with a smile, turning to Akitsu and nodding his head towards the door. Akitsu nodded, but waited until he began to move before moving in that direction. "See ya later Uzume!"

Uzume nodded, watching the two hop out of the window and off onto the rooftops, shaking her head with a grin. *Damn I like that boy! If I didn't already have an Ashikabi, and if I wasn't far more interested in girls than I am and boys, he'd be perfect. Hell, he'd even be perfect anyway with that curse of his! And the way he's treating Akitsu, he might not know everything there is to know about women or dating or anything like that, but he sure on the right track.*

With that she turned, heading downstairs eager to talk to Nabiki more.

She got there just in time to hear Nabiki ask Miya in a very serious tone "so, what can you tell me about Ranma's father that I don't already know?"

Miya turned from where she had just been about to entered the kitchen, frowning thoughtfully. "Why?"

"I'm already looking up his past, I want to figure out if anything is going to come home to roost as it were," Nabiki shook her head smiling faintly. "Ranma and I are both of the opinion that there really isn't any point in the agreement between our families though getting the heads of our families to agree to that is an issue. Its just better to be forewarned, but I haven't had much luck tracing their route."

"That shows good sense, but unfortunately I can't help you much. I did not interact with Genma at all frankly. On the other hand, I know many of the training methods he used on Ranma, will that help?" Miya asked.

"It depends, did those stories come with places and names?"

"Some of them," Miya hummed thoughtfully. "Yes I think that I can help you there. Let me get dinner started and then we can talk."

Nabiki nodded, and turned to Uzume, one eyebrow raised quizzically. "By the way, where in the world you come up with all of those costumes? Are you a costume designer? There's good money in that."

Uzume blinked. "Really?"

Seeing Uzume's surprise Nabiki smirked, and began to describe a few jobs such a talent would be useful in as the two sat down at the table.

OOOOOO

At first, the patrol was uneventful. Ranma and Akitsu hopped over the rooftops while Ranma began to teach Akitsu how to spot hiding places, vantage point and other things of that nature, stuff that he had learned when he began to learn the more advanced form of the Aerial Style of Anything Goes. Akitsu listened intently as Ranma also began to describe the tenants of that school to her.

"It's all about angles, momentum and force," he said, hopping from one roof to another. "Use the appropriate force at the appropriate angle and you can turn aside an attack or use the momentum of that attack to keep in the air, changing your position at the same time. I don't know if you're going to be at all at home with that Akitsu, but we'll see. If not, maybe by the time you're ready to learn advanced techniques, Soun will be ready to teach moves from the Earth style."

Akitsu nodded. After the past few days sparring with Akane, Akitsu knew hand to hand was a very dangerous weakness in her style, and she was eager to correct it. Not only for herself of course, but because she wanted to protect her master.

"Since it is already late, will we have time to train when we return to the Tendo household?" She asked Ranma never called the Tendo place home, and Akitsu had been quick to pick up on that.

"Maybe, it depends. I'd really like to meet up with Kagari, work out a schedule of patrolling the city, figuring out where to go and where not to go, safe zones no go zones that kind of thing. I think we need to start getting more organized. I

mean we've seen what six or seven fights so far today?"

"Six master," Akitsu replied promptly. "All evenly matched of course or we would've interfered correct?"

"You're getting it," Ranma said with a grin, looking back at her causing Akitsu to flush slightly in her own manner.

Akitsu understood that it was not fighting that Ranma objected to, nor even the property damage, though he would prefer if the combatants themselves were the ones cleaning up after the battles were over. Still, MBI had made allowances for that, and he wasn't going to make an issue of that. Rather it was the fights like he had seen against the Tsukiumi and Namiji that bothered Ranma.

In a way she could understand that. Ranma was a martial artist, and as had been explained to her a martial artist always believed in fair play. At least according to Ranma, though his father and Soun seemed to not agree with that ideal.

Miya-sama on the other hand did, and she and Ranma were a much better example of the type in Akitsu's opinion. But this wasn't a martial arts tournament or anything like that. This was the Sekirei plan, and in that, all that mattered was to win in the end.

Not that the plan or the end prize mattered to Akitsu, at least not right now. It might though if Ranma was able to somehow figure out how to fix her like he said they might be able to. She didn't have much hope for that, and frankly she didn't see how it would change anything from the way she was right now, but it would change how MBI and the Sekirei plan viewed her.

She stopped just then as Ranma did, pausing on a rooftop as he looked down. "...Is that? Wait here for a sec Akitsu," he said over his shoulder. "I think I just saw an old friend."

Akitsu nodded, waiting at the vantage point. That this allowed Akitsu to keep a better eye on both her Ashikabi and the area surrounding them were the real reason she obeyed that order, not liking being away from him even by that far.

"Ryoga, is that you?" Ranma said as he jumped down, landing lightly next to the man he'd noticed from the rooftops wandering around aimlessly.

The man in question was somewhat shorter than Ranma by about an inch or so. But he was broader in the shoulders than even Ranma though he wasn't built like a swordsman, he was built like a weightlifter with bulging muscles visible on his arms and a corresponding wide core built for strength. In fact he looked so different from what Ranma remembered that Ranma had trouble at first believing making the connection, but the bandanna and the backpack matched he was willing to chance it, and he was proven right when the man grinned, showing the two slightly pointed fangs Ranma remembered from the Hibiki family.

Ryoga's eyes lit up, and he reached out, grabbing Ranma by the shoulders and shaking him. "Ranma what the hell man! You disappear for years, and all I know about it is that you were suddenly in China!"

Suddenly a premonition hit Ranma. "...Please don't tell me you tried to chase me down? With your family curse..."

Ryoga shook his head quickly. "No, though I might've. When I showed up and you weren't there I was so angry I was all set to do just that, but one of my neighbors had spotted your old man attacking you, and she was quick to point out what had happened." He shrugged. "After that, I tried to find lady Miya, and figure out if you had left word. I never could, but I found my dad, who got in contact with the school, who got in contact with Lady Miya. She told him about your message from Hong Kong and that was that."

"Really?" Ranma asked amazed. If Ryoga and his dad had been in the same room more than four times in the year had Ranma had gone to school with Ryoga, he would be astonished.

"I know, right?! Anyway, he started to train me. That was until a few months ago, when he went to the bathroom without telling me, and disappeared. I haven't seen him since." Ryoga shrugged. "Anyway, I decided to try and find you about a month ago, I left a message with our old school to contact me if you were enrolled anywhere, and I was told a few weeks back that you'd been enrolled at Furinkan in Nerima."

"Makes sense," Ranma said with a nod, making a mental note that Ryoga actually seemed more at home with using phones and other stuff of that nature than Ranma was. The pigtailed martial artist he gestured Ryoga to follow him, leaping up onto the roof to rejoin Akitsu.

Ryoga followed landing heavily with none of Ranma's grace, though there was a certain unstoppable nature to him, like a tank given legs Ranma recognized from his old man. He looked quizzically at Akitsu then over at Ranma who shrugged his shoulders. "Let's just say a lot's happened since I arrived in Tokyo."

"You're still calling it Tokyo," Ryoga said with a nod. "Good, I can understand what's going on with the government letting that asshole in the Cape have his way here. Have you seen any of his broadcasts? He comes off like those old anime-style mad doctors, or sometimes even the villains."

Ranma barked a laugh, shaking his head. "You don't know the half of it."

The two of them moved off over the rooftops, much slower than Ranma and Akitsu alone could've moved, with Akitsu remaining silent as she listened to Ranma explain what had been going on and Ryoga filling Ranma in on some of his training. Akitsu did stumble occasionally as Ryoga mentioned visiting places that sounded like Paris or Egypt, or the Grand Canyon in America, however. While Ranma had told her about his own travels, Ryoga had apparently seen the world yet at the same time talked about these places by prefacing them with 'up Near Hokkaido way', or "When I left Khufu I found this amazing Tower that I thought was even taller than Tokyo Tower, weird huh?"

After about fifteen minutes they had started to talk about exchanging phone numbers, since his cell phone was literally the most important thing Ryoga owned. Hearing that Ranma had to admit to not having a phone, something that made Ryoga stop and stare at him for a moment, then shake his head. "Buy one," he said firmly. "Seriously they're not expensive any longer ironically thanks to MBI, and they are massively useful."

Ranma shook his head, frowning. "I don't know man I prefer to be off the grid, and I really don't want MBI or anyone else to have such an easy way of contacting or tracking me."

"Yeah but it would make it easier for me," Ryoga said shaking his head. "On the other hand, I suppose that people like MBI could track you through your phone if they wanted, so I can see your point."

Ranma's response went unsaid as they suddenly heard the sound of lightning in the distance. Ryoga looked up at the sky quizzically, while Ranma turned in the direction he thought the sound was coming from. "You think that's those Lightning twins Akitsu?"

Akitsu thought looking in that direction than up at the sky and all around them before nodding. "It does not look as if it would be natural Ranma-sama."

"Let's go in that direction then it'll give Ryoga a good example of the stuff I'm talking about. And what've I told you about the sama stuff huh?" Ranma shook his head, already leaping away.

The trio soon came upon the two lightning twins attacking a girl wearing a priestess outfit, who was dodging around racing away from them. Ryoga blinked in shock, shaking his head. He hadn't actually of believed to Ranma about there being people out there with element style attacks (the rest he that he'd found more believable) but even after Akitsu head demonstrated her powers at one point, seeing someone hurling around lightning like the Greek god Zeus was something else.

"Stop chasing me!" Said the brunette in the lead, dodging another lightning bolt. She was dressed almost like a Miko priestess, with that kind of outfit as a blouse combined with a short red skirt and thigh-high red stockings. "I refuse to fight you until I find my Ashikabi!"

"You'll thank us for this later," said one of the lightning twins, shaking her head as she skidded to a halt in order to launch another lightning attack. "Don't worry, it'll be better if you're never involved in the game in the first place!"

Looking back over her shoulder the girl in the lead dodged quickly, but didn't realize that she was running headlong towards the trio who had just appeared on the scene. Ranma and Akitsu promptly got out of her way, but Ryoga simply held out his arms and she ran right into him, bouncing off as if she had run into a wall.

"Are you all right miss?" Ryoga asked solicitously, reaching down to help her to her feet, trying desperately not to stare at her massive, and currently swaying, bust.

The girl only shook her head then looked up at Ryoga in surprise, "I'm all right, but wow, I didn't think humans were that strong!"

"I'm quite a bit stronger than most I'll admit," Ryoga said, pulling her to her feet as easily as if she was a small child. He then glared over his shoulder at the two lightning twins, who had skidded to a halt at the site of Akitsu and Ranma. "Is there any reason why those two are trying to pick on you?"

"They apparently do that kind of thing," Ranma said, glaring at the two twins. "I thought our beat down of you two would've at least put a stop to this kind of thing."

"You got lucky last time punk!" said Hikari, the less busty but far louder twin. The other one seemed to shrink a little at the sight of the two people who had handled them so easily last time they'd fought. "Don't expect to get off that easily this time!"

"Sister, I don't think we should," Hibiki began.

Ranma however had already leapt forward, grinning blue eyes lighting up. "Really, you want to challenge us again?" Akitsu silently moved in his wake, glaring at the two of them as the air all around the combatants began to grow cold.

"Sister!" Hibiki whispered urgently. "We don't have our Norito right now, and without that, I don't think we can win against these two, let alone them and that other one." She shot a cautious glance at the second male there, who had apparently not even felt the impact of a Sekirei barreling into him.

Hikari growled irritably, but conceded the point. "Fine! Just don't get in our way again you weird ass freak, or else..."

Ranma was suddenly in her face glaring at her, having seemingly crossed the intervening distance between one breath and the next. "Or else what? You two are nothing more than bullies! And now you have the gall to mouth off at me?!"

"We're sorry!" said Hibiki quickly, covering her sister's mouth and pulling her away. "But it's just, we want to get experience and hunting down people who haven't been winged also removes competition for later. It might seem like bullying but it's just good strategy."

Ranma visibly pulled in his temper, Akitsu's hand finding his and giving it a squeeze helping more than he would have thought such a thing would a bare few days ago. He didn't like the word freak, especially considering that he had occasionally thought of himself as one since getting his curse. "I can understand that, but these are people's lives right? Are you saying that if you remove someone from the game that they're going to be all right and fine. just not involved in this plan further?"

The twins exchanged a glance. "Our Ashikabi has a theory about that, he doesn't want to share it though. He just said it was fine if we remove them from the game," Hikari said hesitantly, frowning, for the first time not sounding like she was raring for a fight.

"I'd force his theory out of him and make sure that you actually agree with it before continuing this if I were you." Ranma sighed shaking his head. "I understand the need to get experience all, but there are better ways to do it. Hell if you want, you can come by the Tendo Dojo in Nerima, and there'll be someone there to spar with, if not me than my old man. You'll get your experience that way, and no one really gets hurt."

The twins exchanged another telling glance then nodded slowly. "Fine, we'll back off our hunts for now."

"Good girls," Ranma said with a smirk, reaching forward before either could move ruffling their hair then leaping away as Hikari sent out a close range lightning attack that cratered the rooftop where he had just been standing.

Hibiki on the other hand smiled at him, taking her sister's arm and leading her off as she began to shout imprecations at Ranma for treating them like kids. After all, in terms of combat experience she was beginning to realize that Ranma really was the 'adult' here.

"Thank you so much!" said the girl behind them, the one in the priestess outfit. "I'm Musubi, #88. Are you three Sekirei as well?"

She stared hard at Akitsu's forehead, until Akitsu moved behind Ranma feeling a little irritated by the other girl staring like that but unwilling to voice it. Ranma on the other hand simply shook his head. "Ryoga and I are human," he said simply. "We're martial artists, and we've decided, well I've decided anyway to get involved in this game and make sure it's being played fairly."

"That's really nice of you!" Musubi replied, seeming to find nothing odd in that statement. "Ugh, those two were chasing me for so long and all I wanted to do was find my Ashikabi. Then I would have been fine with challenging them, but we have to find our Ashikabi before we can take part of the game! I don't know why they were chasing me like that before I could."

Ranma blinked at her, looking over at Ryoga shrugged. "They just said that earlier, it was for the experience."

"Yes I heard that, but I don't understand. I mean isn't following the rules of the game more important?"

"Not to them," Ranma said, shrugging in turn. Ryoga shrugged his shoulders looking around. "Anyway, I'm kind of hungry, you guys want to get something to eat? What about you miss, you look a little ragged?" he asked politely looking at the girl in the priestess outfit. "And do you know what this Ashikabi of yours looks like, we could help you find him."

"No but I'll know him when I find him, that's a Sekirei's secret!" She said thrusting her fist up into the air. "Fate will lead you together, and you'll know it the moment you lay eyes on them." Musubi then blushed slightly as her stomach gurgled incredibly loudly. "But some food would be nice," she added meekly.

Ryoga smiled, gesturing her over the rooftops edge. "Come on then, my treat I suppose."

Behind him Ranma and Akitsu exchanged a glance than Ranma shrugged and followed the two of them, heading into the family restaurant. Ryoga was about to find out exactly how much it cost to feed a Sekirei.

To Ranma's surprise however Ryoga ate nearly as much, putting away in a single meal what Ranma would in a day. He frowned at his old friend who shrugged his shoulders. "I haven't eaten for a while, in fact today was the first day I've found myself in an actual town rather than out in the wild. And for some reason animals don't attack me anymore. I have to hunt them down, and I'm not very good at it."

Ranma nodded. "Makes sense."

With Ryoga and Musubi busy eating and Akitsu being Akitsu, Ranma did most of the talking throughout the meal, talking about Kuno, school, the fact he was behind, and his Father's agreement with the Tendo's. Ryoga shook his head more than once at that part of the tale, evincing an interest in seeing Ranma's curse form, but also thankful he didn't have one. Musubi looked quizzical more than once, as if she didn't understand what was being talked about, and Ranma wondered if maybe she had been sheltered beyond the norm for Sekirei or simply was that naïve.

At the end of the meal Musubi bowed deeply to Ryoga. "Thank you so much, this was so nice of you to buy me all this food, especially when we just met!"

"Not a problem miss, besides it's not like I wasn't hungry myself," Ryoga replied with a chuckle, and Ranma wondered if maybe his father had taught Ryoga more than martial arts when they were together. He seemed to have a lot better manners than Ranma remembered (or had himself).

Ranma then frowned, head cocked as he noticed Musubi was breathing heavily, looking a little dizzy as she stood there, her face flushed. Ryoga noticed too and frowned, leaning forward and touching her forehead. "She's got a fever or something."

"Ryoga-san, I, I..." Musubi began but before they could go on they were interrupted.

"There you are!" They all turned toward the shout and saw two women standing on a nearby rooftop. The one who had shouted had pink hair tied into a pony tail on the right side of her face, coupled with red eyes. She was short but had the muscles and stance of a hand to hand fighter, with reinforced red gloves on her hands like Musubi's. She was also the first Sekirei that Ranma had seen that didn't have at least a decent sized bust. This girl was as flat as a guy.

The second Sekirei looked to be a close quarter combatant, wearing large metallic claws on her hands. She had gray hair obscuring half her face, the other half showing a almost disinterested expression in sharp contrast to her companion's angry eagerness. Like the pink-haired girl she wore a black kimono that looked like a uniform of some kind, though in her case it was rather ragged. Underneath that and visible from this angle she wore skin tight black pants and cloth bandages.

When she saw she had their attention, the pink haired one continued, pointing at Ranma angrily. "You are the one that painted the side of the MBI tower! We've been told to make you realize the error of your ways. Any attacks on MBI are not allowed, even attacks on it's public image like that!"

"By which you mean your president doesn't like the fact that I'm making fun of him, and basically giving him the finger," Ranma said with a smirk, leaping up to face them on another rooftop. He was followed quickly by the other three, though Musubi seemed to be torn between watching the confrontation and staring at Ryoga.

For his part Ryoga was looking on interestedly, knowing that Ranma had a positive gift for getting under people's

noses, though he would didn't think that he would've turned it on women. That mention of MBI and a tower there gave him a clue. The priestess on the other hand was simply watching interestedly, her eyes gleaming at the idea of being given permission to start fighting, even though she wasn't feeling very well. Her body was burning up, and she couldn't quite stop looking at Ryoga out of the corner of her eye.

Akitsu on the other hand simply stood there, watchful and waiting. While she did not have a problem with MBI as a whole, she was not about to step back and let Ranma fight their representatives alone either.

"Pretty much," the one with silver hair said shrugging her shoulders and an answering smirk. "But we can't really let that kind of thing spread either. MBI has to be seen as the big dog to make certain that people realize they have to play by its rules."

"Oh yeah, and what exactly are those rules? Because where I'm standing it looks as if so long as you don't hurt bystanders everything's okay. And even that might not be an actual rule so much as a guideline." Ranma asked.

"That doesn't matter! We're just supposed to make certain you realize the error of your ways not teach you the rules. If you actually had a cell phone rather than nothing like a Neanderthal maybe you'd already know them and you wouldn't be due a beat down right now!"

"Heh, bring it on, ya Sakura wannabe!" Ranma shot back, cracking his neck and making a motion with his hands to the two to attack.

Instead of attacking right away though the silver-haired girl with the claws broke down into chuckles, smacking her claw-clad hands on the rooftop having quickly gotten the reference. Benitsubasa however didn't. "Sakura wannabe? I'm Benitsubasa of the Disciplinary squad, the Crimson Sekirei, and you better remember it!"

"Pink hair, no chest to speak of, and a loud voice. Yeah, you're Sakura alright." Ranma said, amused and eager to use the art of pissing people art once more on a Sekirei. It might not have worked against Mutsu that first night, but it did to work on the Thunder twins and the others he'd met.

The silver haired one began laughing even louder now, muttering Ranma's words under her breath, while Benitsubasa seethed. "You, you, how dare you! I'm going to enjoy smashing your head in!" Then she turned to her compatriot, kicking her in the side where she had curled up laughing. "Damn it Haihane, whose side are you on!?"

"Can I get involved in this?" Ryoga asked raising a hand as Beni tried to exhort Haihane into taking this seriously. "I'd like to see how strong these Sekirei are anyway."

Benitsubasa blinked as that question penetrated her anger at her friend and Ranma's words and she turned to Ryoga, shaking her head while Musubi gaped in shock. "If you're a normal human you'd better just get out of the way!"

"I have not been normal for years, ever since I first met Ranma" Ryoga said with a shrug. He went on over Ranma's indignant 'Oy'. "You look like a fist fighter to me miss, so why don't I take you on, while Ranma deals with your friend?"

"Fine by me," Haihane shrugged, standing up fluidly, cocking her head to one side as she looked at Ranma, a smile on her face still from his earlier quips at Beni's expense. "I'm interested in seeing how strong you are. I really don't care about MBI's image or anything like that, I just want a good fight, and at this stage we don't have much worth doing really."

Her friend turned to her angrily but Haihane waved her hand airily, her claws clinking together for a moment. "Not even our boss cares about that," she said bluntly. "Or Karasuba-sama'd be here herself right?"

At that Benitsubasa steamed for a moment but nodded. In fact, that was only part of the reason why the Black Sekirei wasn't there. The other half was that she had been ordered to go after an Ashikabi who was using his Sekirei to murder all his old bosses who had fired him.

Without further ado Benitsubasa charged forward, and Ryoga simply stood there waiting for. *Stupid, no way can a human match a Fist Type in strength!*

But to her shock Ryoga simply redirected the attack to the side, his own fist thrusting forward, and Beni was forced to dodge, the blow whistling over her head. *Fast! And strong.* Her forearm was actually throbbing in pain from his block, thought the opposite also seemed true, with Ryoga backing up, waving the hand he had used to block her blow. "Huh, that was actually much stronger than I expected given your frame."

Beni recovered first, her other fist flashing out catching the beefy man in the chest. He stumbled back slightly before recovering quickly throwing out his punches coming now fast and furious, matching Beni blow for blow. The two of them began to move around one another, neither of them leaving the ground like Ranma would, something Ryoga was happy for. Ranma's Aerial style always gave him fits.

In contrast to his friend/rival, Ryoga's style was built around taking and dishing out punishment. He wasn't a solid rock like the Tendo style users were supposed to be, he moved in a battle, but his style depended on strength, landing few but telling blows, in return for being able to tank any of his opponents. If he ran into someone stronger with more endurance or someone who could just dish out more punishment, such as Ranma with a sword in his hands or his own father, Ryoga would run into problems. But the pink-haired Sekirei, who for some reason wanted to be known as the Scarlet Sekirei, couldn't do that.

For her part however Beni quickly got frustrated from her inability to pound her opponent into the ground. The man in front of her was blocking her best punches, taking them when they slipped through with barely a wince. Worse for her ego, he seemed to be stronger and more experienced than her! That shouldn't have been possible given all of the training she had been given since being chosen to join the Disciplinary Squad. Hell, she'd actually even sparred with Karasuba herself a few times, and had the scars to prove it!

But this human was **stronger** than she was. It took only a few blows for Beni to realize that. She had an edge on speed by a decent margin, but not in pure physical strength, and his endurance was insane. *Let's see if he can handle this then!*

With that thought Beni hopped backwards, her leg lashing out slightly in a feint, causing Ryoga to stop raising his hands to protect his face. By the time he realized that was a feint, she had gotten some distance, and their fist lashed downwards into the rooftop "Destructive quake!"

The rooftop exploded out from her towards him as a wave of power was sent along the rooftop towards her target. Ryoga jumped back, avoiding much of the power of the blow, but was unable to get out of the way as the rooftop fell in somewhat directly below his feet.

Ryoga growled angrily, feeling his lower body caught in this move, as Benitsubasa move towards him grinning viciously. But it wasn't as if Ryoga was injured, no, like Ranma he was angry at the idea that the woman had used such a technique on a building. "What if there had been people in this building!" he shouted, already moving around and digging himself out of the rubble.

The girl shrugged, completely uninterested in the question, while idly noticing the big-titted Sekirei in the miko outfit seemed to be having a fit nearby. She was on her knees, her face flushed a bright red, and her breath was coming in gasps audible to Benitsubasa over the ongoing crunching and groan of the building below them. *Huh, is she reacting to this lug? Too bad for her, but I'm going to break her boy toy.*

For his part however, Ryoga decided enough was enough. He charged forward, wrenching his lower body out of the wreckage he showed he was almost uninjured a sight which astonished Benitsubasa. She matched him however, blow for blow and a few more of her blows now got through than before, Ryoga's anger impacting his style. But he simply tanked her blows, though they did actually damage him she could see the bruises she was causing, and at one point even felt a rib break under her blow. But to her horror Beni realized she wasn't stopping him!

His own blows however were so telegraphed she could dodge them, at least at first. Then Beni realized she was being backed into a corner,, heading towards the edge of the rooftop. She tried to leap backwards, only for Ryoga's arm to lash out faster than he had previously moved, grabbing her leg, and then... **THWUMP!**

It was as if Beni had been hit by a main battle tank's round right in the diaphragm, and she grunted in agony, bouncing off the rooftop. literally skipping over a few buildings, before she slammed back first into the wall of a taller building as her ribs screamed at her in agony. *Wh, what the fuck!* She thought, going to her knees as she stared at the Ryoga who was now racing over the rooftops after her. *What the hell is he! How are humans this strong?!*

I, I have to get some distance, let my healing ability get to work, can't take another punch like that or I'll be terminated! Damn it, if only Natsuo-sama had kissed me I could use a norito and end this bastard! She thought, pulling yourself out of the wreckage and then looking around desperately, before dropping into an alleyway and racing away on street level, turning and using the back alleys as much as possible, cutting this way and that to throw her pursuer of her trail..

"You won't to get away from me that easily!" Ryoga shouted angrily, chasing after her not noticing that he in turn was

being trailed by Musubi. But Musubi lost sight of her quarry soon after he hopped down to peruse Benitsubasa on ground level.

About two minutes after she began to retreat Benitsubasa stopped, no longer hearing sounds of the chase. She turned, hopping up onto a rooftop and staring behind her, hopping to spot her pursuer. But not only did she not spot him, but she saw Musubi also looking around. Ryoga had disappeared without a trace. "W, what just happened?"

OOOOOO

High up in MBI tower, Takami scowled angrily, shaking her head. "There's more than one of them!?! And where the hell did he just go? One minute's recorded going around a corner, the next he doesn't show up on the next camera over? What the hell!?"

In the background she could hear her boss laughing manically, which did nothing at all for her temper until she turned, bearing him across the head with her steel clipboard and knocking him out. That made her feel better, and she turned back to her work more seriously. "Get us a video of the action with the original anomaly and Haihane."

OOOOOO

"So do you use a weapon other than those claws?" Ranma asked conversationally, stretching and getting ready.

His opponent let him, her claws clinking together as she waved them in the air. "No, just the claws. I mean, I can't use another weapon at the same time as these, can I?"

"Meh, some throwing knives, a chain or something like that might work, and of course something on your legs." Ranma replied. "Still, that means I won't use weapons either."

Haihane cocked her head to one side, not seeing why that would be. She was also looking warily at Akitsu, who was watching them both, her eyes narrowed, and her face even more blank than usual.

"Don't interfere Akitsu, this is a match between the two of us." Ranma said also looking at Akitsu. She looked back for a moment before nodding with visible reluctance. Ranma smiled, reaching over to touch her hair gently, not the patronizing pat he'd used on the thunder twins. "Don't worry Akitsu, I'll be fine, and later we can spar at home, or maybe do something you want to do tomorrow as a present for not interfering?"

That cause Akitsu to nod quickly then she hopped away to a nearby rooftop where she stood, watching the fight as it began.

Ranma and Haihane both charged forward at the same time, Haihane going low, while Ranma took to the air. Haihane quickly corrected, bringing her hands up and around, to try and claw at Ranma but he lightly tapped her palm right behind the claws of her hand, using the momentum to launch his own roundhouse kick which she was forced to block.

Her return strike nearly scored his side and ripped his shirt, but Ranma had moved just enough to evade. Another blow from Ranma made Haihane's head ring for a second, but she tried to get in her own shot, which Ranma was forced to block into turn, though he again used the momentum to stay in the air, and had used his own hand to turn aside her claws, so that only the blunt edges had struck him.

This style of combat was something Haihane hadn't ever seen before, Ranma's hand-eye coordination and dexterity was on a whole other level from most of her opponents, the only one who was similar was Karasuba. And even then while Karasuba could block her blows with the sword, but there was no way she could use her bare hands to redirect attacks like that.

Another punch got through her defenses crunching into her mouth, causing her lip to split. But Haihane merely grinned, licking away the blood and charging forward her hands slashing and flashing, moving in an intricate display of style Ranma haven't quite seen before. There were flashes he recognized, some Chinese Tiger Fist, some Indonesian stuff, but it was all merged into her own style, which while good, lacked some polish. It had innovation and unpredictability on its side, but that didn't quite make up for the lack of experience and refinement.

"Are you self-taught?" he asked seriously, ducking under one particular slash which would've taken him in the head.

"Mostly," she said bringing that hand back in a return attack that caught Ranma in the shoulder, though in return his leg took her high in the chest, throwing her back. "MGU, urh, most of us are. Human trainers could only keep up with us when we were younger, so after that we watched videos of various training styles, and just had to make our own

styles as we learned."

"Then you didn't look hard enough!" Ranma said sternly. "I'm human after all, and I can point you to at least six or seven human masters who could help you with that style of yours."

Haihane girl cocked her head thoughtfully humming for a moment. "I'll think about it," she said neither of them seeing anything unusual in the two of them talking like this in the middle of a fight. She quickly went into a series of attacks that was based on trying to keep Ranma on the ground, she had already noticed that he favored taking to the air, and hoped to limit his mobility this way.

It worked somewhat, but in reply Ranma concentrated on dodging more now rather than attacking, waiting for an opportunity to counter. Haihane couldn't land a hit, and eventually she made a mistake, opening her up for his riposte. One of his return blows nearly took her head off, causing her to backpedal as she saw stars.

She frowned, circling around Ranma thoughtfully wondering how to deal with this. Ranma however didn't give her much time, charging forward with a grin on his face. "Analyze the fight later, go with your instincts now!" he shouted, and Haihane had to nod at that, a move that almost cost her since it opened her up for a kick that would've taken her in the side.

She rolled away from it then came up into a leap forward, hoping to close the distance with Ranma before he could rebalance himself from the kick. She couldn't, but Haihane pressed him quickly, getting a few slashes to his clothing and actually drawing blood a few times, but not doing any more than superficial damage.

Akitsu frowned, and Ranma chanced a glance her way. "Don't interfere Akitsu, like I said this is just a spar!"

At her Ashikabi's words Akitsu nodded, but her frown remained on her until she saw two other Sekirei moving over the rooftops towards them. Cocking her head she moved in that direction to put herself between the two incoming Sekirei. They stopped and stared at Akitsu's forehead one of them even smirking as she twirled her staff. "It's the broken one, I suppose we can bring her along to."

Akitsu cocked her head. "...Bring me where?"

"Oh she's a bright one," said the other one shaking her head. "Let's just do it! 104 isn't winged, but she was chosen for the Disciplinary Squad which means she's powerful. She's a real find and this one too. I don't know the guy fighting them, maybe he's another un-winged Sekirei? But our Ashikabi won't want a man anyway."

Akitsu's eyes narrowed very slightly and the air around them becoming colder as she prepared her powers. "You will not interfere in my Ashikabi-sama's fight," she said softly but sternly.

"You're going to stop us alone?!" The one with the staff said with the bark of laughter, before kicking off the ground hard enough to crater the ground under her, leaping forward with her staff outstretched.

Akitsu dodged under it, a wave of ice appearing underneath the attacking Sekirei and zooming upwards into a pillar which caught the girl on the chin, hurling her upwards. She shook her head but still dodged the rain of ice spikes Akitsu sent her way. The other one however closed, forcing Akitsu to back away summoning up a wall of ice to block the punch that would've taken her in the head, and then another one as the staff user pressed in hard from her other side.

But Akitsu was undaunted, moving around swiftly, dodging this way and that as the other two tried to pin her in place. Akitsu had already realized that being pinned in place was the worst thing that could happen.

She gestured and the rooftop froze underneath him, reaching upwards to try and grab onto their legs. The two of them were able to break out of that easily enough, but the ice still hampered their ability to keep their feet. That allowed her to get some distance, and she began to rain ice shards down on them, forcing them to move together, defending each other from her attack. "Dammit! I didn't think the broken one would be this strong!" shouted the one with the staff.

"I am not broken," Akitsu said clearly, remembering her conversation with Ranma. "I might be limited, but that does not mean I am broken! And regardless of my ability to bond being blocked I have a Ashikabi," she said coldly. "I will not submit to another."

Even if I could be winged, I would not leave Ranma. Not after all he has done for me, not for after he makes me feel warm!

Elsewhere Haihane and Ranma had continued to fight, Ranma becoming somewhat impressed by the silver-haired woman. She was quick, very dexterous, and thought on her feet. She also didn't seem to have the regular Sekirei hang-up about disbelieving that a human could get keep up with her and took him seriously from the start, plus had definitely taken her training just as seriously. That was good too. But she wasn't fast enough or strong enough to quite match him. Haihane could hurt Ranma, but not beat him, not alone.

Ironically Beni might well have done more damage per hit than Haihane. But she would have been even more enraged at her inability to land said hit, so it was a moot point.

To her credit however Haihane seemed to realize this, and didn't seem to care. She was still enjoying this fight, giving her all. As Akitsu dealt with the two interlopers Ranma once again changed tactics, allowing Haihane to keep them on the ground once more, but now using his hands to block hers and kicking out strongly at every opportunity.

This began to tell quickly, and she winced now, her thighs bruised heavily and her stomach hurting. She finally couldn't block a single kick that took her high in the chest, flinging her backwards to slam headfirst into the wall of a tall building, just as Ryoga took off after Benitsubasa. Ranma turned in that direction, allowing his opponent to get her feet. "Well it looks like the others have finished their fight too."

Haihane did so, shaking your head woozily from the impact, then grinned and charged forward, still enjoying the fight even though she now knew mentally that she was going to lose this one. But she'd rather go down swinging than anything else. The two of them continued to exchange punches and kicks, but it was obvious that despite having cut Ranma several times, one even making Ranma wince as it had dug into his side, Haihane was losing.

Just as Ranma was about to end the fight Benitsubasa landed beside Haihane, still holding her ribs and looking as if she'd been put through the ringer. "This is getting way too complicated!" she said grumbling angrily as she looked over at the fight going around Akitsu and the two interlopers, watching the broken number take it to the others with her long range attacks.

Ranma nodded looking in that direction to before turning to look at Haihane when he saw Akitsu had it well in hand. "You need to learn more about actual martial arts styles," he said sternly. "You've got a lot of skill, but you need a lot more work on your lower body, and in particular how to defend against kicks. You can't just rely on those claw hands of yours and assume that you can overwhelm an opponent with your speed or strength." He chuckled, shaking her head. "I feel like I've been saying that to a lot of Sekirei lately."

"Martial arts styles exist for a reason, experience and training matter," he said slowly and enunciating each word carefully, smirking at Benitsubasa.

She sadly was too tired to take umbrage at his tone. Ryoga had put her through the ringer, and she had at least four broken ribs to deal with. Even though she was a Fist Type that kind of injury took a at least a few hours to heal unless she received a kiss from her Ashikabi, in which case it could heal in as little as a few minutes. She noticed however that the few wounds her teammate had made on Ranma had already healed, a sight that astonished her.

"Come on," she said muttering to her friend. "Let's get out of here." This whole show the flag thing really hadn't worked out as well as their boss had hoped and it was time to cut their losses.

Haihane simply shrugged her shoulders, tipping her head to Ranma. "See you around."

"Come by the Tendo Dojo if you're looking for a good spar." Ranma replied. With that she turned to join the fight against the two newcomers, missing Haihane's considering look as he turned away.

The two would-be interlopers saw him coming, and scowled angrily. "Time to retreat." one of them said shaking her head.

Akitsu let them go, watching until they were out of sight as Ranma moved to stand beside her, one arm flung over her shoulder. "Great job Akitsu! Two on one and you made them run!"

"Ah...yes..." Akitsu said, leaning in as her face flushed ever so slightly.

A second later the two of them were joined by a frantic Musubi, who looked as if she was somewhere between breaking down and crying or pulling her hair out. "Ranma-san, Akitsu-san, I can't find Ryoga-san anywhere! I tried to keep up with him when he went after Benitsubasa, it was so amazing, but he turned a corner and then was just gone!"

Ranma looked around and shook his head sadly. Damn, the Hibiki family curse strikes again! "I wouldn't worry about

him Musubi, Ryoga knows how to look after himself, he's had just as much practice at that as I have. He'll turn up eventually. Come on, I'll take you to a place you can stay the night I suppose. Though you'll probably have to work at chores around the place to pay for it, and I better tell ya in advance: fear the hanya."

With Musubi still disconsolate following behind them, Ranma and Akitsu made their way back north to Izumo House.

End chapter

This story wasn't the winner over here on Fanfic, but it was the winner over on my own Pat-R-eon page where it got 348 votes, and I have to say, I had a lot of fun writing it. The character interactions were fun, outside of Kuno, who is just tedious. I think the interactions are still bogging the action down, and time in general has seemed to crawl in this story more than I realized it would, but it is still fun.

I will be trying to get out both the chapter for Magic of the Force, and the winner of the poll over here Fate Touched in Middle Earth, which was the runner up over on Pat R eon. But I am not willing to promise I will be able to, sorry. Given my patron only One Piece/Ranma crossover and the fact Magic isn't finished yet, I don't know if I will have time. I can promise however to try.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, despite my not putting in much ecchi stuff, and please review!

Chapter 6: Chapter 6

Sekirei is someone else, and I am not Rumiko Takahashi.

Here is the winner of the small chapter poll! The total results were as follows:

Semblance of Hope won a measly 176 here on fanfic. That's kind of sad I think given how cool the characters and the combat is in the RWBY universe, though this was sort of offset over on Pat a Ron with 352 votes, giving it 528. Gods and Devils and Wild Horses Oh My won 256 votes on fanfic and 288 elsewhere for a total of 544, putting it in second place. But this story, Anything Goes Game Changer won second place here on fanfic 283. It also won 408 over on Pat a Ron. This gave it a total of 691, and made it the winner. Hope everyone likes this chapter!

I say it again, I hate writing Kuno. On the other hand, this chapter has once more been edited by Michael, and he has again done a fantastic job!

Chapter 6 Spreading Headaches and Chaos in Equal Numbers

"I'm sorry, could you run that by me again?" Miya said, glancing over at the distraught Musubi. It was obvious the girl had reacted to this Ryoga fellow, and to have the person you are reacting to disappear like that must've been a shock to her system. She would no doubt get over it in time. Miya thought, rather worried about the young feather from whom she sensed something...interesting, something hidden inside of her. *I'm only going by what happened to Kazehana, but she got over it within two months or so from what I can remember.* "How did this boy just disappear around the corner like that?"

The four of them were alone at the moment, Kagari having just left for work early to talk to his manager, and Uzume having just taken Nabiki home. That was no doubt a good thing. Musubi didn't seem to be in the right state of mind to deal with Uzume at the moment, though Miya was a little worried about how well Uzume and Nabiki had hit it off while the human girl was here.

Most normal women would have been put off by a Sekirei's beauty if nothing else, but not Nabiki. Despite being a self-professed noncombatant, there was a toughness to the girl and a cool self-control that put Miya in mind of Takami in many ways. *And the way that Uzume ate up all of the money making ideas that Nabiki came up with was also interesting. I did not know that money was such an issue for her, or is that a recent thing?* Miya thought, before turning back to the here and now as Ranma put down his cup of tea.

"Ryoga has this curse; we think it's a curse, anyway. His entire family has it," Ranma replied. "I've never seen his mom, though apparently she was around at one point when I was going to school with him. His father has it too. You should see their house; it has these strings leading everywhere with notes on them at each intersection that they have to put their hands on and follow from room to room. It's really weird. Ryoga's problem when he was younger was that he refused to admit he had a problem at all, but that seems to have gone away. I was going to give them your phone number, but before I could, those two Disciplinary Squad members arrived."

"And you beat them, both you and Ryoga? Very good indeed," Miya said in amusement before sighing. "Had I known that Ryoga had that problem, I would've come up with a way for him to contact me when he called to ask about you when your father kidnapped you away."

"So is it all right if Musubi stays here with you guys? I already feel bad about the Tendos putting up with me, Akitsu, and my old man, even if I'm helping Nabiki with some of her money making schemes and my father has a part-time job."

"That's perfectly all right met," Miya said looking over at Musubi. "It's probably best that she stay here in any event. I can help her through this. Rejection like this is not something that my people take very well, and with her strength she could do quite a bit of damage if she lost control of herself."

Ranma shrugged at that, not seeing the point. After all he didn't think she was that skilled, not in comparison to him or Ryoga anyway. "It wasn't that," he said deadpan. "Ryoga bought us a meal, and Musubi eats at least twice as much as Akitsu. That's more than even my old man!"

Miya held up her hand over her mouth as she laughed, and Ranma's eyebrow twitched. That was really beginning to bother him. *Why the heck is Miya-nee hiding her mouth when she laughs?*

"Anyway," Ranma said as he stood up, shaking his head of that thought. "It's getting late. Akitsu and I should get going."

He looked over to Musubi. The girl was now sort of rocking in place, holding her knees up to her gigantic chest. Yes, Ranma had noticed. With the size of those things it would've been impossible for anyone with eyes to not have. He just hadn't looked for very long. "Cheer up, Musubi. Ryoga'll be around again. Besides, he's got a cell phone, so maybe he'll remember the name of the dojo I'm staying at, and I'll be able to leave him here."

Musubi looked up with hope shining in her eyes, and suddenly lunged, grabbing Ranma around the middle, pressing her prodigious chest into his lower regions as she squeezed him like he was a giant plushy. "You'd do that for me? Oh thank you, thank you!"

Ranma blushed and tried to get out of her grip, looking over at Miya who was chuckling, and Akitsu who was staring, the temperature around her dropping noticeably. "Yes, yes. If he shows up I'll lead him right to you. Now let me go!"

Thankfully she did before Ranma's self-control could crack. Akitsu immediately moved to stand next to Ranma, lacing one of his hands with hers as she stared down impassively at Musubi. It wasn't that she didn't like the girl. Musubi was happy, outgoing, and seemed kindhearted from what little Akitsu had seen. But even if she wasn't reacting to him, Ranma was her Ashikabi and no one else's! Akitsu did not like other Sekirei being around him at all, and she already had to deal with Tsukiumi, who at least had apparently met Ranma before Akitsu had.

Miya chuckled at the possessiveness of the ice Sekirei before gesturing Musubi to the table. "Wait here for me, please. We'll get you set up in a room in a moment." A moment later as she walked Akitsu and Ranma to the door Miya asked, "How long do you think it will take him to show up?"

"I guess around two weeks or so. Maybe three, maybe less. It wasn't like he and I had much time to talk after he showed up before we ran into Musubi, after all. I have no idea what he's done in the intervening years to try and combat his curse other than his cell phone, so I can't really say."

Miya nodded. She honestly had no idea how Musubi's body would react after not being around the one she was reacting to for that long. Kazehana had gone from reacting to trying to wing herself on Minaka in a very short amount of time and then been rejected almost immediately. She had begun to get over it **very** slowly after that, but for weeks Kazehana had been manic, depressed, and over emotional. It was during that time that Kazehana started drinking. Now that wasn't quite the same thing since Musubi had not been rejected as Kazehana had, but it was the closest example Miya had to go with and she couldn't say if Musubi's reaction would be better or worse, she could only be prepared for either. *And I am not going to let her start drinking her problems away like Kazehana!*

"Anyway, I'll see you tomorrow for some training time. I'm afraid we'll have to cut the time down for that, though, if I want to keep patrolling during the day, because I've also got some schoolwork I have to see to." Ranma scowled (really pouted) irritably, kicking the sidewalk outside Miya's door. "Still don't get what all that supposed to do for me in the long term."

"It is to make you a better, more rounded individual," Miya replied promptly. "Even if you want to keep learning the martial arts as you are, you need to know about the world around you and how to communicate with people, Ranma."

"Oh, I get that part. The languages are interesting, as is history. It's the science and math stuff I don't care about. And I'm already getting some really odd looks from my science professors over at Furinkan."

"I can't imagine why," Miya said dryly, then ruffled his hair affectionately before nodding to Akitsu. "Stay safe, you two, and I'll see you tomorrow."

The two nodded, with Ranma grinning at her for a moment before leaping away over the rooftops as easily as any Sekirei, and with quite a bit more speed than most. Chuckling, Miya watched them go for a moment before turning inside to prepare a room for her new tenant. *And no doubt she is going to be just as much a freeloader as Mutsu and Uzume. The life of a poor widowed innkeeper is not a pleasant one.*

OOOOOO

Staring at the report from the sensor teams Minaka frowned, leaning back and putting his feet up on his desk as he thought. There were two major issues with the report in his mind, though he bet Takami would have thought the second unimportant at best.

"How did this Ryoga fellow disappear like that?" Minaka mused aloud. One minute Ryoga Hibiki was there, the next,

he was simply gone. And none of the other video cameras situated everywhere throughout the city could find any hint of him. It was as if he had just disappeared entirely, until the espionage team had been called in. They had been able to find his cell phone via hacking into his data plan's carrier and then tracing him using Ryoga's own GPS system. It placed Ryoga first in Europe on the Italian/French border, then in Canada, and then in Russia, all in the space of an hour or so!

However he did it, if Ryoga really was able to travel to those places, and after seeing Saotome's curse I can't say it isn't possible, this could be a future problem in the making. If he can take others with him like that, he could easily break our containment of the Sekirei Plan here in Shin-Teito. I am going to have to order the sensor teams to be on the lookout for him. The moment he appears again he'll have to be directed away from any un-winged Sekirei, just in case. I'm all for chaos and anarchy, but only when I can see it occurring right in front of me.

Added to this was the second issue. Another un-winged Sekirei had taken up residence in Izumo House. This wasn't normally an issue, since they would have to leave the North to take part in the Sekirei Plan. But Musubi was a problem for a few reasons. She was one of the Sekirei Karasuba was most interested in fighting, and if she received training from O1 then the odds of the two meeting too soon in the game would go up since Karasuba would be certain to search her out. Musubi was also one he was most interested in watching the progress of given her core had been donated to her by O8, Yume, the leader of the second generation of the Disciplinary Squad.

And she joined four other un-winged Sekirei residing in O1's impenetrable castle. Kagari, Matsu, Kocho, and now Musubi. Kocho is no great loss, though her norito is, of course, unknown, she has no desire to participate in the game at all. Matsu is a thorn in MBI's side, but the jinki she stole is of little concern any longer. Kagari is another irritant, but a small one, since he intends and can be made to take part in the game. Still, they are also apparently allied with number 7, Akitsu, and this Ranma fellow. While I enjoy the way Ranma has added such magnificent anarchy to the game, I would not like his idea of simply not playing it at all to spread, though admittedly that is doubtful in terms of Musubi.

"Still, perhaps I am worrying overmuch. And if it gets to the point that too much anarchy is spreading, I will simply have to send Karasuba to cut out the source of it all..."

OOOOOO

As they jumped and ran along the rooftops Ranma looked over at Akitsu, who was running beside him now, having come to realize which he wanted her to do that rather than simply trail behind him. He was making more progress with her every day, though she was still not showing any real emotions on her face.

"You know," he began, coming to a halt on a rooftop as he looked around for street signs to make sure they were going the right direction. "You did very well against those two Sekirei who tried to take you away. And um, you've been doing well overall with how much more outgoing you've been. I also know that staying out of my fight with Haihane was tough for you. So um, do you want anything, you know, as a sort of reward?"

Akitsu nodded her head so quickly that it looked like she was already answering before Ranma finished speaking. "I want a kiss, master."

Blushing, Ranma backed away a little, but he couldn't go far because Akitsu grabbed his hand. "Well, that is...um... that wasn't what I had in...r-really?"

Stepping close and looking up into his eyes, she nodded once. "Ahh... You don't want to, master? You, you find me unattractive?"

"That's not it at all!" Ranma said, flailing his hands to both sides as his blush escalated. "You're gorgeous! I mean, of course anyone would, that is..."

Akitsu almost allowed a smile to appear on her face but kept it down for the moment. "Ahh... then that is what I want, master."

Ranma winced, his blush fading slightly. "You're still calling me that. I..."

"...Ashikabi-sama, we have not exchanged a kiss. That is the traditional way for a Sekirei and Ashikabi to bond. I know that this," Akitsu touched the large mark on her forehead, "means we cannot, but I can at least try, master."

"I don't think it will, Akitsu. You, you shouldn't get your hopes up."

"But that is not the only reason I want to kiss you, mas-, that is, Ranma-sama. I know that the odds are low that doing

so will let me bond to you. I want to kiss you because I want to kiss you," Akitsu went on quickly, putting her arms around Ranma's body and holding him still, pressing her chest into his and staring soulfully into his eyes. "You are my bonded one regardless of my lack of wings," she said, moving slightly against him, her chains rattling.

That sound caused Ranma to flush and look away, remembering a magazine one of the guys at school had sold to another guy in the locker room. The cover had been of a woman in chains, a happy, almost ecstatic smile on her face.

Ranma knew he was attracted to Akitsu and really wouldn't have minded being in a relationship with her long-term, but there were two things that were bothering him. One was the ongoing issue with the Tendos and his father, with the promise to marry one of the Tendo girls. Admittedly his father had cooled on the idea somewhat, but it was still there in his mind. Though Ranma had yet to see anything concrete that indicated that the Tendos had a school of their own that made it a worthwhile idea.

But more importantly to Ranma was the fact that he didn't know if Akitsu was really interested in him, like he had said to Nabiki. That she was interested in him as Ranma, not as her savior anyway. It was an important distinction, in Ranma's mind at least. These issues were added to the fact that she wasn't the only girl he had confused feelings towards. Ranma also felt something towards Tsukiumi and Nabiki.

He didn't understand or know how to act on those feelings, but he knew they were there, at least. *Still, I can I can at least kiss her, right?* "Um, all, all right," he said hesitantly.

He leaned down, and their foreheads banged together for a moment, then their noses, as Ranma didn't realize he had to turn his head just a little bit to give her a kiss, and Akitsu hadn't had any idea either. When they did get it right, their lips briefly touched one another. Then Akitsu leaned in a little more, pressing her lips against his and Ranma responded, instincts that he didn't know he had welling up inside him.

His arms went around Akitsu and vice versa, though one of her arms slowly dropped from his back to his rear, squeezing it causing Ranma to squeak a little and open his mouth. Akitsu took advantage of this, her tongue moving into Ranma's mouth to find his, snaking around and along it.

Ranma almost froze at that, but slowly began to respond, his own lips warm and moving against hers, his tongue now dueling with Akitsu's in his mouth, then slowly pushing back into hers, exploring it in turn. *She did it to me, so that means it's okay for me to do it to her, right?* was Ranma's rather disjointed thought at that moment. Following this thought one of his hands went down her back to Akitsu's rear squeezing it through her kimono, and Akitsu moaned, holding him tighter. Their other hands moved up to twist in one another's hair.

The kiss couldn't become more intense, that would've been impossible, but they hugged one another trying to almost fuse their bodies together, and Akitsu's entire body began to shudder until she was forced to lean away, panting. A rosy blush was visible on her normally porcelain cheeks, her breath coming in short gasps as she leaned her head against Ranma's chest.

He held her gently, the hand on her rear moving up to her lower back as his other fell to her upper back, his own breathing ragged. "Was, was that what you wanted?"

"That and more, Ranma," she said breathlessly, looking up at him with several undefinable emotions in her eyes which Ranma couldn't name but which caused him to blush in turn. "You're so warm!"

Akitsu pulled away looking up into his eyes, her own eyes slightly glassy. "You **warm** me," She said repeating the line that she had used in the bath when she came into wash his back. Then she leaned up and kissed Ranma very lightly on the lips before moving slightly away on suddenly wobbly legs.

She stumbled and Ranma reached for her, but she righted herself quickly. Now that the event was over though Ranma's nerves came back. He took a quick step backwards, blushing bright red and looking away. "We, we should get going."

"I agree...Ranma," Akitsu said, looking down at her body for a moment, a brief flare of something like consternation in her face, though the reason was lost to Ranma.

It didn't take more than around ten minutes more to get back to the dojo. Leaping over the outer wall into the garden they saw Genma and Soun sitting on the patio around a shogi board. Neither of them bothered to look up, but Genma asked, "Anything happen while you were out?"

"Saw Ryoga, ran into a few fights, including one against a claw user who might stop by," Ranma reported succinctly.

At that Genma looked up, missing Soun moving a few pieces around quickly before he could look back down to the table. "Truly fascinating. I look forward to meeting her and seeing if she outshines Akitsu's physical abilities as you keep saying they do. It should be interesting to see how fast a Sekirei that specializes on close-in combat is able to learn."

"Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. Still, I had to take her down pretty hard, so I don't know when she'll show up."

"Bah, even that will be interesting to discover given your own fast ki-assisted healing," Genma said, waving that off.

Heading inside, Akitsu and Ranma found Nabiki watching some news broadcast about stocks in the main room, writing down on a piece of paper as she munched on a rice cracker. Akane was on the floor working on some history homework. Kasumi was sitting beside Nabiki, reading a book on gardening judging by the cover. Both of them looked up as the two guests landed in the garden, moving quickly into the house from the patio.

The two older girls took one look at Akitsu and then over at Ranma, their eyebrows going up. "There something you want to share with the class, Ranma-chan?" Nabiki drawled, trying to keep a hint of jealousy out of her voice. *God dammit, I am not interested in him to that extent, not yet. Yes, okay, he's sexy as hell, I admit it. But that is no reason for me to to get so interested in a boy after so short a time!*

"We got into a few fights but nothing major, but an old friend of mine could be coming around in the next few months," Ranma said, not realizing that his lips were a little red, or that Akitsu was still looking a glassy eyed and was walking awkwardly. Or that Nabiki had spotted a line of some kind of perspiration running down her inner leg when Akitsu walked forward, letting her legs be seen thanks to her kimono. It was running down in a clear trail down to mid-thigh.

"He's got a sort of family curse thing that makes him get lost really easily, but I mentioned the Tendo dojo to him so he might stop by looking for me. If you guys could keep him here at least until I give him Miya's phone number I'd really appreciate it. And he also mentioned I should probably buy myself a cell phone. I'm not really happy about the idea, but if we can find a small place that sells used cell phones that isn't tied to MBI, or some place that sells a cell phone that can't be tracked? I don't actually know enough about them to know how likely that is."

"Not very, though we might be able to hire someone from one of the clubs at school to make it untraceable physically. Still, every time you answer a call you would be traced by the call," Nabiki mused, distracted for the moment. "I'll look into it."

"Cool," Ranma said. "Still, I suppose I should head up and start my homework. Kasumi, did you set up your room for Akitsu?"

"I did," Kasumi said with a smile, hiding a spark of curiosity in her eyes. "Come with me, Akitsu. We'll go have a bath, and then I'll show you to my room."

"I'll come too, sis," Nabiki said hurriedly, stretching in place, smiling as Ranma tracked the movement for a brief second before looking away. That made Nabiki feel a lot better suddenly. "I have some questions I want to ask Akitsu anyway. Have fun studying, Ranma."

Ranma groaned, causing both sisters to giggle as he left the room. As soon as he was out of earshot, Kasumi and Nabiki pounced. "That's not all that happened, is it, Akitsu?" Nabiki asked, taking the girl's arm and leading her towards the bathhouse.

Akitsu paused at the entrance to the bathhouse, looking back at Ranma mournfully for a few moments before turning back to her.

"Your lips are a little bruised," Nabiki elaborated as Kasumi leaned in too, interest in her eyes.

She might have been less overt about it, but Kasumi was still a young woman, darn it! *Bodice rippers are all well and good, but listening to some actual romantic moments would be nice.*

Akitsu actually blushed, and Nabiki pulled her into hug with her arm over Akitsu's shoulder. "Come on, this is part of being a girl. You have to share things with us," she wheedled.

"Only if you want to," Kasumi said, poking her sister in the shoulder, though that did nothing to dim the curiosity in her eyes.

"We kissed," Akitsu said simply. "Master, that is, Ranma, asked me if I wanted a reward for not butting into his own fight and dealing with two interlopers on my own. I asked for a kiss, and he gave it to me."

Akitsu's hands went up to her forehead, tracing the mark there before sighing. A part of Akitsu had actually hoped that kissing Ranma like that would've broken through whatever barrier was making her unable to wing herself on him. But given the feelings and the emotions that had thrummed through her, Akitsu couldn't picture bonding with him would be any better.

"It was that good? That you found the clouds and rain?" Nabiki asked, watching as Akitsu trailed off, her porcelain skin darkening noticeably under her eyes as she blushed again.

Akitsu had come across that phrase in some of Uzume's books, and she looked at Nabiki in shock, pausing in getting undressed.

"Your walking is rather unstable, my dear," Kasumi interjected. "And, *ahem* you um, you have some evidence of your excitement on your legs..."

Looking down Akitsu could only blush once more, her porcelain skin noticeably becoming pink. She quickly got undressed, making the other two realize she had once more forgotten her panties, hence why the excitement had become visible. Not noticing that Akitsu entered the bathroom faster than either of the sisters had seen her move before this. But Kasumi and Nabiki quickly followed her, getting undressed themselves.

The three now naked girls were all beautiful, if somewhat different. Akitsu was a contrast. Despite her pearl-like skin which made it seem as if she had never spent a day in the sun, her body was fit and athletic save for her somewhat large breasts, which despite their size were perky and firm. Having kept in shape through various exercises Nabiki also looked fit, but Akitsu actually was surprised that Kasumi looked somewhat trim if not athletic. Neither girl had much muscle definition in comparison to Akitsu, though Nabiki's legs had a bit, and neither girl had much excess fat on them. Kasumi's breasts, while smaller than those of Nabiki or Akitsu who were somewhat of a size, were somewhat fuller and bounced slightly more than theirs. Her long hair, undone now, cascaded down to the middle of her back in honey brown waves, and Akitsu idly wondered if she should grow her hair out, wondering if Ranma liked longer or shorter hair.

Both Tendo girls sat down, cleaning themselves on the stools closest to the bath. "So, did Ranma notice?" Nabiki asked mischievously. Turning her head after dunking a pail of water over her hair she saw Akitsu shake her head, still blushing hotly.

That caused Nabiki to throw her head back with a laugh. "Damn, only Ranma would be so dense as to miss the fact he gave a girl an orgasm." *Although the fact he was able to give her one in the first place with just a kiss does make you wonder...*

OOOOOO

That evening Akitsu slept in Kasumi's room for the first time, and oddly enough found that given their earlier moment, she was content with this arrangement, if not pleased. The next day she woke up with Kasumi to help her, and after waking up Nabiki with her mug of coffee was thrilled to get a kiss on the cheek and a hug from her Ashikabi. *If I have that to look forward to every morning I will forego the pleasure of sleeping in Ranma's bed, especially since I then don't have to deal with Genma.* That was not a minor consideration in Akitsu's eyes given what she had felt when the older Saotome looked at her naked when she got up to go to the bathroom. Although having Akane glaring at her and her Ashikabi did irritate Akitsu somewhat.

Thanks in part to this change of routine, the next two days passed relatively uneventfully at the Tendo dojo and in the main elsewhere for Ranma, Akitsu, and the others. Nabiki began to sell off copies of the pictures and started work on a few money making schemes for Uzume's benefit, and Akitsu's training continued during the day with Genma. In the afternoon she sparred with Akane while Ranma did some homework, then after a bath would go to Izumo House where Ranma would train with Miya before going on patrol.

Even the patrols settled down somewhat, as according to Matsu MBI had decided to randomize the releases of the last dozen Sekirei so that they couldn't be ambushed any longer by their winged sisters. They found several matches a day, but only a single uneven fight over those two days. The moment the two showed up, however, the group of ambushing Sekirei backed off, allowing their un-winged sister, a young woman wielding a naginata, to go on her way.

However this only seemed to concentrate the craziness at Izumo House.

On Tuesday Ranma and Akitsu arrived to a banging crash as Uzume leaped out of the bathhouse's window wearing nothing but a towel followed by Musubi who was bare ass naked. "Gah! Dammit, Musubi-chan, I don't want to fight you! I wasn't showing off, just telling ya I was a Sekirei!"

"Musubi doesn't believe you!" the naked girl shouted, charging forward. Her large, melon like breasts bounced and wobbled in every direction as she charged, though not nearly as much as they would have if she was a human, seeming to be very firm for all their size. Her flat, toned stomach was also on display, as was the small v-shape of her pubic hair.

"GAAHH!" Ranma mumbled, nearly losing control of his hop from the last roof to Izumo's garden. Ranma had a lot of self-control, it came from being a martial artist and his own personality. But there were limits, and a naked girl, especially one with Musubi's proportions, shattered that self-control. Blood began to ooze from his nose, and he could only stare as his upper brain functions began to shout for help due to blood necessary for their function rushing elsewhere.

Seeing this Akitsu's face showed no visible reaction. For all that she was becoming more emotional on a daily basis thanks to being around Ranma her expressions had yet to become more demonstrative. Nevertheless anger seemed to boil off her, and she swiftly lashed out with her powers, creating a wall between Musubi and her target.

A second later Musubi crashed into and off the ice, while Uzume leaped backwards, sending a grateful look Akitsu's way. "Thanks for the assist, Icy-chan! HAHHA!" she laughed, pointing at Ranma. "Looks like bro there is going to need a blood transfusion, though."

She moved towards Ranma around the ice as Akitsu glared at the downed Musubi in her normal, impassive manner. Uzume leaned over towards him nearly forcing him to look down her chest. "Good to know you have a pulse, bro..." she whispered huskily, then danced away with a laugh as Ranma seemed to break out of his stupor, falling back on his rear and shaking his head, his eyes wild.

"Mah, mah, mah... Uzume-san, you should know illicit activities are forbidden in Izumo House. As is actual fighting..." All four individuals in the garden shuddered as a Miya came out, a hanya mask already out spreading darkness around it, the sound of two wooden slats smacking together sounding out accompanied by an unseen wind. The image was finished by more masks appearing one after another in slow motion as she stepped forward, one mask per step.

Uzume quickly hid behind Akitsu who had already moved behind Ranma, while he and Musubi were caught in the open, frozen with fear. Even Ranma couldn't quite muster enough courage to pull out his notebook. "EEE, I'm sorry Miya-nee! We just got here and...!"

"I know, Ranma," Miya replied, and with that the terror and pressure of her technique faded somewhat, on him at least. "I was mainly talking to Musubi and Uzume there, as well as Akitsu."

She looked at Akitsu, who was poking her head out from around Ranma, and gestured to the wall of ice. "While I appreciate the fact you did this to stop the fighting here, could you please remove this?"

That, and she no doubt would have attacked Uzume for that bit of teasing there in the end. I wonder why Uzume does that occasionally. Is it just her way, or is she actually somewhat attracted to Ranma despite being with Chiho? Miya thought, before setting that mystery to the side for another time.

"As for you, Musubi, please go and put some clothing on. Running around naked is a most immodest thing for a young woman to do, and I will not allow it."

"Immodest?" Musubi asked innocently, having bounced back from her first exposure to the hanya mask. "What's that?"

The others all looked at her in surprise, and Miya sighed. "I see your education in the human world is sorely lacking, Musubi-chan. I think we will have to correct that."

At that point Kocho came out dressed in a one piece dress that looked remarkably severe alongside her glasses, despite her epic bed-head and bleary expression. "What did I miss? And what the heck happened to the bathroom?"

Later, after being told what had sparked the fight, Miya sighed, watching as Ranma surveyed the damage done to the outer wall when Uzume burst through it. The window into the bathhouse was small and high up the wall, more intended to let in cool air than anything else, and Uzume could never have fit through them, so she had been forced

to smash open the outer wall to get away from Musubi's rampage. "That girl, honestly. I see we're going to have our work cut out for us. To think she would assume you were showing off, Uzume. That's rather sad."

Musubi was sitting seiza style nearby with the various bits of wood and other things Ranma was currently using piled on her lap in punishment for the damage she had done to the inn. She was looking rather morose, though Miya doubted the weight of it bothered her nearly as much as Miya could wish for the girl's damaging her home.

"Meh, I think Musubi-chan's just going through a rough patch. I remember the time when Chiho-chan was trying to convince me I shouldn't bond with her. And she was still, y'know, here and visible. This Ryoga guy's not even in the city any longer. Has to be harder for her," Uzume replied.

"Hmm, that's true, and I won't really come down on her for that, but the girl doesn't seem to have much in the way of common knowledge. Imagine, running around naked like that." Miya let out another sigh, shaking her head.

"Heh, I didn't hear bro complaining about it, did I, bro?" Uzume shouted out, causing Ranma to twitch where he was working on the outer wall. "How about we get Icy-chan to try the same thing? Bet you'd die of blood loss!"

"Probably, yeah," Ranma muttered, shaking his head. "Damn nearly did when..." Before Ranma could incriminate himself further he clamped his mouth shut, shaking his head to dispel the image of Akitsu when she had joined him in the bathhouse at the Tendo place.

Akitsu smiled her small, almost imperceptible smile at that, looking up at Ranma from where she was steadying the ladder Ranma was currently using since he needed both hands for the work on the wall. Ranma looked down, and they locked eyes for a moment. Ranma blushed but didn't look away, matching Akitsu's broadening smile with one of his own before giving his head a shake and returning to the task at hand.

Both Uzume and Miya had noticed this, and exchanged a very girlish giggle at the romance developing between the broken Sekirei and the wild horse. "Better than those midday soap operas." Uzume whispered.

Later that day when she saw Ranma and Miya practicing, Musubi tried to join in by attacking them with a shout of, "I want to join in too!"

Ranma reached out lightly to redirect a wildly obvious but powerful haymaker down, leaping up into the air and kicking out at Miya, who had learned quickly to force Ranma to stay on the ground as much as possible. Doing so taught Ranma to rely more on speed and also built up his strength since he had to block rather than dodge or redirect the energy of her strikes in that manner. It also made their matches shorter, which was good considering the duty Ranma had taken on to patrol the city.

She dodged backwards now, her sheathed blade flashing up faster than Musubi could track to bat Ranma's leg aside. But Ranma used that momentum to twist around, kicking out at Musubi catching her on the chin and sending her to her rear. "Gonna have to do to better than that, Musubi!" he caroled.

Pushing off the ground, Musubi laughed, throwing out a series of wild punches. "Musubi will!"

"Well, this seems to have drawn Musubi out of her depression, at least," Miya said dryly, before attacking them both, pressing Ranma down and to one side while she flashed around Musubi, smacking her here and there as she called out instructions.

While Musubi began to adapt given Miya's instruction, Miya was surprised to realize that Ranma's learning curve was actually better than the fist type Sekirei's. Every time they sparred Ranma was better in some fashion, his style and tactics slightly better even if his base abilities, his strength and speed, did not grow at the same rate. Musubi wasn't nearly as quick to adjust her style, but she was still a physical powerhouse. In Ranma's opinion she was better than he was when he first showed up in Miya's garden by a decent margin, but not close to his or even Ryoga's current level.

The sparring ended soon, and Ranma made to join Akitsu, who had been watching from the sidelines, to head out on patrol. Once more Musubi wanted to join in, but this time Miya negated it. "I allowed you to join the training session, but letting you go out on patrol on top of that after this afternoon's confusion is a bit too much like rewarding you for your actions this morning, I think. No, instead you will stay here and we will discuss what you know of the human world and people in general. I get the distinct impression that a lot of your education was severely lacking."

"Oh, pooh. I thought I knew how to fight well enough before coming here," Musubi pouted. "What else do I need to know?"

"Hmm... Where have I heard that before...?" Miya glanced over at Ranma dryly, and Ranma had the decency to duck his head apologetically, acknowledging the point before he leaped away, leaving Musubi for Miya to deal with.

The next day it wasn't Musubi who was the source of the chaos, but Ranma's curse and his being free with his connection to Izumo House.

Miya turned from where she was sparring with Akitsu and Musubi for a moment as the doorbell rang. She had wanted to see what progress the ice-wielder was making training with Genma and Ranma at the Tendo dojo, and had come away impressed with her skills. Not so much her strength or speed, those were much harder for an element type to train to a higher level, though Akitsu was already at least as fast as Musubi. Even if she was nowhere near as strong, Akitsu was still able to dodge and wear out the more straightforward Musubi. And her tactics and style were already much better than they had been.

"Ranma, could you get that for me?" she asked, not wanting to leave the two younger feathers alone, fearing that the match might become a full scale fight without her there.

Ranma was inside replacing the bathhouse's floor, which had been cracked and weakened in places thanks to Musubi's rampage the day before, as well as two of the faucets. Since he was working with plumbing, Ranma had decided not to tempt fate and had changed into his female form just in case. This had proven a prophetic move, given that Ranma had been splashed by some of the water that had somehow stayed in a broken faucet when she removed it from the wall.

Sighing, Ranma stood up from her work, moving to the doorway. Outside she found Tsukiumi standing there, looking around the inn's front yard with approval, possibly to mask a certain amount of nervousness. She turned as the door opened and smiled at seeing the redhead there. "Ah, so this was the right address. Excellent. How are you, Ranma? It hath been several days since last I saw you. And why are you wet again?"

"Hey Tsukiumi, I'm good. You here to train?" Ranma asked. "As for being wet, I'm working on a bit of the plumbing and got wet somehow. I'll show you to the backyard. Akitsu is out there with Miya-nee now, and another Sekirei who I saved from the Thunder Twins. You know who those are?"

"Ah, yes. I have had the displeasure of making their acquaintance. Verily they are a most irksome twosome," Tsukiumi replied, shaking her head as she entered the inn, looking around appreciatively. "My, this is a most traditional inn. I approve. I would like more modern appliances around, but the actual design is much to my liking."

"Heh, Miya-nee will appreciate that, I'm sure. How's life been treating you? Have you run into trouble besides Hikari and Hibiki?" Ranma asked.

"Indeed I have. Though I learned not to venture into the east or south of the city and stayed mostly in the north and west, I did run into a few very combative Sekirei, apparently part of a Nishi Sanada's flock in the west." Tsukiumi began, following Ranma through the inn to the backyard where she could already hear the sound of combat. "They were most rude and violent, as well as skilled, though of course I won despite that."

That battle had been a far closer thing than Tsukiumi would ever admit aloud, and she had in fact more survived and escaped than won. Yes, she had left one of the leather bustier-wearing women bleeding on the ground behind her, but she too had been exhausted and wounded, hence why it had taken her so long to search out Izumo House. And even that had only been because she had taken Ranma's advice and worked on short range techniques, a water sword and a water shield respectively.

Outside they found Akitsu and Musubi fighting. Musubi kept on trying to keep the range close, trying to pin Akitsu in place against the wall or in some fashion limit her maneuverability. Akitsu, in contrast, didn't try to open up the range to use her ice powers, rather she closed hard on any openings Musubi had in her defense, of which there were many since Musubi relied on wide angle blows and brute force rather than control. Her blows didn't matter much taken one on one, but they added up.

As Tsukiumi watched another blow got in between Musubi's arm and chest, taking her right under the armpit and she jumped away, letting loose a wince of agony. "GAHhh, what was that?!"

"There are several places on the human body where if you hit them it will cause too much pain for your opponent to do much." *I should know, my old man trained me to be as near to immune to that kind of a hit as anyone can be.* "I think that's enough for now, you two." So saying, Ranma moved to stand between them, looking quizzically at Akitsu. "Did you know that would be so painful when you targeted your attack there, Akitsu-chan?"

Akitsu nodded. "Yes, Genma did the same thing to me yesterday during a midday spar." She paused, her normally stoic expressions shifting very slightly to show a grimace. "It hurt, so I expected it would work on Musubi."

"Ara, then it marks the end of this training session, as does this young lady's arrival. Ranma, why don't you introduce us to our new guest?" Miya "asked," looking at the blond feather expectantly.

"Oh, right, sorry. Where's my manners?" Ranma replied, pulling at his pigtail. "Miya-nee, this is Tsukiumi, the Sekirei I saw fighting off four others that first evening while I was coming to Izumo after getting back to Tokyo. Tsukiumi, this is Miya. Don't let her mild appearance fool ya, she's an excellent swordswoman on top of being this place's keeper." *Anything else, it's up to Miya to share.*

Tsukiumi nodded her head formally, though she was looking at Miya rather askance. Despite the sheathed blade in one hand, Miya just did not give her the impression of being a powerful warrior. "Hmm, it is a pleasure Landlady-dono. I came here to ask if you could train me as you have Ranma."

"Hmm... We will see if that is indeed a possibility," Miya replied. "First I would like you to attack me as strongly as you can for five minutes. After that, I think you and Ranma would both learn something from sparring with one another."

She sighed, looking over at Ranma with a pout. "Really Ranma-kun, since when did my inn become a makeshift training center, hmmm? I would very much prefer a peaceful life you know."

"Yeah, but think about it this way, the stronger me and those allied with me are, the more wrenches into the Great Game we can throw," Ranma replied with a smirk.

"There is that," Miya said, before shaking her head. "Nevertheless, I think I would prefer after today if Tsukiumi and Musubi joined Akitsu and yourself training at the Tendo dojo rather than here." She gestured to her backyard, sighing. "My garden has already suffered enough as it is."

She then blinked, one hand rising to her mouth as she turned to Tsukiumi. "Ara, I apologize. Please, begin."

Narrowing her eyes Tsukiumi gathered her willpower, water appearing out of the air around her. *She's not taking me seriously!* "Water Celebration!" she shouted, and battering rams of water shot forward, each a different size and speed from its fellows, coming in at multiple angles. Tsukiumi couldn't create her attacks from that far away, that is, she couldn't start an attack from one position while she was in another distant one, but she could control the direction of the attacks at will, which she did now.

It didn't matter much at all to Miya, who dodged around and between her attacks as if they were standing still, her sword lashing out as she did, so quickly none but Ranma could see it move. Each time her sheathed sword hit one of the water attacks the attack dissipated, shattering even as Tsukiumi tried to retain their forms.

Narrowing her eyes Tsukiumi tried to jump up to the roof of the inn, causing Matsu, who was in her room as normal, to look up at the clatter of her feet on the roof. More water condensed out of the air, and Tsukiumi launched another attack, this time pulses of thin water shaped into arrows and going far, far faster than her previous attacks. "Water Arrow Barrage!"

But the added speed simply made Miya smile, and suddenly they all shattered. Her voice registered from behind Tsukiumi who couldn't turn before a slight impact hit the middle of her back, pushing her off balance. Even as Tsukiumi wind-milled her arms frantically to keep from falling off the roof, Miya spoke calmly. "Hmm, there are so many openings there. I think, however, that you would benefit from learning from Ranma before training with me. In fact, I think all three of you would benefit from that."

Tsukiumi scowled, but kept her temper under control as she analyzed how quickly the other woman had neutralized her attacks with seemingly no effort. "Very well," she said, gritting her teeth slightly to get the words out. She then looked down at Ranma, barking, "You, where do you live? I apparently am not at a level where Landlady-dono will consent to train me."

Below in the backyard Akitsu's eyes narrowed slightly, her equivalent of a glare, as she looked up at the very arrogant water user. Musubi, however, thrust her hand into the air. As interesting as it was to fight Miya or Akitsu, Musubi actually gained more fighting Ranma, and she found it a lot more fun too. There was no sign of her depression over Ryoga's absence now and she was eagerly looking forward to more sparring. "Ooh, ooh, me too! This way I won't have to wait here for Ryoga-san to come back either!"

"Meh, so long as it doesn't cut into my training time with ya, Miya-nee, that's fine by me. They can train with my old

man during the week and me on the weekends," Ranma replied, her shoulders shifting. "Still, we're here now, so why don't I start Musubi on some more katas, and Akitsu and Tsukiumi can find a nearby empty lot or something and start training against one another?"

"What is that supposed to mean? Do you think I am unworthy of your training?" Tsukiumi growled, then before Ranma could reply began to attack. The other girl's attitude had irritated her, and she had the desire to fight someone who was hopefully nearer to her own skill level than Miya. Ranma yelped and dodged to one side, then had to continue dodging as Tsukiumi continued to attack, until Miya interrupted her via a smack to the blonde's head.

Elsewhere the days were just as fraught as Ranma's time at Izumo House, if for very different reasons.

OOOOOO

Karasuba groaned, her blade halting in midair halfway through a kata as the sound of Benitsubasa's shrieking something reached her ears. Whatever the hell had happened to her compatriots had affected them both deeply. Karasuba had not looked into it, not caring in the slightest, having just come back from a slash and hack job. Minaka had sent her to deal with a Sekirei and Ashikabi pair who had been murdering the man's previous employers, and enjoying it too.

That, and the fact she also didn't care about her so-called subordinates. They were weak, it was that simple. She might be the Disciplinary Squad captain on paper, but she couldn't care less about them as individuals or about this whole leadership thing. So long as she had missions like her last one that put some blood on her sword, that was the only thing she cared about.

*Well that, and some **fucking** peace and quiet, maybe!* With that thought Karasuba sheathed her sword in one smooth motion, not even looking at what she was doing, before stomping over and nearly ripping the door into the hand-to-hand training area off its hinges. "Benitsubasa, Haihane, shut up!" she barked.

She let out so much killing intent that both of her squad members quailed, shrinking back from her in fear. The pink-haired one almost looked as if she was going to bolt, but Karasuba was standing between her and the doorway. Haihane looked worried, shivering in place, but wasn't making any move towards the door.

Karasuba took in their responses for a brief moment, smirking at them, but then went on quickly. "What the hell are you two arguing about now! It's getting so I can't concentrate on my own training."

"This **traitor** is actually thinking of going to the dojo that Ranma guy who beat her up is apparently a part of. Can you believe that?" Benitsubasa began, her tone strident but her body language wary.

"Wait, start at the beginning. There aren't that many Sekirei men, and I would've heard about it if you fought with number 5. In fact, I would've been very angry if you had fought with Mutsu," she said coldly, looking at them both. "He's one of mine, understand?" As a fellow swordsman and a veteran like herself from the first Disciplinary Squad she had some smidgeon of respect for Mutsu. So she was eagerly looking forward to the time when she could cut him down.

"No, it wasn't him!" Haihane replied quickly, waving her claw hands frantically. "In fact, Ranma isn't a sword user at all, I don't think. He used his bare hands against me. And he was a human, not a Sekirei," she said after a moment.

"You're joking," Karasuba said, shaking her head, a sneer on her face. "None of these over-evolved monkeys are strong enough to take on a Sekirei."

"Yeah, well these were," Benitsubasa said, shaking her head and getting some of her normal arrogance back now that it seemed Karasuba wasn't going to attack them. "The one I fought was actually physically stronger than anyone I've ever faced. He took my best shots, and it was like I was trying to knock down a building. Most of my blows just didn't matter, and the one blow that did he was too angry to notice."

"And you say you both lost to these humans?" Karasuba said, looking over at Haihane and becoming more interested now.

"The one human who was our actual target, Ranma, he was involved in the painting of the tower. The boss said to go and rough him up a little. Didn't turn out that way, though. Maybe it would have if we'd come across just Ranma, but even that's doubtful since he had the broken one with him," Haihane said, shrugging as if she didn't care at all about it.

"Humans can actually fight us?" Karasuba said, still skeptical.

"Actually, I have heard rumors from some of the workers that Ranma is connected to 01. Maybe he was trained by her; that could be why he's so strong. Maybe the other one was too, who knows?" Benitsubasa said.

"Interesting!" Karasuba said, suddenly very, very focused. "Who was spreading those rumors?"

"Someone from the Sensor division, I think."

"I'll have to look into that myself," Karasuba mused, then looked sharply at Haihane. "You'll be telling us both about what happens when you go to this dojo, right?"

"Planning to go on Thursday," Haihane replied, nodding her head quickly. "Have to heal before I can go, after all."

"Fine, I'll give you my permission then."

Haihane brightened at that, while Benitsubasa looked shocked. But Karasuba simply shrugged. "He's not another Sekirei so he's not really an enemy in terms of the game, and so long as he doesn't break the rules of the plan in a big way, I'm willing to let it slide. Besides," she said over her shoulder as she turned to leave, her smile condescending. "The two of you are so weak you need all the help you can get anyway."

Benitsubasa growled, but kept her response to herself. It was true, after all. Karasuba could beat the both of them easily with one hand tied behind her back, so long as she had a sword in her hands. And even when she didn't, she was still damn strong.

Haihane looked at her, poking her in the shoulder with one of her claws. "Want to come?"

"No I don't! I don't want to have anything to do with those **freaks** again!" Benitsubasa shouted angrily, smacking her hand away and stalking off muttering. "I'm going to go see Natsuo-sama. I suddenly feel the need to be pampered."

"Just because you've got a flat chest doesn't mean he'll go for you, you know." Haihane called out to a resounding shriek from her squad mate and a thrown weight from one of the stacks by the door. Haihane dodged them, still chuckling.

About two weeks ago, the Disciplinary Squad had been introduced to and begun to react to their Ashikabi. His name was Natsuo, and he had looks and style that could make you think he was a male model or a playboy. He was suave, seductive, intelligent, and had full access to MBI funds. Benitsubasa had reacted to him quickly, and a few days after he winged her, Haihane had reacted too. As far as she knew Karasuba hadn't reacted, but had still been winged by the man.

However there was one problem: their Ashikabi was gay. Not even bisexual, just plain gay, with a capital G! Haihane was fine with that. She really wasn't interested in all that mushy stuff; so long as she could use her norito that was all she cared about. She was interested in fighting, anime, and Disney stuff pretty much in that order. Even the orders from on high only mattered so much as they let her fight and pay for her other interests.

After her friend had left, Haihane moved around experimentally, wincing slightly as her ribs and thighs flared up in pain. Still, they were getting there, and she would be well enough by Thursday.

Wednesday did not go any more quietly for Karasuba. Though her two squad mates were no longer arguing, and she had indeed found a few Sensor specialists who told her about Ranma and his apparently knowing 01, she wasn't allowed to go and try to find him just yet, despite her best efforts, which had ended with her here in front of Takami's desk.

Half of the rules about how Karasuba and her Disciplinary Squad could act were intended to keep Karasuba away from 01, and the head geneticist, Takami, made no bones about it. "Keep the fuck away from the data anomaly until we figure out how he's so strong and his connection to 01! Minaka might be willing to endanger all of our lives by trying to bait the tiger. I'm not, and I will shut your sorry bitch ass down the instant I see you in the North without prior authorization, understood?"

Karasuba had to admit the human woman had some courage to her. If Takami had been anyone else, Karasuba would've cut them down before they finished the first sentence and made their deaths as painful as possible. *That, and the fact that Takami's other hand is underneath the table, probably on the button that will shut me down thanks to those little implants we've all got in our heads,* Karasuba thought to herself, chuckling. *Humans and their toys. They are such devious little creatures.*

"Fine, I'll wait until he breaks the rules and I can go after him for that while he's away from Izumo House. All right?"

"Fine by me. Honestly I would've preferred this guy never even showed up, so if he does break the rules I'll be fine with you hunting him down as soon as possible. But until he does his connection to 01 worries the hell out me."

Karasuba chuckled. "What worries you **excites** me."

"Just as long as you follow orders you can get excited as much as you want," said Takami firmly, pointing to the door with her free hand. "Now get out. I've got work to do."

Before Karasuba could turn away, however, a call came in, and she stopped, looking at the speaker phone on the desk. "Ma'am, we've got in a situation down herEEEE!" A loud bang was heard on the other line, and Karasuba's habitually foxlike eyes widened.

Takami quickly turned on her TV, which was connected to the tower's security cameras, to show the main lobby. There a young man wearing an old-fashioned blue gi and wielding a wooden sword was tossing several of the security guards around like they were untrained children.

"Forsooth, I will speak to whoever is in charge here!" he shouted, audible via the various microphones hidden everywhere in the building as part of its security. "I wish for the beautiful Yuki-onna's hand be given to me, for am I not more worthy of her than the foul peasant Saotome!? You will not gainsay me in person as you did on the phone! For I am Tatewaki Kuno, the Blue Thunder of Nerima!" the young man shouted as thunder rolled in the background.

"What...the...hell?!" Takami murmured. Both women turned to look outside, seeing it was a bright sunny day, then looked at one another, sharing a slight nod to indicate they had indeed seen the flash of lightning. "Special effects?"

"There seem to be a few other people down there. They caused that, somehow," Karasuba murmured, her eyes flicking over the image. "I think..." She paused, dredging up some memories from that one time she'd allowed Haihane to drag her into a movie. It had been bloody enough to interest Karasuba, and she actually had a bit of fun. From the memory the name came to her slowly. "Ninja, I think they're called?"

"There are no..." Takami paused, then groaned leaning back. "This is all Minaka's fault," she said muttering under her breath. "He opens the gates to this so-called game of the gods as he calls it, and it's like a freaking lightning rod attracting all of the craziness in the world! Why couldn't it have just stayed under the rocks where it was buried!"

"Where would the fun in that be?" asked Karasuba, turning away and heading towards the door.

"He's human, remember," the head geneticist said as she looked up. "Try not to kill him or damage the building too much."

"I make no promises," Karasuba replied with a wave, the door sliding shut behind her.

Moments later, she was out walking from the elevator out into the lobby, watching with interest as the body of one of their security guards flew past her face to crash into the opposing wall. "Not bad form," she said, moving towards the swordsman, her own sword still at her side.

Kuno turned to her, looking her up and down. "Verily, thou art as beautiful as a passing rose, though I declare that your style of beauty is not to my liking. Thou art too boyish for my tastes, so I am afraid I would not date with thee."

"Such a pity," Karasuba drawled, pulling her sword out now. "Because I think I want to date with you. So let's get it on!" With that she charged forward, her sword coming out of its sheath with such speed that no human should have been able to even see it coming.

To his credit, while he wasn't the strongest or the fastest individual, Kuno did have good sword-fighting instincts. The moment the woman across from him crouched slightly his bokken was raised. So he was actually able to intercept her attack. His wooden sword was also not a typical bokken. It was infused with some of Kuno's ki, which he had a surprising amount of. Most of it was tied into his ability to heal from practically anything given time, but what little remained was unconsciously sent into his sword to toughen it up.

His sword was thus not sliced through but it was shattered by her attack, which continued on into his chest, hurling Kuno out the doorway and away, slamming him into a building across the square that was at the front of MBI tower. The actual cutting power behind the attack was mostly absorbed by his sword however.

Whistling in amused wonder Karasuba walked forward over the wreckage of the doorway towards him across the

street. "You're still alive! That's actually quite impressive, even if I was holding back most of my strength."

"I...fight...on!" Kuno shouted as he pushed his way out of the rubble, holding up another bokken, though where he had gotten it Karasuba couldn't say.

Karasuba blinked in shock as he kicked his way out of the rubble, his wound across his chest visible but not nearly as deep as she had thought. *Did I hold back too much?*

She watched as he moved towards her, cocking her head to one side thoughtfully. *He can take a hit, let's see if he has any offense to speak of. This could be fun*, she thought, her mind much like that of a cat toying with a mouse who had just acted a little cheeky in the cat's presence.

"Verily, thou art strong, powerful enough to even put the great fierce tigress that is Akane Tendo to shame. Yet still I have business inside yonder building to deal with, and thou art still not my type, being of far too boyish manner and body. Verily, I will have to defeat thee to be on my way!"

Karasuba howled, her eyes going wide as she threw her head back in laughter. "Bring it on, you Shakespeare wannabe!" she shouted between guffaws. "You? **You?** You, beat me?! That is bad comedy!"

She waited until the boy attacked, a long range air slash which she easily blocked, then moved to intercept his blade with her own, sighing theatrically. "So weak, and you think you have business with MBI! Only the weakest of my so-called sisters couldn't put up a better fight than this. Your durability is a little surprising, but it just means I need to put a little bit more into it..."

With that Karasuba's eyes went from amused to dangerous in a brief second. The next moment Kuno was on his back feet from a negligent flick of her wrist, and her sword was coming around in another wind shearing attack.

Again Kuno surprised Karasuba by getting his blade between the two strikes, though she knew she hadn't held back as much that time. She was still holding back, of course, but the difference was something like reducing the amount she held back from 95% to 90%.

However Karasuba's blow shattered his bokken once more and carried on, slicing deeply into the human's chest and hurling him away unconscious from the pain, possibly dead. She had certainly felt some bones being sliced through by her sword there, though she couldn't tell if she had done anything more.

She marched forward to finish the fool off, and suddenly there were ninja everywhere. It was literally that sudden. Even Karasuba's senses hadn't spotted them all. Dozens of short, black clad individuals popped up from the shadows, a nearby sewer drain, and from over the rooftops. All of them immediately began hurling tiny daggers or throwing stars at her then several of them closed in quickly with short swords. At the same time two of their number quickly moved to Kuno, grabbing him up and hauling him away, while two others tried desperately to staunch the flow of blood.

"Now this has gotten a lot more interesting!" Karasuba shouted, cutting down two of the ninja quickly then twirling in place, her blade disappearing even to the ninja's senses as she batted aside or sliced through the weapons hurled at her. A second later she closed swiftly with the ninjas charging at her, cutting them down two at a time even as they leaped away, trying to keep the range open.

Wind attacks slashed out from the Black Sekirei, cutting three luckless ninja standing on the rooftops above the battle in twain, their blood splattering everywhere. Others she cut into actually disappeared into the shadows, their bodies splitting up as if they were images rather than people, but she quickly learned the trick to telling which was which.

The last ninja quickly fell, his head decapitated, only for the rest of his body to roll forward before he hurled himself shoulder-first into a sewer drain.

Karasuba blinked, looking at the head which was now a melon ball and shook her head, laughing aloud. "That was hilarious! You know I'm starting to get why Minaka is holding this game in the first place!" *All this chaos it's bringing in, I might actually have some fun with this other than waiting for Musubi to try to challenge me or goading O1 into doing the same.*

Minaka had watched all this with amusement from his office up high and thought much the same thing. The chaos this game was causing was hilarious to him, so long, that is, as he remained in the driver's seat. The ninja were a bit of a shock, and he wondered where they'd come from.

What is the importance of this Kuno family? He knew they had rejected his land grab of the district, and the

government hadn't helped him at all in that, so was the family tied to the district, and if so, why was Nerima itself important? *Something to sic my spies in the government on, I suppose.*

For her part back in her office Takami was simply banging her head on her desk, a rhythmic thump as she muttered curses under her breath. "Ninja. People cursed to change into pandas or change genders, sword wielding morons, and now ninja. What the hell is going on with my life!?"

OOOOOO

Thursday morning started much the same as the previous days in the Tendo household with Ranma and Akitsu helping Nabiki wake up after sparring with Genma. Akane, despite her desire to better herself as a martial artist, wasn't willing to change her morning routine enough to take part and would always go running instead. This left Ranma and Akitsu just enough time to finish up with Genma, give Nabiki her coffee and take a bath, separately despite Akitsu's continual efforts to wear down Ranma on that point.

In that combat he had two willing helpers: Kasumi, who thought it was most improper given they were not married and didn't want to think of someone doing anything in her bathroom, and Soun, who looked at Akitsu as a major threat to the agreement between the Tendo and Saotome families. He always tried to get between the two of them if he could, though he rarely had any energy to do so given the ongoing retraining Genma was putting him through. Soun would train with Genma practically from the moment the kids left for school to when they returned, and then for several hours before dinner.

Leaving Akitsu behind once more, Nabiki and Ranma went to school together with Akane. "So, are you ready for this afternoon's math test, Ranma?" Akane asked, somewhat teasingly. She didn't like how much better Ranma was in terms of martial arts, and sometimes took solace in the fact she was better academically than him. Added to this was the fact their personalities continued to clash, causing an argument at least twice a day. The normal reasons for these were his curse and Akitsu. She still considered Akitsu a witch at times, and thought Ranma a pervert for having her around.

"Ugh, don't remind me. I think I'm all right, but I'd like to get in some more practice before the test," Ranma replied before stopping suddenly and then hopping forward high into the air to put two houses between himself and an old woman who was splashing the step before her front door.

The two girls watched as the woman, instead of splashing the ground, flung the water from her ladle high into the air to try and catch Ranma. Thanks to Ranma's leap, however, this water assault missed.

"Ranma, did you do something to irritate her?" Nabiki asked, catching up to her friend quickly, as did Akane, staring back over her shoulder.

"No idea, but I've gotten into the habit of being leery of people with water," Ranma said, smirking over his shoulder at the old woman who had stopped what she was doing to glare at him.

Thus Ranma completely missed a group of young elementary school kids running by the fence, one of whom was throwing a water balloon to another. The balloon missed its intended target, going high and splashing Ranma right in the chest, triggering his change. As Ranma looked down at herself, the old woman cackled once before going inside.

"Hahaha! The mighty martial artist done in by a kid with a water balloon. Oh, that's priceless!" Akane laughed, shaking her head. "Listen, I'm going to head on and deal with the pervert brigade. I'll see you two later."

"Grrr..." Ranma growled. "That girl really does have it out for me, doesn't she?"

"Well, this time you have to admit it is kinda funny, Ranma-chan," Nabiki replied, winking up at the redhead.

In turn Ranma growled again, leaping down to walk beside her. "Remind me to smack you two with a water balloon, see just how that feels, let alone the whole sex change thing."

"Don't worry about it. You know Tofu's always got some warm water to spare. And as for your test, I'll help and quiz you on it while we walk and at lunch if you want. Think of it as a partial down payment on your share of the cash from the pictures I sold of you and Uzume."

"Really, you already sold them all? I thought you had made a few hundred of them? How'd they do?" Ranma asked interestedly.

"Very well. My factors and I actually didn't sell them at a set price, instead we had groups of students bid on each five

picture batch. After giving my factors their cuts and setting aside Uzume's portion from the sales of her photos we still came away with quite a lot. About 17 large, all told."

"Wow! Really?" Ranma was astounded. He knew Uzume was pretty as hell, and his female form was no slouch either, but that much after only a few days?

"Oh yes. Uzume was tremendously popular. I honestly think we could have gotten away with selling some of her pics for an even higher price than they normally went for. And your female form was a major hit too, especially the action poses." Nabiki frowned a little. "I should probably warn you, though, that Kuno bought several sets of each of you, outbidding everyone on them from a few of my factors."

"Ugh, that's just what I need, to have him coming after me in this bod as he does Akitsu already. Not cool Nabs. Why didn't you tell your factors not to sell to that whack job?"

Nabiki reached over and flicked Ranma's ear with one finger, smirking as she twitched away. "Don't call me Nabs, Saotome. And if I had done that it would have cost us at least half of the profits. We'll just be have to be careful he doesn't ever see your female form in person."

"Easier said than done, Nabiki," Ranma grouched.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully until lunchtime. Ranma and Nabiki were sitting under what was rapidly beginning to be known as their tree, with Nabiki helping Ranma by quizzing him between bites of their respective meals. The two of them sitting like this had become a common sight, though there were many in the crowd of students all around them still looking their way askance at seeing the Wild Boy, as Ranma was known, and the Ice Queen sitting together as friends like this.

Akane thoughts on the sight was much more negative. She didn't like seeing the boy who continually showed her up in martial arts becoming so close to her sister. He was a boy after all, and all boys were perverts. Nabiki might be smart, but she wasn't a martial artist, so who knew what Ranma could do to her?

Their meal-cum-study session was interrupted by an unwelcome voice, though it sounded slightly more breathy than usual. "Hold, Foul Sorcerer Saotome, for whilst I have found thee at last, I have not come before you to do battle this day. Nay, I seek information from the silver-tongued crass commercialist beside you."

The two of them looked up, rolling their eyes at Kuno's speech, only to stare in shock along with much of the rest of the student body. Kuno stood there in the normal school uniform, though it was hard to tell given how many bandages were wrapped around his torso. He was limping badly, leaning on a real katana's hilt for aid as he moved toward them.

"Kuno, what the hell did you run into?" Ranma asked, astonished. Even after so short a time knowing the psychoswordsman he knew Kuno's ability to bounce back from injury was impressive, to say the least. Seeing him injured like this was a surprise.

"Verily, while your astonishment is warranted, it is of no consequence to you Saotome. Know only that I didst run into an obstacle in pursuing information on the glorious Yuki-onna who you have been charged with caring for with the intent of taking that task upon my more worthy shoulders."

The two sitting students looked at one another, then Ranma supplied, "Um, you went to MBI and got beaten by someone there?" Ranma tried, wondering if Kuno had a speech impediment to go with his obvious insanity though what Ranma had understood from the swordsman he hadn't liked.

"Indeed. A single swordswoman of...some appeal, physically, though not to my tastes, with an even fiercer disposition than the mighty tigress Akane Tendo, but with far less honor and a bloodlust to match any ogre of old," Tatewaki declaimed grandly. "Twas a sorely fought contest." With that said he turned his attention back to more important matters. Even Kuno had limits, and the beating that Karasuba had delivered to him the day before was one that was going to stick with him for a while. He had no desire to share the full tale with anyone. "I wish to know, Nabiki Tendo, of the magnificent specimens of womanhood whose pictures you were selling yesterday."

Nabiki looked at Ranma, indicating he should be the one to answer. After a moment he nodded back to her and gave the upperclassmen the story the two of them had thought up that morning. "Well, the redhead's my sister, and she's a friend to Uzume. I have no idea why, but Uzume needs the money, hence why she agreed to have Nabiki take pictures of her. Ranko volunteered to join in."

"Hmm... Thou doth speak it plain. I do see a passing resemblance betwixt the two of you," Kuno mused, leaning down with a pained grunt to stare into Ranma's face, making the pigtailed martial artist recoil slightly. "Yet it seemeth to me that thy sister gained the lion's share of the beauty between the two of you."

"You have no idea how happy I am to hear you say that, Kuno," Ranma drawled, causing Nabiki to break into a fit of giggles she covered unconvincingly with a series of coughs. "Now, was there anything else?"

"Yes, of course there is, you peasant! I wish you to introduce me to your sister and the beauteous Uzume," Kuno said, straightening up once more with another grunt of pain. Ranma could even see some dark droplets of blood coming through the bandages covering his upper body. "Such beauties as they are, surely they wouldst prove worthy to date such as myself!"

"Yeah, no. You hit on me, er, my sister, and I'll kill you," Ranma said, shaking his head and trying to sound angry and protective despite his little gaffe. It worked against Kuno, anyway, and he went on hurriedly. "Come on, Kuno. I hardly know you, man, outside of the fact you're too damn quick to attack, and you don't care much about bystanders."

At that Kuno stiffened, then winced, and Ranma frowned again, noticing how badly hurt he must've been to be in that much pain. But he went on regardless. "So why the hell would I introduce you to my sister? What would you do if someone wanted to meet a sibling of yours?"

"Prepare an obituary page for him because if the fool angered my dearest sister she would probably poison him or feed him to Mr. Turtle," Kuno retorted, sounding rather deadpan despite having gotten the words out between gasps of pain.

As Ranma floundered at that Nabiki stepped in quickly, changing the angle of their defense slightly. She had talked to Uzume extensively yesterday, mostly about how to parlay the girl's skill with costumes into money even though she didn't have any real ID or schooling, and she knew that for some reason Uzume was rather desperate for money. "As for Uzume, she's already in a relationship, Kuno. And we couldn't give out her address without her permission anyway so we'll have to get back to you on her, Kuno-baby."

As Kuno nodded, though most of that might have been because of his being in pain, Nabiki went on quickly, shaking her head sadly. "Besides which I thought you were interested in my sister and Akitsu, Kuno. Are you going to say you're going to throw my baby sister over for someone you just saw in a few pictures? That's low, Kuno, very low."

This seemed to do the trick, and Kuno turned, slowly, his normal somewhat controlled if not graceful movements sharply curtailed by his injuries. "Nay, Nabiki Tendo, I will never forsake thy sister, for she is verily one of the prettiest of the flowers of womanhood." He moved towards where Akane had been sitting nearby watching all of this, his arms spread wide.

Akane paled but was saved by the bell signaling the end of the lunch period. As the others students all turned to enter the building several small men dressed in ninja garb appeared out of nowhere, grabbing at Kuno for a moment, swiftly wrapping his upper body in a new set of bandages.

Seeing them Nabiki hummed thoughtfully as she stood up, accidentally flashing Ranma her legs up to mid thigh as she did so. *So he really does have ninja at his beck and call, and more than one too. I thought that was just a rumor. Interesting.* "Well good luck on your test, Ranma. Sorry our studying was... What's wrong with you?"

Ranma had turned away, getting up hurriedly, his face red. "Legs, er, I mean, I'm fine Nabs. I'll see you after school. Will you be free to head over to Izumo House today, or should we wait to give Uzume her share of the cash tomorrow?"

Putting Ranma's red face down as a case of nerves or something similar, Nabiki shook her head. "I'm busy after school. I'm seeing a banker this afternoon. Do you want to come with me? You can open up your own account that way and keep it out of Genma's hands."

Ranma frowned, thinking hard, as the two of them walked to the main building. "Um, no, I don't think so. You can take half of my share and—what's the phrase?—play the stocks or something with it? Make it work for us, anyway. I'll take the rest and hide it at Izumo House tomorrow. That way we'll have some cash to work with if need be."

Nabiki turned, smiling brightly and leaning over to give Ranma a brief kiss on the cheek. "Thank you for trusting me like that, Ranma," she said, shaking her head. "I think you're probably the only one who would trust me like that outside of Kasumi."

"Meh, I might've just met ya a few weeks ago but I know you're smart. You could've sold my secret to Kuno or tried to use me rather than work with me to make money, so... Yeah, I trust you," Ranma said, flushing slightly. Then he smirked. "Well, I'll trust ya after you have your coffee in the morning, before that I don't think I'd trust you to walk in a straight line."

Nabiki smacked him lightly on the chest for that, flushing at the gentle teasing note in his voice. *Okay, its official. Crap, I really am interested in him. I, I need to sit down with Akitsu at some point, talk this over with her.*

OOOOOO

Later that day Ranma, Akane, and Nabiki walked home together. Akane was rather angry at the moment at Ranma, who she felt had sicced Kuno on her that afternoon. Not that Ranma noticed this. "You want to continue your balance training, Nabs?"

Nabiki kicked the fence lightly. "Don't call me Nabs, Ranma-chan."

"Then don't call me Ranma-chan," Ranma replied, smirking at her. Both of them were now wearing smirks, and Ranma went on still locking eyes with Nabiki. "You didn't answer my question."

A chance to feel those hands and that bod against mine? Yes, please! "Sure Ranma, why not?" Nabiki said, feigning only slight interest despite the suddenly rapid thumping of her heart.

Ranma leaped down, picking up Nabiki easily and leaping back up with her in his arms to land lightly on the fence. Akane watched this, glowering as Ranma's hands rested on Nabiki's waist for a moment before he moved back.

Almost immediately Nabiki began to move slowly forward, showing a decent amount of balance for someone who had only done this twice. If someone had asked Akane she would not have been able to tell them which made her angrier, the sight of Ranma following her sister so closely with obviously perverted thoughts, or the sight of her sister, who had never shown much interest in anything physical, showing such aptitude.

Still, she controlled it for now, saying, "Hmmf, I bet I can do that too!" With that Akane leaped up onto the fence. Her legs were more than strong enough to get her up there, that was never in doubt. Her balance, however, left much to be desired, and she soon leaped off rather than falling off. Despite that she kept trying, getting angrier as the walk went on.

By the time they reached the Tendo dojo Ranma could practically see steam coming out of Akane's ears, and Nabiki had decided to stop practicing, walking on the ground now. This served to calm Akane down somewhat, but not by much. When they turned down the lane to the front door of the dojo Akane stopped, growling angrily. In front of the door was a young woman with gray hair wearing an off the shoulder black kimono and bandages wrapped around her body. On her hands she wore massive claw gauntlets. She was currently poking the ground with them, then looking up at the door and then back down for some reason. Despite her absurd clothes, however, it was obvious to Akane that she was stacked, and Akane could also tell she was probably another one of the Sekirei witches.

"Who the hell is that!?" She rounded on Ranma, who was moving past her towards the girl. "Another one of those freakish Sekirei? Have you been inviting them into our home, Ranma?!"

"Nope. Been inviting them to show up to the dojo for training, though," Ranma replied, smiling in welcome as Haihane looked up at him. "Yo, ya here for some sparring?"

From behind Ranma, Nabiki looked around his shoulder, a curious expression on her face. *She isn't as stacked as Akitsu was, but she is cute in a goth sort of way. Yep, beauty does seem to be a Sekirei trait.*

"Mm," Haihane said, standing up and smiling at Ranma. "You said I could, so..."

"Cool, lets head inside. Though ya might not be able to spar with me right away. It depends on if my old man and Akitsu are already using the dojo. Don't think it'd be a good idea to have two spars going on at the same time."

They found Genma and Akitsu outside the dojo, with Genma pressing Akitsu back hard. She was trying to bring her ice powers into play, but Genma was moving too quickly for her to get a bead on, and her concentration kept faltering whenever she had to block his blows.

This proved to be a feint. As the others watched several ice spears formed in the air above the two combatants, then fell swiftly, boxing Genma in. But to the surprise of three of the four watchers Genma was able to escape the trap, shattering one spear and bouncing between two more to escape into the sky.

This should have let Akitsu keep the range open, and she began to form more ice spears and other attacks until she spotted Ranma. Then she swiftly moved to his side, a wall appearing behind her, blocking Genma from attacking her once more. The large man smashed bodily into it and bounced off. Akitsu's eyes narrowed in her equivalent of a glare at Haihane before she moved to stand beside and slightly behind Ranma. "Master."

"What've I told you about that, Akitsu-chan?" Ranma quipped, sending one of his lopsided smirks at her, which Akitsu answered with a slight uptick of her own mouth. Before Ranma could stare too much at those lips he turned away, addressing his father as Akane headed up to her room to change into her gi. "Hey, old man, this is Haihane, the gal I told ya about. She's here ta spar with us?"

Genma cocked his head to one side, looking at their young woman before him thoughtfully. "What's with all the wrappings?"

The girl looked away, flushing slightly as two of her claws clanked together as if they were fingers. "...hurt myself sometimes; forget that I'm wearing these. I started to get into the habit of wearing bandages because of that during training, and it sort of evolved into my own kind of fashion sense."

Genma grunted, looking over at Ranma. "Where would you rate her skill?"

"Better than most fourth Dan black belts, at least in speed and strength. Not so much more style-wise though, and she lacks experience," Ranma replied promptly.

"We'll see if we can help with that, and if you have a learning curve to match your specialty," Genma said, gesturing to the girl to follow him into the dojo where he had left the gasping, brutalized body of his friend a few moments ago.

Genma looked Soun's way for a moment before shaking his head and moving to pick the other man up, leaning him against the wall. With that done he moved into the center of the room, gesturing Ranma and Haihane to join him. Akitsu quickly followed, taking up position behind Ranma, glaring at Haihane. Surprisingly they were quickly joined by Akane, who glared at them all before taking up position along one wall to watch.

Glancing at Akane, Genma hid a smile before turning back to the others. *The girl might not have the skill or self-control, but at least she's got a competitive attitude. She might have become something if not for that damn temper of hers and the fact that Soun never trained her.* "I want to watch you spar, five minutes, no ki or special attacks."

Ranma nodded and looked at Haihane, cocking a hand towards her invitingly. Haihane needed no second urging, and with a wild grin on her face she charged forward, her claws slashing this way and that, in the same sort of attack she had tried the first time they fought, except slightly more controlled. Despite that Ranma dodged, blocked, or redirected her attacks easily because she was still being a little too one-dimensional.

But that ended quickly. Between one step forward and the next she leaped to the side, then lashed out with a roundhouse kick which caused Ranma to duck, following it up quickly with a series of claw and leg kick combos, moving around Ranma now, circling and attempting to force him to defend himself from multiple angles.

Ranma laughed, nodding his head. "While your style hasn't changed, you're thinking now. Good!" With that he jumped over another kick, spring-boarding off her leg which was outstretched for just a brief second too long. He smacked her claws to either side, his own hands quickly moving back to her head, using it as a springboard to leap higher into the air. Once in the air Ranma was able to deal with Haihane's attacks easily, and she never regained the initiative.

"That's enough!" Genma said, sitting on the floor of the dojo in a thinking pose as he looked between the two of them. "That was quite good, far more of an actual style than I expected, too. We can work with that. What you need right now is more style and experience, as the boy said. Those kicks were sloppy, uncoordinated, and far too **slow**. We'll need to work on that first. Once your legwork is up to speed, we'll start moving into more of a balanced style, and then we'll start working on strengthening both your legs and arms further as we build your experience. Only experience can diminish your tells and let you really take your own style beyond the barely acceptable."

Ranma rolled his eyes lightly, but he didn't interrupt his old man. *Oyaji might be a bore and an ass some of the time, but when it came to the Art at least he knows his stuff.*

"Until then, let's start you sparring with Akane here. She has many of the same problems as you do, but she is actually physically stronger while you have an advantage in speed. It should be a good match." Genma looked over at Akane challengingly, and as he knew she would the girl rose up to the challenge.

For the next hour or so Ranma and Akitsu worked on teaching Akitsu some hand to hand. Since her main power was a long and mid-range type, Ranma taught her some Aikido and would teach her some Pencak Silat along with the Saotome Aerial Style, which would allow her to reopen the range via throws and leaps.

The spar between Haihane and Akane did grab his attention at times. Akane was a bull, charging forward, her attacks powerful, short, sharp, and controlled for the most part, but with little thought or style behind them. Haihane, without her claw hands, seemed to be rather hesitant, awkward for the first few spars, and though she had an edge on speed she didn't use it well, matching Akane charge for charge. But she learned as quickly as Genma and Ranma had hoped a fist type would, never making the same mistake twice, and by the end of the day was able to use a hold to flip Akane to the ground, ending the match by dropping a kick on the other girl's chest.

About two hours after they began Nabiki came in, dressed in short short-shorts and a tank top, holding a large folder. Ranma caught sight of her out of the corner of her eye, and turned his head around to track her, flushing hotly as her legs grabbed his attention for a moment. She noticed this, but only allowed a faint smile on her face as she approached him. "Ranma, here's the thing I wanted you to deliver to Uzume."

Her eyes flicked over to Genma, who she had a low opinion of after talking to Miya and to Ranma about his past antics. Ranma realized this and nodded his head slightly, agreeing with her being cagey about this in front of his father. "Would you mind dropping it off for me today?" Nabiki continued.

"Yeah, sure. Akitsu and I were pretty much done for the day anyway," Ranma said, and Akitsu quickly halted her progress though the last kata Ranma had taught her, moving to stand beside Ranma.

"Thanks, Ranma-chan. And if you could, see if she has a cell phone number I could reach her at, okay?" Nabiki said, then turned away. She looked over her shoulder to watch as Ranma's eyes tracked to her rear for just a brief moment before flicking away and smiled to herself. *So he is actually attracted to me. Good, but I do need to sit down with Akitsu this weekend and hammer this thing out.*

Seeing that Ranma was leaving Haihane quickly decided to leave too. She had enjoyed sparring with Akane for a bit, but the other girl's smug attitude when she won grated on Haihane's nerves. She made her farewells and hopped away over the rooftops towards MBI tower, before sheepishly coming back to grab her gauntlets from an amused Kasumi, thanking her before once more turning away.

When the grey-haired girl left, Akane smirked smugly and turned in Genma's direction, only to find that he had woken up her father with a splash of water, and the two were facing one another in the middle of the dojo. Scowling angrily, she left in a huff.

OOOOOO

Ranma and Akitsu quickly made their way through Tokyo as Ranma still called the city, refusing point blank to call it by its new name of Shin-Teito. They arrived at Izumo House to find Kocho and Musubi sitting on the porch as Kocho showed Musubi some pictures in a book, though what they were neither of the new arrivals knew. "Hey gals," Ranma said as he jumped down from the outer wall. "What's up?"

"Nothing much, Ranma-san," Kocho said, smiling over at her savior. While she wasn't reacting to him, she liked Ranma well enough, and if she had wanted to be involved in the Sekirei Plan at all she might well have winged herself on him, even knowing Akitsu would probably kill her. As it was, however, she was more than happy to be not-very-close friends with him. "I'm just teaching Musubi about different actual fashions, street signs, and that kind of thing. Asama-sama roped me into helping teach her common sense."

"Gotcha," Ranma nodded, looking into the doorway as Miya came out of the inn. "Hey Miya-nee, is Uzume here? I got some stuff from Nabiki to give her before we can spar."

Musubi stuck her head up at that reminding Ranma for all the world like a dog that had just heard she might be taken out for walkies. "Spar?"

"Maybe later, Musubi-chan," Miya said before turning back to Ranma. "She's up in her room, actually."

Miya led the way inside despite Ranma and Akitsu both knowing where Uzume's room was and entered with them after Uzume told them she was decent. Thankfully for the brunette Sekirei she actually was, somewhat, wearing much the same kind of outfit Nabiki had been wearing earlier, with a pink and blue short sleeved shirt stretched near to breaking point over her chest. "What's up, guys?"

Ranma tossed the packet to Uzume underhand, and she caught it, opening it quickly. "That's your share of the take from the photo sales, Uzume. Nabiki said that she and her agents cleaned up, though I've no idea how much there is there."

Pouring the package out, Uzume counted through it quickly, her eyes widening along with her smile until it was a full on grin as she leaped up, grabbing Ranma in a hug that planted his face in her chest as she danced around the room. "Bro, this is, oh this is awesome! You seriously don't know what this means to me!"

Gasping, Ranma's hands flailed to either side as he tried to think up how to get out of her hug without touching anything he shouldn't.

Luckily Miya came to his rescue, bonking Uzume on the head with her ladle. "That is most inappropriate, Uzume-san, regardless of how happy you are." To her side Akitsu also was rubbing her head, a sign that she had been about to interfere too.

"Oh fine, ruin my fun, why don't ya?" Uzume quipped, holding Ranma out at arm's length and smirking as the boy gasped in air, his face suffused with a magnificent blush. "Bro, seriously, you've no idea what this means to me. If Nabiki wants to sell any more pictures of me at any point, tell her to call me, because this cash, what it could mean is just..."

Ranma nodded, not questioning why Uzume wanted the money, feeling that wasn't any of his business. "Actually Nabs wanted me to ask you for your phone number so she can get in touch with you. She's apparently following up on some of the ideas she told you about for your costumes and such."

"Awesome!" Uzume cheered, hopping in place as she thrust her hands in the air. Then she sobered somewhat and turned to the window, grabbing up the cash again. Pausing, she turned to Ranma, then reached down to write her number on a pad by her bed, holding it out to him. "That's my number, but I have to go now. See ya later, bro, Icy-Chan, Miya-nee~!"

Miya huffed as Uzume caroled the last word as she leaped out of the window and away over the roofs. "Ranma, if that nickname spreads be prepared for your training to be heightened to a tremendous degree!" Seeing Ranma's thoughtful face she rolled her eyes and smacked him very gently upside the head with her ladle. "That isn't supposed to be a good thing!"

OOOOOO

The next day the trio's school time was astonishingly uneventful. There was no pervert brigade in the morning, and Kuno was noticeably absent, something they were all happy about. Ranma did decently on his math test, scoring an 82. So it was with a light heart that he headed back to the Tendo dojo with Akane and Nabiki.

Akane had scored better than him, a 94, so she too was in a decent mood, though it passed quickly as Ranma looked around just as they reached her family's front door. "Huh, Haihane isn't here today. I suppose that's a good thing considering it gives me more time over at Miya-nee's, but I would have hoped to see her take her training seriously."

The youngest Tendo scowled. "Well if you want to train someone, why don't you train me?! I **am** the heir of the Tendo dojo after all, and my own father seemingly can't bring himself to do it, so shouldn't that fall on you and your father's shoulders?"

For a moment Ranma noticed an odd look crossing Nabiki's face, a calculating look coupled with something else he couldn't make out, but whatever it was, it went away as Ranma replied. "Maybe it would if you had enough self-control, or you and I could actually get along well enough for you to take instruction from me. And do you really want my old man to teach you, seeing the way he's been trying to get Soun into shape?"

Akane had been puffing herself up to the first part of his statement, but she couldn't deny that she and Ranma didn't get along, and the last point made her deflate entirely. "Fine, I see your point." With that she opened the door, and the trio entered the house. Nabiki headed upstairs quickly to get changed in order to head over to Miya's. Ranma had told her about Ukyo and what was going to happen today, and she was eager to see Genma get his ass kicked. She also wanted to talk to Uzume about some more money-making schemes and organize the next photo session with her and Ranma.

The other two said good afternoon to Kasumi and then made their way through the house to the garden and the dojo.

In the garden they found Genma having been knocked into the koi pond by one of Akitsu's ice attacks, which made a

series of icicle spikes on the ground in a line and elsewhere, where she had tried to bracket the larger but far more mobile Genma. The ice wielding Sekirei stood, looking rather tired, but her face noticeably brightened as she saw Ranma. She moved toward him, and Ranma smiled at her, making Akane gag before turning to head to the dojo.

Looking over at the panda Ranma held back a snicker, saying "Remember, Oyaji, Miya-nee is expecting us over today."

"I heard you the first time, boy," Genma replied with a sign, holding it up quickly before flipping it. "Soun and I will be leaving right after I get back here, though."

He looked around, making sure his friend was still in the dojo where he had left him before sparring with Akitsu. Then he pulled another sign up and began holding them up one after another, flipping them several times to show a longer message with no pause to actually write on it that Akitsu could see. "Honestly boy, I need to get Soun out of this house. Every time he sees Akane trying to train with Akitsu I need to sit on him so he can't interfere. And there's no way I can push him as hard as I need to get him back into shape here. He just won't take it as seriously as he should. Frankly it might take a year or more to get him to the point where he can even use his school's special techniques."

He shook his head, holding up another sign while Akitsu, who had moved to Ranma's side once more, twitched, her fingers making little grasping motions towards the sign. "We might have to figure out a way to teach them to you without his example to work from, boy. I'm not saying Akane won't ever be able to control herself enough to be able to learn them, but it's doubtful."

Ranma blinked, then smiled eagerly at the idea of learning new techniques, while beside him Nabiki snorted, not at all surprised her sister was having self-control issues. Ranma noticed the snort and a sort of dark look in Nabiki's eyes, but decided to set that aside for now. "Sounds good to me, Pop. You know how quickly I can learn things like that. As for Miya-nee, I'll go ahead and tell her you're coming. That'll give me time to train some more with her. She's helping me perfect my wind pressure attack."

Genma growled, throwing his ursine head to one side, visibly trying to throw off the idea that Miya had anything to teach his son that he couldn't, though deep down he knew that was not the case. He didn't like to admit it, but Ranma really was better thanks to Miya's training.

"Yeah... I really don't think ya should show up like that that, old man," Ranma quipped. "I mean, Miya-nee has seen my curse, but she hasn't seen yours yet, and if she reacts negatively..." Ranma and Genma both shuddered at that, and Ranma went on hurriedly. "Besides, this is a sort of formal thing. A meeting between two masters, right?"

The panda held up a sign. "Too right, boy!" The sign flipped. "I'll go and get changed. I'll even..." *flip* "...find a clean gi to change into, and then..." *flip* "...I'll head over there in a few hours."

"You have one?" Ranma asked blankly, then ducked as Genma hurled a sign at him. Akitsu swiftly caught it by the signpost, staring at it only to gasp as the writing disappeared. *How does he do that?!* she thought, staring hard at the panda as it rumbled its way inside.

"Ah, Soatome-san, please change out there!" Kasumi said with a hard tone for the normally mild-mannered woman. "I do not want to have to clean up more panda hair from the bathroom!"

Laughing, Ranma turned away as Nabiki came out to meet them, talking with Kasumi for a few moments. Ranma exchanged a few words with the woman who he thought was the real head of the Tendo household, promising to be back with Nabiki by the time it went dark, before turning away. With Nabiki once more in Ranma's arms, he and Akitsu turned and hopped up and away over the roofs.

OOOOOO

From the door to the dojo Akane watched them go, scowling as she saw how closely Ranma was clinging to her sister. For whatever reason though, Nabiki seemed to actually like the pigtailed pervert. *I can't believe it, but she does. Though I bet that's only because of how much money she's making working with him. Ugh, who could really like a freak like that, with that curse of his!*

But that actually wasn't the main thing bothering Akane. No, she was thinking about this whole Sekirei thing. She didn't like Akitsu. She didn't like her tricks or the fact she was so much faster than Akane. But Akane also didn't like the idea of this whole Sekirei Plan either. The very concept of some pervert suddenly gaining total control of a super-powered alien woman was disturbing to her.

On that same line, however, she didn't like the fact that Ranma seemed to be doing something about it without even asking her or anyone else if they wanted to join him. That, along with how Genma kept on dismissing her skill and her father's continued attempts to dodge out of training her, made Akane think that everyone was making fun of her, or simply denigrating her skills as a martial artist.

She stared over at where her father had just dragged himself out of the dojo, wincing in pain from various muscles and injuries, only having acknowledged her with a bare nod before heading off. Akane's face firmed, watching him. "Well, I can damn well do some good too!"

With that thought Akane headed up to her room, changing into a training gi before heading downstairs. She scowled as she saw the two large packs by the door where they had been left for her father's and Mr. Saotome's training trip. *And did either of them ask if I wanted to go? No! I could have helped daddy get into shape, and then he could have taught me the family techniques in return. I don't care what Ranma says, there's no way I'm so far away from using the Tendo branch of Anything Goes even if I can't use the Aerial style.*

Quickly Akane reached the door and she turned, shouting out to Kasumi. "Kasumi, I'm heading out on a jog. I'll be back for dinner!" Before Kasumi could reply Akane was out the door, eager to look for some trouble.

OOOOOO

After arriving at Izumo House, Ranma trained with Miya for about two hours before he looked up as the doorbell rang, audible out in the backyard. His face split into a wide grin, and he looked over at Miya, who looked as pristine as ever despite his attempts to mark her. In contrast Ranma was sweating somewhat heavily, though he wasn't nearly as bruised as he would normally have been at this stage. "Is that..."

Nodding, Miya led the way through her inn, her lips twitching. "Indeed, I called Ukyo-san before you arrived here. You might wish to dry yourself off, at least, before meeting her, you know." She continued onward despite Ranma's growl of irritation at her gentle jibe, a smile once more twitching across her lips.

Opening the door Miya smiled at the young looking woman standing there. She was dressed in a boys' school uniform, but her chest was just large enough to show feminine curves with long flowing brown hair. On her chest she wore a bandoleer with tiny, strangely designed throwing knives, while on her back she wore a massive spatula. "Good afternoon, Kuonji-san. I believe you know the young man behind me?"

"Heh, yeah. You still have that lame pigtail, Ran-chan?" Ukyo said, her voice somewhere between friendly and awkward. She glanced at Akitsu, recognizing her as someone like Uzume and the others here, dismissing her for now while examining the other brunette standing by the doorway into the sitting room much more closely.

"Hey, don't diss the pigtail!" Ranma replied mock-indignantly, then moved forward, his hand outstretched. "It's great to see you, Ucchan, and I'm sorry about how my old man's an asshole."

Ranma then ducked as Miya swung a ladle she hadn't been holding a second before. "You of all people should know that cursing like that is not allowed in Izumo House, Ranma," she admonished, before pausing. "Even if the word you used was accurate."

Both the younger people laughed, and Ranma gestured Ukyo inside to the sitting room. "Erm, so how've you been, Ucchan?"

"A lot better since Miya-san made me realize chasing after you was stupid," Ukyo said dryly as she sat down. "No offense, Ran-chan, you look handsome and all, but I really don't want Genma as a father-in-law. Him... Him I still have a problem with."

"Er, did your old man tell you about the agreement, and do you know why he made it in the first place?" Ranma asked. "I mean, do you know if my old man even mentioned the fact that he'd already made an agreement with the Tendos before making the agreement with your father?" Ranma asked, gesturing to Nabiki.

Ukyo looked at the other brunette, and both girls nodded hello to one another. "We were told about the whole arrangement a few weeks ago, about an hour before Ranma and his father showed up on our doorstep."

"That was still a bit better than me," the chef said grimly. "I wasn't told at all until about an hour before I was due to leave with you. Genma was supposed to take me with you along with our cart, but then ran off with you and the cart, leaving me behind." Her eyes narrowed, and she leaned over poking Ranma in the forehead. "I still remember you sitting on top of it, waving at me as if it was all in good fun, y'know?"

"Yeah, I wish I could remember what line my old man gave me about that. I remember having the cart too for a bit, but I can't remember how he explained that to me. Probably just told me it was to train you or me, something like that," Ranma said morosely.

"Don't worry about it, Ran-chan," Ukyo said, leaning back. "Miya-sama has helped me through a lot of my anger about being abandoned like that, and she pointed out that given our ages there's no way I could blame you for it. But Genma is a different matter. I want to at least kick his tail a few times for what he did."

"Why did your father agree to the deal in the first place?" Nabiki asked. "I can't imagine that Genma was ever that persuasive, unless copious amounts of booze was involved."

"My dad wanted a boy to take over the school," the chef said bluntly. "He was never happy that I was born a girl, hence the way he dressed me and everything. Don't get me wrong, I like dressing up like a guy, makes things a lot easier. But I still have days where I like to dress up as a girl, another thing Miya-sama's helped with. My dad would have thrown a fit he'd ever seen me in anything but our school's gi and guy clothes. I think that was a major part of his reasoning. The other half, he just sucked at taking care of me on the road. That aspect didn't go away when we traveled together after Genma and Ranma ran away."

"That's the most sexist thing I've ever heard," Nabiki said coldly. "Though I have to say it also makes some sense given my own father's reasoning behind the agreement between Genma and him. Where's your father now?"

"He died a few years ago, about three months or so before I found Ranma's name on that high school registry which eventually led me here to Izumo House," Ukyo shrugged, showing a marked lack of regret. "I've gotten over it."

"I have to apologize again," Ranma said wincing. "But hey, look on the bright side. This way you don't have to have Genma as an in-law."

"Ouch. Maybe my sisters and I need to rethink this whole fiancé thing," Nabiki quipped, causing the others at the table save Akitsu to laugh.

The three of them talked for a time, somewhat awkwardly. While Ukyo and Ranma had been great friends when they were younger, that was ten years ago, and both of them had changed a lot over that time. It was obvious that they were still friends, but Miya, sitting nearby but only occasionally taking part, doubted that they would ever become close. Their interest lay in different directions, and they had few similar interests outside the martial arts. But while Ranma saw the Art and becoming as good as he could be in it as his life, Ukyo was nowhere near as passionate about the martial arts. She was a cook first and a martial artist second.

On the other hand, although Nabiki and Ranma were very different and had different goals in life, there was a growing closeness between the two that Miya could see. Whether the connection was one that would grow in time she couldn't say, but she rather thought it would.

There have been many trite phrases trotted out over the centuries about love and how people go about falling in love. But one line my husband once said I think is the closest to reality: falling in love is at times a quick process based on mutual attraction. Staying in love is based upon whether a couple will be able to grow together rather than apart. And I think these two, for all their surface differences, could well grow together like that. Like my husband and I did during our courtship and after until his death.

For once thinking about her husband did not bring with it the normal wave of pain and sorrow. Rather a sort of bittersweet regret came to Miya then as she listened in on the conversation before her. *I think you would have liked the young man Ranma has become, my love, and what he continues to do for my sisters as well.* What her thoughts on Nabiki might mean for Akitsu didn't occur to Miya. After all, harems were normal among her people.

About an hour after Ukyo's arrival, Izumo House's doorbell rang once more. Miya smiled over at Ukyo, gesturing to the backyard. "You might want to get ready, my dear, to *ahem*, serve up some comeuppance, yes?"

"Lame," Ranma sighed, shaking his head, then wincing as Miya's ladle smacked him upside his head while she moved towards the door. Behind her Ukyo laughed before racing out to the backyard as Ranma, with Akitsu trailing him, went out to prepare. This was going to be fun.

Outside the door Miya found Genma in a surprisingly clean white gi looking irritated and attempting to appear his normal brash, arrogant self. That façade faded quickly as he saw her standing there. Even without her hanya mask Miya could cow most people with her simple presence, but she said nothing. Her own chastisement of Genma would come later; this was Ukyo's time now. "Ara, Genma-san. Excellent. Please, come in. I have been looking forward to

speaking to you about the training you gave Ranma while on this trip of yours."

Miya allowed her eyes to narrow even as Genma straightened up, recovering some of his poise. "However, we will be discussing your decision to bring Ranma to this Jusenkyou place in detail later. I was most displeased to discover his curse and how precisely he received it." She let her hanya mask out just slightly so that it peeked over her shoulder almost, the horns, lank black hair, and white skin barely visible.

In response Genma stepped back, letting loose an unmanly shriek, and Miya smiled. "For now, however, please, come this way. There is someone here to meet you, interested in getting to know your training styles. And I must say I'm interested in talking to you about them too."

She gestured Genma inside, then out into the backyard. There was a woman standing there leaning against a tree, but her looks didn't register so much to Genma, rather the weapon over her shoulder was the reason he stopped short. *A giant spatula. I know only one school of marital artists that use those... No, it couldn't be...*

Genma might have moved backwards, but a slight shove from behind and his son's voice saying, "Get out there, Pop, and take your medicine!" sent him stumbling out into the garden.

The brown-haired girl's eyes lit up malevolently as she took in the sight of the man, and she stalked forward towards Genma.

Genma backed away, trying to think of how to play this, but Ukyo continued to move toward him. *Try ignorance first.* "I don't know what you're talking about, girl! I don't even know you!"

"My name is Ukyo Kuonji. Genma Saotome, you cheated my father and stole my dowry, prepare to die," Ukyo said, circling around Genma, keeping his back to the inn where Miya was standing in the doorway.

It would take a far braver man than Genma was to try and get out that way, but Genma made a break for the outer wall, only for the girl to intercept him, a string of some kind of dough grabbing his leg and hauling him back to earth. He broke it quickly, but had to leap away again as the girl closed, making him unable to get back to the wall. "My name is Ukyo Kuonji. Genma Saotome, you left me behind and stole my dowry, prepare to die."

Watching from the sidelines, Ranma noted Ukyo's normal Osaka accent had been replaced by an obviously fake, foreign sounding accent. *What's up with that?*

"I'm sorry! I was weak! I had enough trouble looking out after one child, I couldn't look after two!" Genma pled, looking around for an out. While he could have fought the girl, it was entirely possible if he tried that Miya would join in, or his own traitorous son. It was evident to Genma that he had been brought here to take his lumps, but he certainly wasn't going to go down without a fight. *I'll get you for this, boy!*

"Then why did you make the agreement in the first place, you ass!" Ukyo shouted. With that she charged forward, leaping into the air and bringing her spatula down, slamming it into his head without further warning. "I will have my pound of flesh for leaving me behind!"

Groaning in pain, Genma dodged to one side, then yelped as a few flung dough bombs went off all around him, almost bracketing him for Ukyo's next charge. But he dodged under it, only getting hit in the shoulder by the base of Ukyo's battle spatula, which hurled him sideways.

Deciding to try to at least redirect Ukyo's anger Genma shouted, "It wasn't my fault! I gave the choice to the boy. He chose your okonomiyaki over you! I asked him which he liked the most between you and okonomiyaki, and he chose the food!"

Ukyo actually looked over at Ranma at that, but Ranma growled, flinging a piece of wood left over from his projects around the inn at the back of Genma's head when he turned to try and run away. "Don't give me that, old man! I was six or seven, and that was the best food I'd ever eaten, and the most, too, thanks to you always stealing my food from my plate! No way in hell did I understand what you were really asking!"

"That's right, Genma. It was your damn fault for stealing my dowry. Now stand still and take your punishment!" Ukyo shouted, closing in once more.

"Never!" Genma shouted, trying to back away only to have to dodge a series of the small knife-like spatulas from Ukyo's bandoleer.

Watching this from where she and Akitsu were sitting on either side of Ranma, Nabiki frowned even though she was

amused by what was going on. "So, you have any idea how many other families your father might have made agreements with?" she asked idly.

She blinked as Ranma grabbed one of the spatulas out of the air from in front of her. To one side Uzume too was grabbing them as they came towards them piling them up next to her while she wondered where the girl had been hiding most of them. There were certainly more knives there than showed on her bandoleer.

"I don't know. I've been wracking my brain trying to think about that but I can't remember meeting anyone else my own age on the trip. There could've been a few temples he might have stolen from, and I know we both dined and dashed a lot. Other than that, I don't think so..." Ranma said, shaking his head.

"Hmm..." That was what Nabiki's research into Genma had dug up too, though Miya had not been as helpful as she had hoped in that search. Ukyo was the only one to have come around asking about Ranma and Genma, but that didn't mean there weren't others out there.

"I'd like to think that most of them are like the ones he made with my family and the Kuonji's, simple verbal agreements, and as such could be forgotten. But a lot of the old style martial arts families that have their own styles are a little...well, a little wrong in the head. Look at the way my own father's pushing you to choose me or one of my sisters and get hitched already." Nabiki had, in fact, thought about telling her father about the Kuonji agreement, thinking they might be able to get him to cancel the pact between their families, but thought better of it for a few reasons, not all of them logical.

"Heh, don't hold back Nabs. Tell me what ya really feel," Ranma said, pushing her shoulder lightly. As Nabiki tried to push Ranma's shoulder in turn without success, he went on. "Well, whatever the case, we can just wait until trouble shows up and deal with it then."

"True," Nabiki said, her brow furrowing in irritation.

"Heh, you're looking kind of worried there, Nabiki," Uzume said, having turned from the ongoing fight to watch the two interact with interest, one eyebrow rising in sudden surmise. "Any reason why you're so concerned about more girls going after bro?"

"Other than the fact they might attack my family and our house, no," Nabiki said coolly, staring at the slightly older and far chestier woman with a calm expression, not rising to her insinuation.

Before Uzume could launch another attack, Ukyo picked up a pail that had been left on the porch half full of water with cleaning solution in it and hurled it at Genma, having run out of both spatulas and dough bombs. The makeshift missile hit Genma in the face, splashing him and triggering his change.

Ukyo watched in amazement as Genma shifted from his normal body into that of a large panda, gaining about a foot in height and girth. "GRowf!"

Uzume slid down the support she had been leaning against to land on her rear, shaking her head in shock. "I... You told us about it, but damn if that transformation isn't even more surprising than yours, bro!"

Not having heard about the curses just yet from Ranma or Miya, Ukyo stumbled backwards gaping. This allowed Genma to turn away, leaping up and over the outer wall.

As he did so, Musubi arrived from the errands Miya had sent her on today. "Oya-san, I'm backKKK!" she shouted, as the giant panda leaped up at her from the other side of the wall.

Before Musubi could do anything or the others could interfere the panda had smacked her to one side, sending her crashing down into the garden while it leaped away, running over the rooftops. Musubi hit face and chest first, holding up the bags of groceries she had been sent to buy so they were left undamaged. Genma raced on, looking for a place where he could change forms and then call Soun to meet him so they could get out of the city as fast as possible.

"Ara, are you all right, Musubi-chan?" Miya asked, moving to help the girl up, taking the basket of groceries from her.

Musubi bounced to her feet uninjured but looking rather awestruck. "I'm fine, Oya-san. But wow, what was that? That punch was strong, and he was so fast, too!"

"I've got the same damn question, girlie!" Ukyo said before turning to glare at Ranma. "Anything you want to tell me, Ran-chan?"

OOOOOO

"What do you mean she was able to pay the hospital bill? I thought that Uzume had no ID, and thus no method of making money legally without reverting to her MBI card, which she in fact does not have, having helped number 2 escape. Was this in fact in error?" said a calm, but very cold voice. This was a voice of a man who did not like dealing with setbacks and was used to getting his own way.

"No sir. That seems to have been the case." This second voice was also calm, but markedly subservient sounding. "But nonetheless she seems to have figured out a way of making enough money on smalltime jobs. She was not very forthcoming about how or what those jobs entailed, so I doubt we'll be able to find her place of work and put pressure on them." After a moment the voice went on. "If she is able to make that much money in so short a time, we might need to be more proactive in pressuring her."

"Hold her Ashikabi as hostage to her good conduct, you mean?" said the voice from the other end. "That is a bit too strong for my preference this early in the game. I will order the hospital manager to add to the amount of money she needs to pay, but to do it in such a way that it doesn't seem to be maliciously aimed at Uzume. And then when she can no longer pay the amount needed, you can come back into this. Until then, you and your Sekirei will be of better use elsewhere. I'll see you in my office first thing tomorrow morning."

With that Izumi Higa, Ashikabi of the East, hung up, turning to look at a map of the city that was slowly taking shape as the great game continued. *Some random elements might've been added of late, but the game is still going on, and so long as it does, my path to power is still out there waiting for me to grab it.*

OOOOOO

After the explanation Ukyo spent several moments playing with pouring hot and cold water over Ranma's head, shaking her head in wonder. "Wow, this is just amazing, Ran-chan! Heh, I don't suppose you're looking for a job? You could make a killing as a waitress with a bod like that."

"Heh, no thanks, Ucchan. I've already got a few jobs lined up through Nabiki here," Ranma said, gesturing at Nabiki who had been talking quietly with Uzume as Ukyo got her surprise at the curses out of her system, having called home to her family to tell Kasumi that she would be coming home late. "But I've got a question for you. Why did you repeat yourself so often when you threatened my old man, and what was up with the accent?"

In the kitchen Akitsu helped Miya with dinner as Miya talked to an excited Musubi about training her further to help her react to sudden surprises. Kocho and Matsu had also joined them in the dining room for dinner as was the rule in Izumo House. Both of them were looking a little angry, glaring at one another, then turning away as Miya turned to glance their way. Ranma guessed the two of them had had another argument about Internet usage.

"Oh, that." Ukyo giggled a little, shaking her head. "Er, I was trying to imitate this scene in the *Princess Bride*. I suppose my accent and the way I had to mangle the lines kind of ruined it."

"No way, Ukyo. I got it at once. That was why I was laughing," Uzume said, to which Nabiki nodded.

"What, is the *Princess Bride* a famous movie or something? I've never heard of it," Ranma said, and all the side conversations cut out as everyone except Musubi turned to stare at him in shock.

Reaching over, Nabiki gently touched Ranma's cheek as her head shook from side to side sadly. "Oh, you poor, poor boy. You've never seen the *Princess Bride*? We must correct this." She looked over at the small TV in one corner which didn't have a DVD player, then stood up resolutely. "Who here hasn't seen the movie yet? I know that my family has a copy."

Musubi looked confused, which Nabiki decided was the same as a reply, though amusingly enough all the other Sekirei, even **Akitsu**, had seen it already. From where she had turned to them from her place in the kitchen even Miya was looking a little nostalgic, and a little sad. "I saw it when it was out in theaters while on a date with Takehito-san. It was one of the last ones we had seen before he proposed..."

Ukyo shook her head sadly, standing up. "Sorry, I need to get back to the restaurant. If you're ever in eastern Shin-Teito, come and find me, Ran-chan. I'd like to catch up with you more."

"Sure, Ucchan. And again, I'm really sorry about what my old man did." With that Ukyo left, shown to the door by Miya.

Of the Izumo House crowd only Musubi was interested in coming with Ranma and Nabiki. She joined the two of them

and Akitsu, heading back to the Tendo house. Little did they know that Musubi wouldn't be the only guest that night...

End Chapter

I looked back and saw how much stuff has come out of the Kuno mansion, and I thought... hmm... so the ninja brigade came from that hmm, and Kodachi may well become a main character going forward for that reason and the fact I'd like to see if I could redeem her character without changing her too much. We'll see. I also had several other things I wanted to write up for this chapter, however I realized I was still stuffing in too many events in too short an in-story time frame. So they will occur later.

As for Takami, she struck me, just like Homura, as someone who would be unable to deal with a sufficient amount of utter chaos, hence her reaction and his avoiding Ranma (yes he actually is avoiding him/her). Don't worry, she'll start rolling with it soon, but it will take a while.

August's poll is up here on fanfic. Something many of you might know is that it has been three months since its last update and that means [A Third Path to the Future](#) is up for voting!

Why isn't it automatic you ask? I have decided that at this point I can cut down on the chapter size of ATP without losing any of the impact and world building. So from now on it will be up in the monthly poll! It is also the author's choice, which means I will be voting for it too, and [Horse for the Force](#) is not going to be part of August's poll. I need to do some research on characters and worlds, and plan the next few events, both major and personal, out for that story. Magic of the Force however is part of the poll in August.

If you want it or one of my other stories updated this coming month take part in the poll here or join up over on P at Ron. I have story ideas, several omakes and teaser chapters up there, as well as the One Piece/Ranma story [Stallion of the Line](#), which is already in the Grand Line, putting it ahead of a lot of the stories here on fanfic LOL.

Chapter 7: Chapter 7

Sekirei has too little plot, Ranma too little romance for it to be from me.

This story was the winner of the short story poll for February. Remember that this month, given it's a short month, there was only one winner in this poll to go with *Making Waves*, my Ranma/Fairy Tail crossover Pat R on only work, and *Magic of the Force*, which should be up by now or within a few hours. Considering I got out a chapter of *Effect* for the Super Bowl, I don't think anyone can complain LOL. Just think about how many words I've written in a short month, then wonder if maybe you can find it in your heart to support me over on Pat R on. If you do you get access to my Pat R on only content and a far larger voice in what stories I update per month. Case in point:

Anything Goes Game Changer brought in 140 votes here on fanfic, but 624 votes over on Pat R on, giving it a total of 764. The others were *Semblance of Hope* which came in dead last here with only 52 vote, but brought in 595 votes over there, putting it at 647. Astonishingly *Stallion of the Line* came in last overall, though it came in third here fanfic, giving Stallion 401. *Fate Touched in Middle Earth* came first here with 229 but only won 414 overall. *Gods and Devils and Wild Horses* came in third place, but didn't break five-hundred, raking in 472 with only 122 here on fanfic.

You should also note that my new small story poll is up. I have put two HP and two Ranma stories there, so the voting should be relatively even here and maybe over on Pat R On. The SW crossover however I have decided to make a Pat R on only poll. You can win further votes for the story of your choice in this poll or the SW poll however if you are of an artistic bent and think you can come up with a story cover for any of them.

This has been betaed by... me. Yeah... so there will be mistakes within it, I have no doubt.

Chapter 7: Random Meetings and Heart to Hearts

Akane was out and about walking the streets of Tokyo, or rather Shin-Teito, looking for trouble. That would not be how she described what she was doing to anyone else, but that was what she was doing. She wanted to see if these Sekirei were all that in a real fight. She'd been beating Akitsu handily after all, and she didn't think the other one, Haihane, was going to last very long either. Besides, Akane wanted to prove that she could stand up for herself, that she really was worthy of being called the strongest girl in Nerima.

The fact that she'd been beaten several times during spars against Ranma in his female form and once or twice even Akitsu were facts which did not stay in Akane's head. Being beaten never stayed in Akane's head. It wasn't simple confidence, so much as a denial of reality, the source of which was unknown at present even to her.

So far tonight she had seen one or two Sekirei racing along the rooftops as she walked through the streets, but none of them were anywhere she could get up onto the rooftops in turn. That was irritating and as she watched a few of them leap by again heading to the right of her current route she shook her head. *What's so special about racing along rooftops anyway? I'd rather stay in one place and hammer anyone who comes at me. That's what real martial artists do, not bounce around like springs!*

This concept was based on what Akane could remember her father doing when she was very young in the few serious matches he ever had after settling down. Standing and acting like a fortress and simply hammering anyone who came within range was part and parcel of the methodology of the Ground-based school of Anything Goes.

Sighing deeply Akane paused her steps to watch the group race on ignoring the crowd of city-goers all around her and the few odd looks she got for staring up at the rooftops. After a moment she shook her head and decided to make a loop through the city before heading back home. Turning, Akane wound through a few more blocks towards a park she knew about, well away from where that group of Sekirei had been going.

As she neared however, Akane heard the sounds of someone fighting. "About time!" She said gleefully moving forward.

Entering the park Akane soon came upon what looked like a one-on-one fight between two weapon users occurring in one of the public soccer fields. One of them was using a large scimitar, reminding Akane strongly of something she'd seen in that Disney movie *Aladdin*. The other was wielding a massive warhammer that frankly looked a little too large for her frame.

The two of them were exchanging blows, heavy and not very coordinated to Akane's eyes, and she smiled triumphantly at the thought. *I knew that silver haired bitch couldn't be the norm for these cheating aliens!* The thought

actually served to calm her down and she moved forward on a tangent, hoping to get close enough to overhear any conversation and figure out if this was a friendly spar or a real fight before getting involved.

However doing so Akane quickly became aware that she was not alone in watching the fight. There were several other people there watching from the bushes, all of whom were guys. This was enough to get her back up, but what they were saying nearly made her see red.

"Damn, will you look at the ass on that girl with the weird sword, mmm... more cushion for the pushin' man."

"Blah, you can have it, I'm more interested in the other one. "Look at her face, you can tell she doesn't have much spirit to her. That's the kind of girl that you could treat anyway you wanted and she'd just be happy that you're the one doing it. This whole destined one stuff is the path to paradise I tell you."

Her eyes narrowing Akane moved through the bushes, showing a surprising amount of stealth to anyone who knew her, moving up behind each man in turn and knocking them out with a chop to the neck. A chop from Akane was like getting hit by a two by four swung by a sumo wrestler, and none of them even had time to grunt before they collapsed into lala-land.

She ended back where she began, dealing with the two men who were there together spying on the sparring Sekirei. Before the two men even knew she was there Akane grabbed them both by the back of their necks and slammed their heads together. "Perverts!" she roared, finally able to let loose her battle cry,.

Her shout drew some more attention, and both of the combatants turned to look at her. The scimitar wielder quickly stepped away from the hammer wielder, bringing her sword up to point at Akane, as the Hammer wielder took a step backwards, looking around her, suddenly looking both small and worried.

"Sorry," Akane said almost cheerfully now, holding up her hand quickly and kicking the two unconscious boys out of the woods. "These two were talking about perving on you big time, and that's the kind of thing I just can't stand."

"...If they were reacting to us why did you get in the way?" said the hammer wielder slowly.

"Well," Akane said equally slowly, hefting the one who had been talking about the hammer wielder up into the air by his neck like he weighed nothing at all. "Even if he was reacting to them that shouldn't mean much. As far as I know, that's just a way of saying your bodies are compatible or something right?"

Akane actually only barely remembered the talks Kasumi and Nabiki had with Akitsu on this point. The whole Ashikabi/Sekirei bond sounded way too perverted to her, so much so she'd pound any Ashikabi she met just on general principle. But Akane had understood the reacting thing to be half-physical attraction and half-indoctrination thanks to Kasumi explaining it to her.

She shook the man she was holding like a rag doll. "I mean well do you like the look of him? He looks like a gang banger or street bum!"

The hammer wielder looked at the unconscious man and slowly shook her head. "Well no not really, but well," she seemed to wilt, staring down at her feet. "I, I know I'm weak, and I know I'm not very skilled, so...I mean, if he was reacting to me, that could've been that could be my only chance, I mean who would want me and I don't really have any place to go, I've been around the city for days and I don't want to go back to MBI..."

"Gah that's enough," Akane said, tossing the man behind her like so much dead weight. "You have that giant hammer, girl! You're strong, skill and speed can come, don't put yourself down like that." if there was one thing Akane had in abundance beyond self-confidence (or self delusion), it was the belief that women were superior to men and should be confident about themselves. So she hated seeing girls put themselves down. "Now, what's your name?"

"Y, Yashima, #84," the hammer wielder said.

"Kiriko, #93." The scimitar user said, rolling her eyes at her sparring partner's timidity. "I suppose if you already know about reacting and such we can tell you our numbers."

"Well, what do you think about these guys?" Akane asked looking Kiriko.

She shook her head. "I agree with you, but I already have a guy I am reacting to. He's a policeman, and I'm trying to get through his dislike of us Sekirei to take me seriously. Yashima's situation is a good deal worse than mine."

Akane winced. "Yeah, policemen really don't like us martial artists either, I imagine Sekirei have it even worse

sometimes."

"We would if not for MBI controlling the city. He doesn't like that much either though," said the scimitar wielder, wilting to almost match Yashima's depressed state.

"Ah, okay" Akane said with a nod. "Well, I suppose I should wish you luck, just as long as he doesn't turn out to be a pervert. Still... I suppose policemen are safe enough, or should be..."

"So you're a martial artist?" Kiriko asked, shaking off her doldrums and moving over to talk more naturally with Akane with Yashima following behind her. She ignored the last bit Akane had said figuring that humans, just like Sekirei, had their quirks.

For her part, Akane wondered why the two Sekirei had started fighting. Now that they had stopped it looked as if the two of them weren't particularly friendly, but also as if they didn't hate one another either. Still, she decided to bring that up later, there were more important things to talk about right now.

"That's right," she said, smacking one hand against her chest. "We're proof positive that super-powered people don't only come from space. I'm the strongest girl in Nerima, and I've yet to see a Sekirei that can match me without using weapons or dirty tricks."

Looking at the still morose Yashima, and not noticing Kiriko's dubious look, Akane sighed. She really wanted to keep looking for more trouble wanting to prove herself still against more Sekirei and maybe pound some perverts. But Yashima's sadness called out to her, and she decided to set that aside for tonight.

"Come on," she said, looping her arm with hammer wielder's and pulling her toward the park entrance. "If you don't have any place to stay you can stay with my family. We've already got a few freeloaders so what's one more? At least you don't bring a perverted attitude and curse with you."

"Curse?" Yashima looked at her quizzically, but didn't fight her grip, walking beside her for a bit.

They were nearly back to Nerima when they ran into real trouble. Mist began to appear around them so thick they could barely see the end of the street and Akane stopped, peering through the mist warily while Yashima went back to back with her, also confused and worried.

"Oh, what's this then, two for the price of one?" shouted a voice from on high, causing both Akane and Yashima to turn in that direction. On a nearby rooftop stood four Sekirei, appearing out of the mist as if summoned into being. One of them had brown hair and was wearing a black gown with white puffy sleeves and was wielding a scythe of all things, though the end of it was covered by a specially made sheathe.

It had been her who had spoken and her face was ecstatic as she stared down at Akane and Yashima, and Akane had to fight back a shiver at the look in her eyes. Something about that look bothered her a lot. "Taki, do we know anything about these two?"

Next to her was a girl that was dressed something like Musubi in a heavily modified kimono/Shinto priestess like outfit, but with her arms bare. She also had nowhere near Musubi's bust and seemed to wield a staff as her primary weapon. Beside her was Mitsuha, the blonde-twin-tailed girl Ranma had met several times by this point.

The fourth girl had vibrant gray blue-gray hair and wore a white dress which had an open slit revealing her belly button and enough of her sizable bust to make Akane grit her teeth in anger at the girl being a pervert. Or jealousy, though once more Akane would sooner die than admit that.

Taki held a cell phone in front of her, staring at its screen for a moment before shaking her head mock sadly. "Don't order me around Yomi," she said almost absentmindedly before answering the other Sekirei's question. "Yashima, the hammer wielder, is a known loser, but she's not winged yet. The other one we don't have any information on, she must be a recent release. Looks like a fist type though."

"Well in this game, any card can be useful, even weak ones. Let's take them!" said one of the two blonds. Mitsuha, flaring her whip with a crack.

With that the quartet leaped down towards them, only for Akane to move forwards with a grin on her face. She met them as they landed a punch nearly taking one of them out the fight immediately. It instead hammered into the shoulder of the staff wielder as she dodged at the last second, spinning her around and sending her backwards so hard she lost her grip on her weapon. "I might not be a Sekirei, but I'm a martial artist! I'll force you to take me seriously!"

With that Akane went on the attack, getting in close and not letting up a moment, switching from one series of punches to a series of kicks smoothly. Her speed was nothing to brag about, but she was strong enough to make her blows really hurt even Sekirei. The one called Taki intercepted some of them, wincing as one of them landed wrong on her forearm, bruising her somewhat. "Yashima, you take on the one called Yomi and the one with the whip, I'll handle these two!"

The Sekirei holding her injured shoulder was pushed away from Taki, who nearly took a kick to the side but moved with it, trying to circle around Akane and come from both directions at once. The still unnamed Sekirei scowled angrily rolling her injured shoulder and assuming a shaky boxer's stance. "Know your place human, you can't fight Sekirei, you're not nearly as good as that guy with the dumbass pigtail is reported to be!"

"I'll show you how strong I am!" Akane shouted, getting angry now. She paid no heed to the fight occurring nearby, concentrating on her two opponents. She redirected or dodged several attacks, trying to land another haymaker and failing, the two Sekirei facing her now used to her speed and able to see her blows coming even if the former staffwielder's defense was nothing to write home about. Akane had some decent form, but she telegraphed her attacks, and this was enough for the two of them to slowly break through her defenses. Even so without Taki she might have beaten the staff-wielder.

Eventually Akane was being pressed back enough that the staff wielder was able to pick her weapon up off the ground, looping a foot under it and hurling it into the air. Catching it deftly, she brought it down in an overhead strike to Akane's head.

Akane barely got an arm up to block the blow. The staff blow landed, cracking down on Akane's forearm weapon with enough force to shatter bone which it did, causing Akane to cry out as she felt her forearm break. "Gah!" She fell back going to one knee and cradling her injured arm with her other hand.

Nearby, Yashima went down too, the sheathed edge of the scythe wielder's weapon smashing into her chest while Mitsuha slowly choked her from behind with her whip. She lost her grip on the hammer which clattered to the street, and the scythe wielder stood over her, staring down at Yashima disdainfully. "Taki, Juusa, are you two nearly done with that girl? She's not a Sekirei, she's of no use to us unlike this weak bitch."

"Nearly, Yomi" said Juusa, moving over to stand over Akane, cracking her knuckles. "I want to have some fun first. What was that about making us taking you seriously? Well we took you seriously girl, just as serious as this concussion will..."

Before she could bring down a blow which would send Akane into unconsciousness Akane roared, heaving herself to her feet. In her uninjured hand she was suddenly holding a hammer, the same ki-hammer that she had threatened Ranma with when Akitsu first showed up which she swung upwards. The ki hammer slammed into Juusa's chest, hurling her down the street with a cry of agony into a building a full block away, the mist around them parting from the force of the wind of her passage.

At that sight the other Sekirei quickly moved backwards, joining up to face Akane. She stayed where she was on unsteady feet, her breath coming in gasps, barely able to raise her ki hammer as she faced him.

"That's it! No more Miss nice Sekirei," shouted Yomi, flipping a switch on her blade. This shot the sheath off of it quickly leaving the blade bared and deadly. "You're no Sekirei, and while we've been told not to kill civilians, since you're fighting us that means you're no fucking civilian either."

She raced forward, along with the other two intending to encircle and kill Akane as quickly as they could, but before they could there was a shout from nearby "Fire Wall!"

The three Sekirei swiftly brought themselves to a halt as between her then Akane wall of fire two stories tall appeared, encircling them and pushing them back. They quickly went into a triangle formation, and the wall of flame stopped moving, rising even higher for a second before cutting out.

The cause of this sudden interruption became apparent as a man dressed in a black long coat and white undershirt with a half mask covering his lower face hopped down to stand between the unconscious Yashima, Akane and the attacking Sekirei. "Hmmm, I think I've met at least one of you ladies before. When will you people ever learn? Fights are supposed the one-on-one, none of this low-class ganging up on one another."

"Low class!?" Shouted Mitsuha.

"How dare you!" raged Yomi, though she made no move to try and close with the fire user, nor did Mitsuha.

For her part Taki swiftly realized that this was going bad. She turned to their injured fellow, looking her over with a wince at the obviously broken ribs.

"And on top of that," the man said, ignoring their words. "You even have the gall to attack a human with intent to kill? If that's the case, you can hardly blame me for doing the same when it comes to you."

He held up her head, and between his fingers flames began to appear. He then held out his hand towards them, gesturing the fire forward. "Begone!"

The sparks flew from his hand shooting out towards them in a tongue of fire and the three attacking Sekirei quickly retreated. "Damn you Homura, I swear one of these days you're going to get in our way just one time too many, you damn lion of defense!" shouted Mitsuha.

"Let's just go!" Groused Taki. "A weakling like Yashima's not worth this effort, and we need to get Juusa some medical attention."

As the three of them retreated, the flame wielder turned to Akane. He bowed grandly, almost reminding her of Kuno for a moment, but his words were not nearly as flowery. "You were doing very well, much better than most humans would have certainly. I don't suppose you and this young lady were already heading home?"

Akane nodded wearily. Now that the battle was over, her adrenalin was slowly draining out of her, and the pain in her arm was becoming almost overpowering.

"Will you need help getting home?"

At that, Akane was torn. The man was being polite, and he had certainly proven he could fight which was a good thing, and what she could see of his face looked handsome. But he was also dressed something like a cross between a ninja pervert she'd seen in Naruto, and Tuxedo Kame from Sailor Moon so she wasn't really willing to trust him. *Besides, we're close enough to Nerima I can get myself home.*

"Just help me wake up my friend here, and then the two of us can get into Nerima quickly enough."

"I'll do that, and I'll follow you until you're well into Nerima just in case. While no Sekirei fights have occurred there yet, it's only a matter of time."

Akane snorted harshly, then winced looking down at her arm, which was now a violent black and purple from her wrist to her elbow. "Not if they know what's good for them. *Damn this is really starting to hurt!* It was slowly getting through to Akane that she had just been about to lose a fight. Not only lose, but be seriously injured. *Maybe, maybe I really did bite off more than I could chew here.*

"By the way, where did you pull that hammer from?" the man asked.

Akane blinked, looking over at the man who had just knelt by her new friend, waking her up with a gentle shake of the shoulder. "What hammer?"

Confused the man turned and only to stop and stare as the hammer in her hand dissipated. "...I'm not even going to ask." *These martial artists, even the ones who aren't particularly astonishingly tough, cursed and friendly with Miya-sama seemingly can break my idea of normality all too easily.*

He brightened then as Yashima's eyes fluttered open. *On the other hand, I'm not the one who is trying to run this game while all these wild cards are causing havoc. I sincerely hope Minaka is enjoying his so-called game.*

OOOOOO

"Okay, that was kind of cool I'll admit. I might want to try to work that whole 'for the pain' speech at the end there into some of my taunts. The romance though was kind of not really important. I mean most of it happened off-screen, and the movie was mostly about him both proving his love and then freeing her, right?" Ranma asked as the credits for the *Princess Bride* rolled.

"Oh, and...." He went on, holding up a hand as if he was a debater about to make an important point, "rapiers suck. They are the worst sword type I've ever dealt with, so pointless, get it point-less? Still funny though."

"The movie isn't supposed to be a serious romance Ranma," Nabiki said with a laugh, smacking her shoulder against his. She was sitting on one side of the sofa, with Ranma in the center and Akitsu on his other side. Kasumi had also joined them, and was sitting on the floor in front of Nabiki, leaning back against her younger sister's legs. "I suppose we could show you a serious romance?" she teased. "Help you... get in touch... with your female side maybe?"

"No thank you! And for some reason, the way you said I 'get in touch with my female side' sounded just wrong." Ranma retorted, pushing her shoulder back against Nabiki's lightly. "Akitsu what did you think?"

Akitsu cocked her head thoughtfully. "...It was funny. The spandex those characters were wearing. Do you think I would look good in that Ranma-sama?"

Ranma blushed, while the other two girls laughed. "Erm, yeah, duh Akitsu, you'd look good in a paper bag," He replied earnestly if embarrassedly. However he noticed something else and put an arm around Akitsu's shoulders. "What's wrong?"

Akitsu frowned, but leaned into the touch slightly and answered in her normal monotone voice. "The torture chamber reminded me somewhat of the room where I was adjusted. Some of the adjustments were very painful."

"And yet another reason why I need to find someone in MBI to smack around," Ranma growled.

"This has been very fun," Kasumi said brightly, turning around so she could look at the others and hoping to break the sudden downturn the conversation had taken. "It has been a longtime since we did something like this as a family."

"And were not doing it as a family now are we Kasumi" Nabiki said, lightly poking her sister with her big toe. "Akane's out, and our fathers are both gone."

"Amen to that!" Ranma said with a laugh. Apparently, his father had come home and grabbed Soun then raced to a way like a panda out of hell. *The old man must've thought the chef was still after him*, Ranma thought in amusement. *Or maybe he was just using the threat of that to get the living weeping river to leave with him.*

"I for one am quite happy we won't have to deal with either of them for a few weeks," he went on. "I like my dad, but he isn't exactly the most stable of personalities. And no offense, but your father doesn't seem much better."

"It's not nice to speak like that about Father," Kasumi admonished then sighed. "But you're right. He's never been the strongest of personalities, let alone the most stable."

Nabiki stood up, stretching in place her arms over her head as she cracked her neck and shoulders. This very intentionally left her rear directly at Ranma's eye level, and he couldn't stop himself from looking, blushing slightly at the view of her pert, toned yet still soft looking rear.

Looking over her shoulder Nabiki saw this and smiled slightly before looking away. Akitsu saw this in turn and pressed herself into Ranma side, almost glaring at Nabiki which she also caught but didn't respond to. "We'll have to do this again," she said aloud. "There are a lot of modern movies I doubt you've seen on the road Ranma."

"Star Wars?" Kasumi asked hopefully.

"You and your obsession with Star Wars sis," Nabiki said with a laugh. "All right, if you can get Akane to agree, that can be the next movie night thing."

"What's Star Wars?" Ranma asked innocently, with Akitsu also cocking her head and staring at the two sisters.

Kasumi gasped in shock. "You really have been deprived! We'll have to do that then. For now however it is getting late," So saying, Kasumi began to clean up the drinks and the bowl they had used for the popcorn. Between them Akitsu and Ranma had eaten practically all the popcorn they had in the house.

As she was cleaning up, the house's front door opened and Akane's voice was heard, sounding far weaker than normal. "I'm home. I, I kind of need some help?"

At the pain-filled voice of their youngest sister both Nabiki and Kasumi dropped what they had been doing and raced for the front door with Ranma on their heels and Akitsu trailing behind him. In the small entranceway they found an unknown girl with a hammer strapped to her back helping Akane along, the youngest Tendo woman holding her arm to her chest. There was a bright black and blue mark from her elbow to her wrist, and Ranma winced at the sight of it. *Ahh damn that looks broken and badly too.*

"Akane what happened to you!" Kasumi gasped moving forward to help Akane along, staring down at her forearm aghast.

Akane paled, not having remembered until just then that she hadn't told Kasumi where she had gone and had no desire to tell her oldest sister what she had been really up to. "I was walking back from the mall," she said, prevaricating quickly. "I went there to pick up a present for one of my friends and I found Yashima here and another Sekirei sparring. I interrupted a few guys who wanted to do perverted things to them and then offered her a home.

Akane weakly gestured to her new friend, who was looking intimidated by the new people a little especially Ranma staring at him for a moment before looking down at her feet as Akitsu moved between them not even noticing the mark on Akitsu's forehead signifying she was broken. "But we were attacked on the way home."

"I'll get Doctor Tofu!" Kasumi said quickly. "Nabiki, go to my room and find some of the medical supplies, specifically pain killers. "Akitsu, can you summon some ice to put on that for a moment, maybe if we can deaden the pain some Akane will feel better."

Ranma moved forward, gesturing that he could take Akane's weight now and Akane rather reluctantly let him while Yashima trailed behind, looking rather intimidated still. "Who attacked you?" he asked grimly.

The new girl and Akane quickly described their attackers, and Ranma nodded slowly. "I met at least two of those before. They're from the South and they belong to this little rich brat, don't remember his name. Dammit, I thought he'd gotten the message loud and clear by this point about this whole ganging up and forced winging shit!"

Nearby, Kasumi had picked up the phone, and dialed Doctor Tofu's office and despite it pushing eleven at night Doctor Tofu's quickly answered. "This is Doctor Tofu can I help you?"

"Doctor, this is Kasumi, my sister..." Kasumi began.

She was interrupted by the voice on the other end, going suddenly high-pitched and almost clown like. "Kasumi! H-how are you? It's been a few days since I last saw you, or your family, Betty's been asking about you all."

"I am personally fine **Doctor**," Kasumi said, letting her voice harden somewhat. "However, my sister came home with what looks like a badly broken arm, and a friend who seems to have other injuries. We need you to make a house call immediately."

"Ahh, a house call, of course of course, I'll be right by."

When Nabiki returned with the household medical supplies Ranma began to perform some first aid on Yashima. She had a few cuts and scaps and more than one bruise, but other than a major bruise on the side of her neck she was alright. Kasumi and Nabiki in contrast couldn't do much for Akane except make her comfortable, pad her arm with ice and feed her a lot of pain killers along with some of Nabiki's carefully hoarded snacks.

Tofu arrived quickly, hopping over the outer wall with a black bag of supplies in one hand. He looked serious for a few moments as he entered the house, but the moment he spotted Kasumi, he began to stiffen, his glasses going opaque almost. "K-Kasumi, fancy meeting you here!" he said, his voice high pitched as he talked not to her but a fern plant that sat in the corner of the sitting room.

"Of course I am here doctor I'm the one who called you to look at my youngest sister's broken arm!" Kasumi said sharply, gesturing down to Akane, who was suddenly looking a little fearful. Ranma caught onto that and wondered why, but Nabiki had also quickly backed away from both Akane and Tofu, standing by the stairs, having pulled Yashima with her, who was also looking between the newcomer and Akane questioningly.

"Oh... um, right," Tofu seemed to shake himself, staring out away from Kasumi as he pinched his side for some reason. Somewhat more composed he moved over to Akane, his glasses almost back to normal.

Seeing this Nabiki reached forward and pulled Kasumi out of his line of sight, causing the oldest Tendo girl to stare at her in frowning confusion, but Nabiki simply shook her head, watching closely. She then looked over at Ranma and whispered, "If he does anything odd can you get him away from Akane quickly?"

"Sure, but why?" Ranma whispered back, not turning away from where Tofu was running a gentle hand down the interior of Akane's injured forearm.

"Let's just say that Tofu has a bit of a... issue at times, okay," Nabiki replied, looking between Tofu and her two sisters.

"Thankfully Tofu seemed to conquer whatever mad fit was working its way through his body, quickly analyzing Akane's arm. Well, her arm is sharply fractured in one place the bones have been distorted out of proportion. Akane, I'm going to have to set the bone now. I'll deaden the nerves in your arm first and then again after, so you don't have to deal with the pain, but you'll have to come by every day until it's healed for me to keep doing that. Though there will be some long term consequences of doing that in terms of muscle control. We'll talk further about that tomorrow alright?"

Akane nodded, looking both relieved and happy for some reason. "That's gre, I mean, that sounds fine Dr. Tofu."

Looking at Akane Ranma wondered what was going on there, watching intently at how Tofu touched a few points on Akane's upper arm, watching a look of happiness come over her as the pain in her arm disappeared.

With that done Tofu quickly set to work, both setting the bone once more, then rubbing a salve into the skin before splinting the arm with several splints rather than the two which would normally be used. "I know how energetic a young lady you are Akane, so I'd prefer to build in some protection for your arm right away." Tofu chuckled, watching Akane blush.

Once that was done, Tofu looked over at the others, his glasses fogging up once more as he looked at Kasumi. Nabiki however quickly stood between them and then moved forward, grabbing Tofu's arm and pulling him away from Akane just in case. "I can't thank you enough for getting here so quickly Dr. Tofu. Can you prescribe some painkillers for her, or can we get by with those pressure points and the common brands?"

"Common brands for now, I'll talk with Akane tomorrow about the pressure points and how long it will be safe to use them. After that there are a few pain killers I can recommend," Tofu replied, coming back to himself quickly.

This disappeared as Kasumi moved around Nabiki to smile at the older man. "That sounds good, and I'll thank you as well for this doctor. I will call you if anything happens with Akane's injuries. Would you like some food to take home with you?"

"Er, yes, yes, those cookies you made me a few months back were very tasty, why I think I ate the whole plate! Betty liked them too of course," Tofu replied, pulling the skeleton whose skull Ranma had crushed when they first met out of his bag with a speed that made Ranma blink. "Didn't you Betty dear?"

"Betty-headless more like," Ranma muttered, shaking his head and leaning down to help Akane sit up while Kasumi led the doctor into the kitchen. "What was all that about?" Nearby Yashima also nodded, while Akitsu simply looked on, though in her case it wasn't incomprehension but simply uncaring.

"Dr. Tofu likes Kasumi," Akane whispered, looking both relieved and sad. "He's always losing control of himself like that around her. And this was actually a pretty mild episode thanks to Nabiki. It could have really gone bad if he had lost it completely, especially when he was working on my arm."

"Well that went about as well as it could have I suppose," Nabiki said, coming back in with Kasumi, as a loud carol of a Christmas song was heard dopplering away over the rooftops.

"Tofu-san is a very good doctor, but he's so silly all the time," Kasumi said, sighing faintly. "I could wish he would be more serious sometimes."

Looking around at Nabiki and Akane, Ranma saw both of them rolling their eyes but saying nothing. Deciding to simply blurt it out, Ranma said "You know he's like that around you because he likes you right?"

"Whatever gave you that idea?" Kasumi asked, looking shocked.

"It's a kind of fit of nerves I suppose, right?" Ranma asked looking over at Akane, who had blanched as soon as he opened his mouth again. "That's what Akane just told me."

While Nabiki rolled her eyes once more Kasumi shuddered, looking over at Akane pleadingly. "Please tell me he's joking!"

Akane blinked, her shock at Ranma's blunt statement leaving her as she stared at her older sister. "Why? He... Ranma was telling the truth Kasumi. I mean he's always acted like that around you because he likes you. You didn't know?" she asked incredulously.

"No I didn't! I thought he was just acting like that because he was silly." Kasumi actually shouted, something that startled both her sisters.

"But, but what about how you're always giving him food and going over and borrowing books?" Nabiki asked, frowning as suddenly saying that aloud made her realize how lame it sounded.

"I give him food because he is a bachelor who lives alone and he has always given the family a discount for his services, which has been useful many times. As for borrowing books, there was a time when I dreamed of being a school nurse. Reading medical books is one way to move forward with that idea despite my..." Kasumi trailed off, and both her sisters nodded, realizing what she had left unsaid.

"So... you don't like him?" Akane said. She wanted to be very clear on this. "Erm, why don't you, I mean, he's handsome, mature and strong, a man instead of a boy..."

"While I like mature men, I can't see myself with someone that much older than me, and further someone who has such control issues." Kasumi said shuddering. "Gah, I remember him as my doctor too you know! He, he gave me my first physical, ugh... This all sounds far too much like obsession to me."

With that Kasumi stood up promptly, and moved over to her father's liquor cabinet. Pulling out but a lot of sake, she knocked half of it back in one go.

The others stared at her, and then let Ranma began to laugh. "Okay, I can see that that that is kind of disturbing now that you mention it. Makes me wonder if I should trust Akitsu with him."

"Thank you for being the voice of reason Ranma," Kasumi said smiling at him sweetly. "And that is probably the first and last time anyone will ever say that to you. As for Akitsu, you should be alright; I'll admit that aspect is probably me just overreacting. Whatever he might act like around me Dr. Tofu is a very good doctor."

Akane continued to look at her older sister in shock while Nabiki laughed, and Ranma held up his hands to his chest, as if he had taken a mortal wound. The Sekirei just looked on rather confused by events.

Glancing at the clock Nabiki asked, "How are we all going to sleep tonight?" It was now pushing elven thirty, and they all had to get up early tomorrow for school.

"Well Akitsu is sleeping in my room," Kasumi said, looking at the ice user, who pouted but nodded having understood finally that she couldn't sleep with her Ashikabi as she wanted to in someone else's house. Thought the fact that Genma was not around any longer meant that Akitsu felt she might push that rule in the future.

"We could put Yashima in with me" Akane volunteered.

At that Yashima spoke up for the first time. "Probably not a good idea," she said softly. "I apparently snore." The others looked at her and she flushed. "I slept with a few other Sekirei in a single dormitory while we were all being adjusted and nearly all of them complained about it."

"If Yashima wants a room of her own, I'll sleep on the couch," Ranma said.

"There's no need for that, you can take over Father's bed until he returns. He is not around to use it after all." Kasumi said.

"That works," Ranma said with a shrug.

As the others were heading to bed, Ranma touched Nabiki on the wrist, gesturing her to wait for second. As the others walked up the stairs he leaned in and asked "is it just me, or did your little sister look a little subdued there"?

"She was definitely subdued Ranma," Nabiki said tartly. "This might have been a wake-up call for her. One can only hope."

Again there was a flash of something in her eyes that Ranma couldn't identify. *Not satisfaction, more like grim appreciation maybe? And sadness? Dammit, I wish I was as good at reading expressions and eyes as I am at reading body language in a fight.*

"And what's this, caring for my little sister?" Nabiki asked cocking an inquisitive eyebrow at Ranma.

Ranma rolled his eyes. "I might not like her, but she didn't deserve to have her arm broken like that just for trying to help someone else out. And even I could tell that she was way too quiet."

On the other hand it could have been a lot worse, they got really lucky that this Homura guy was in the area. And it's

nice to know that there's another person out there who is willing to interrupt forced winnings like that. I to see what Miya knows about him. Huh... didn't she say something about Kagari being a fire wielder?

"True, but maybe this will help curb further adventures on her part. At least that way some good will come from this," Nabiki replied, before tapping Ranma on the shoulder and turning away. "I'll see you with my morning coffee tomorrow boy, be sure it's got enough milk and sugar in it will you?"

"Yes mistress," Ranma said, bowing as she turned away, before actually swatting her on the rear when she wasn't looking. Laughing he leaped over her head, heading up to the second floor as Nabiki followed flushing hotly and rubbing at her now stinging rear.

OOOOOO

Staring at the report in her hands, Kodachi scowled. "If I am reading this correctly Sasuke, my brother came very close to death. Is this the case?"

"I'm afraid so mistress. My fellow ninjas and the shadow-kin were able to get him away, and the young master surely did himself credit for facing such a monstrous powerful, nay inhuman woman. She had the strength of a full grown Oni! If not for master Tatewaki's enhanced durability, which he gets from being a member of your illustrious line of course, he would have been literally sliced in half by any one of her blows." The man Kodachi addressed reported.

He was a very short man, barely coming up to Kodachi's waist when he was standing up straight let alone when on one knee as he was now. He wore traditional ninja garb complete with head gear, had a small whiskery face that resembled that of a rodent almost, save not pointed in any manner. At the moment that face was scrunched in concern as he spoke to the lady of the house.

"The Shadow-kin sacrificed themselves by the dozens to get Master Kuno away from her, and most of them fell to the woman's blade. It will be some weeks before they reform, which has unfortunately forced me to pull most of our ninja spies back to the mansion to make up the loss in numbers amongst the guard. Master Kuno on the other hand will be on his feet and fully healed in a few days," Sasuke finished.

"I see. And this occurred when he went to beard MBI in its lair?" Kodachi asked.

"Yes mistress," Sasuke said, wincing and hoping that his mistress wasn't going to fly off the handle and tried to attack MBI herself.

"And I take it you were able to convince him not to pursue that madness further after his wounds?"

Breathing a sigh of relief Sasuke smiled and nodded. "Yes mistress. The swordswoman's abilities have warned Master Tatewaki off doing so, though he is still interested in the Yuki-onna. He will instead seek to court her directly, rather than work through MBI to get her moved in with us here rather than with this Ranma fellow and his friends.

"I see. Well, it's nice to know that my brother has some measure of self-preservation that will at least keep him from getting himself killed." She tapped her finger on the desk as she thought. "You have no doubt been observing my brother's obsession, this Akane wench, and now Akitsu for him?"

When Sasuke blinked Kodachi rolled her eyes. "I have heard of both Akitsu and this Ranma man before this. Is she really assigned to him? My source gave me the impression that the two of them were romantically involved." Seeing Sasuke hesitate Kodachi scowled. "Speak plainly" she ordered.

"I'm afraid that that is my impression too mistress. Your brother does not see it, and of course even if that is the case surely the young master would be the better catch, but..."

"Enough," Kodachi said waving that off. She thought for a moment, tapping her finger on the desk in front of her once more. "If this Ranma fellow is truly taking a stand against MBI and this Sekirei Game, I think I want to talk to him. Observe him this next week as best you may without being seen. And if he is in fact involved with this Akitsu and is determined to make this game as honorable as possible, I will wish to invite him over to talk formally this next weekend."

OOOOOO

The next day after school was over Nabiki decided to stay at school for a while to touch base with her friends and start up a pool to see how long Kuno would be out of school. She and Ranma both bet on only a few days more, while most of the students thought it would be weeks before he returned given the fact he had been so obviously

wounded.

This left Ranma walking to the dojo alone for once, which he used to take to the rooftops again. Halfway there he paused seeing that Akane had been even quicker than he had been to leave school behind. That was unusual enough, but she was also not heading towards the dojo, rather she was going toward Doctor Tofu's office. *Oh yeah, she does need to get her arm looked at.* He stared first at her and then the doctor's office a few blocks away, barely visible from his vantage point at the moment thanks to the intervening rooftops as he remembered what Kasumi had said last night.

So, Doctor Tofu's got a crush on Kasumi, who thinks it's disturbing and gross because he's so much older than her and because he's been the family doctor for so long. Then we've got Akane, who likes him, again the family doctor and a middle aged guy. Tofu of course doesn't know that Kasumi thinks it's gross, While Akane does and doesn't seem to understand why...

He thought for a moment then shook his head. *Yeah, you could not pay me to get involved with that train wreck.*

With that Ranma resolutely turned away and continued to hop across the rooftops towards the dojo. Halfway there however as he hopped from a roof down to a wall, he felt a splash of water catching him from behind out of nowhere.

Twisting quickly, he glared angrily at the old ladle woman, who was once more out on her porch cleaning her porch. She simply smirked back triumphantly, stuffing her ladle into its bucket and turning to go inside.

"I'll get you!" Ranma shouted. "One of these days you'll catch me in a bad mood granny and then you'll find your entire house full of water! See if you like being wet!"

Receiving no reply other than a cackle from inside, Ranma turned her feet once more towards the dojo. There she found both Haihane and surprisingly Tsukiumi waiting there. They were glaring at one another, though sitting calmly enough at the table thanks to Kasumi's presence. Beside Kasumi sat Yashima, looking about as comfortable as a rabbit around two competing foxes.

Haihane and Tsukiumi looked up as Ranma entered, and she nodded before looking around behind him as he felt Akitsu suddenly behind him. "Gahh! Akitsu how did you get behind me!?"

She simply blinked at him, her entire face showing incomprehension. "My place is by your side Ranma-sama."

Sighing Ranma nodded slowly, gesturing her to sit down with the other two as she did the same next to her. Ranma had noticed that while he/she was at school or doing something else away from her, Akitsu's mannerisms began to slide back to what they had been when they first met. *At least she's not calling me Ashikabi-sama any longer.*

"Would you like some hot water Ranma?" Kasumi asked.

While Tsukiumi looked a little quizzical at that, Ranma shook his head. "Nah, there's no point since it looks as if it's going to rain anyway. So I take it you both would like some training?"

Haihane was looking at the redhead, her head cocked to one side as she stared from her face down to her breasts. She had heard about the curse of course, even before she and Benitsubasa had been sent after Ranma. Now however faced with the reality she began to choke, giggling to herself for some reason. *Hehehheh, even a boy-turned girl has a better chest than Benitsubasa!*

"Indeed, I had hoped to at least talk with you about further training myself in close range combat. I do realize that is a weakness of mine. I also wished to see if you had any other ideas I might make use of with my superior water mutilation skills," Tsukiumi replied haughtily.

She then smiled politely at Kasumi. "Ms. Kasumi here found the both of us arguing out on the roof, which I have to admit was rather rude of us, and invited us in for this lovely tea." Then her gaze sharpened as she turned back to Ranma. "I did not know that you had been so profligate with your offers of training..."

"Haven't been really," Ranma shrugged. "I offered to help you train because we ran into one another, and I know that since you are so powerful you'll be marked by those idiots who're trying to forcefully wing you Sekirei. As for Haihane here, we fought a few days ago. She and her partner were sent after me to try and teach me a lesson for not following the rules of the game."

"It didn't work," Haihane said dryly, still snorting in laughter as she looked from Ranma's face to her breasts once more. He offered to help train me, so long as I was willing to listen. Ranma and his old man wanted to figure out if Fist

type Sekirei were really better at their specialty than others."

"And before you ask, I decided to offer that because there was nothing personal in our fight and she seriously needs it. Besides, some of the things the disciplinary squad has to do are actually needed." Ranma interjected.

Haihane nodded. "Just yesterday I stopped two Ashikabi from using their Sekirei to go on a crime spree. Was both against the rules, and's just plain stupid."

"Very well," Tsukiumi said arrogantly, her back ramrod straight. "I do must admit that even dogs of MBI can have some use."

Haihane shrugged. "Doggies are cute." The others blinked at her, and she rolled her eyes. "Know it was an insult, don't care."

"Not so loyal to MBI are we?" Ranma asked, one eyebrow rising in query.

Now it was Haihane's turn to blink, which she did before laughing. "Loyal? Only reason I joined the disciplinary squad was so I could get into fights, loyalty doesn't come into it."

"Totally understand that," Ranma said with a nod as Tsukiumi did the same and Kasumi rolled her eyes very discretely.

"Indeed, a most excellent reason, but does that not perforce mean that you **are** loyal to them?" Tsukiumi reasoned.

Haihane shrugged. "Haven't thought about it. Not so loyal to my Ashikabi, Natsuo, that's for sure."

"What?" said both Akitsu and Tsukiumi.

They looked at one another then back to Haihane, while Kasumi and Ranma also looked at one another in surprise. "Why? Isn't that how your Ashikabi Sekirei thing is supposed to work?" Ranma asked.

"Natsuo's gay," Haihane said simply.

For a moment there was silence then Kasumi suddenly raised a hand blushing brightly. "Ahem, um, when you say he's gay, what do you mean exactly? Do you mean it as he's a very happy fellow or..."

"As in boys love!" Haihane said giggling now at their gob-smacked expressions. The only one who wasn't reacting was Akitsu, who was just drinking her tea calmly. "As in Natsuo likes it through the back door, as in he uses more hair gel and body wash than I do, as in he's a very, **very** pretty boy, definitely the Uke in any relationship."

She looked at the various blushes around the table before she broke down again, pounding the table in laughter.

"Right!" Ranma said shaking her head to clear it of those horrible images. "Okay so that went so far beyond too much information it's leaving orbit! Let's move on to happier things. Now that there are four of you and one of me, we can have a game of King of the Mountain."

"Is that not a child's game?" Tsukiumi said, also grateful for the change in subject. "I do remember my adjustor playing it with me."

"Kind of but not quite," Ranma said with a smile hopping to her feet. "I'll show you in the dojo." By this point it had indeed begun to rain once more, and Ranma had no desire to get wet again before she had to.

The others followed her quickly, though Yashima looked a little reluctant as she followed silently.

The rule of this simple training program was simple. There would be one person who was designated king of the mountain who had to stay within a circle Ranma drew on the floor with chalk. The others would attack her from different directions, and the king of the mountains would switch out if any of the others got in what was Ranma called kill shot, as he pointed to his head chest a or under the armpits.

"No kill shots on your legs?"

Ranma shook her head at Haihane's question, and hopped into the circle grinning at them all. "I'm king of the mountain," she sang. This seemed to goad the hotheaded Tsukiumi and Haihane into attacking right away which was exactly the point.

Surprisingly, with the others all fighting her at once, Ranma was tagged a few times and stepped out for the other one of the others. To everyone's surprise Akitsu lasted the longest but by less than a minute,. She was still declared the winner, and Ranma held her hand up overheard head and cheered while the others scowled a little.

Yashima had of course done worse than any of the others, which depressed her further. this lasted until the Sekirei all took a bath together, wherein Akitsu idly mentioned that she had done better than Akitsu would have when she first came to the dojo.

After that, Tsukiumi decided to leave before the sun started to go down and Haihane was called in to work. At the same time, Akane had come home quickly glared at the training going on and headed up to her room. Yashima quickly followed her, hoping to talk to her new friend again. This left Ranma and Akitsu to head out for patrol, before swinging by Miya's that evening.

There, Ranma told Miya about Yashima and her staying in the dojo.

"Does she have any interest in playing the game?" Miya asked.

"No idea." Ranma shrugged. "She's been talking to Akane a lot, and she seems to have a major confidence issue, but other than that I don't know. Certainly no one's going to try and force her to fight at the dojo. And there's no way MBI could force her since she doesn't even have her MBI card any longer. Yashima said it got stolen last night." That had actually been why Yashima and Kiriko had started fighting, Kiriko had been passing by and laughed at something on her phone, but Yashima had thought Kiriko was mocking her, so attacked the other Sekirei.

"I feel sorry for whoever stole it," Kocho said smiling evilly. "Those things have a **lot** of security on them, the moment he tried to use it he'd be tracked, taken into custody and possibly even liquidated at this stage in the game. MBI takes those cards very seriously, it's one of the reasons why all of us Sekirei have one, and since they are connected to the game, technically they are supposed to be secret."

Though given how the secret seems to be leaking out anyway that probably won't matter much any longer, Kocho thought sardonically. The number of videos, pictures and discussions on the internet about what was going on in Shin-Teito was astronomical, and Kocho knew for a fact it was spreading to the internet at large, not just the local systems. There were even a few videos of Ranma's curse in action, and his fight against the Disciplinary Squad had gone viral too.

So, oddly enough, had Ryoga's fight too. Oddly because the cameras recording it hadn't been nearly as well placed to catch all the action, but the video, in particular the close up of Ryoga's face, had suddenly captured the interest of a lot of people the world over. In particular various militaries and conspiracy theorists had grabbed onto it. Kocho idly wondered if she should look into why more closely but decided it wasn't worth the effort just yet.

"But if he'd she doesn't play the game, how will she find her destined one?" Musubi asked innocently.

"Ya make the mistake of thinking everyone wants to look for their destined one. At the moment, I think she just wants to get over her insecurities," Ranma said with a shrug.

"But finding her destined one would do that! He would love her unconditionally and..."

"Then use her in a game for his own wishes and desires? To fight other Sekirei? For no apparent reason that I can find other than the machinations of a madman?" Miya asked her voice like a scalpel, causing Musubi to blanch and shrink away from her. "Do not make the mistake of assuming that all your fellow feathers want to fight, while we are a combative race that doesn't mean we all enjoy such equally. Or that strength of arms should be the only way to achieve your dreams."

After a moment she turned back to Ranma, smiling lightly. "I am most pleased that while I might be constrained by my agreement with Minaka, you and your friends are so intent on providing another choice for my feathers going forward. Do not hesitate to send any further Sekirei you find who no longer or have never wished to fight to my inn here. My presence will protect them."

"Actually on that subject Kocho," Ranma said, turning to the gamer otaku. "I have a favor to ask of you. Then I want to talk to Kagari if he's here."

"He is, though he might not thank you for waking him up. His job after all keeps him up most of the night." Miya replied, looking at Ranma quizzically, wondering what he wanted to ask the Fire Sekirei. As far as she was aware the two of them had barely exchanged a few words since Ranma had first shown up. Kagari seemed even more thrown

off by Ranma's curse than Matsu had been.

Shaking her head at that she asked Ranma if he and Akitsu would be staying for dinner. Getting an affirmative reply, Miya stood up, gesturing to Akitsu. "In that case I'll start dinner now. Akitsu, Musubi could you come help me please?" Though Miya worded that as a question it was obviously not one, rather an order. "Oh, and Ranma, Uzume wanted to talk to you if you stopped by."

While Musubi leaped to her feet and followed the landlady quickly Akitsu looked to Ranma first. He smiled, waving her off. "Don't worry Akitsu, I'm not gonna leave the inn without you. Promise."

At that Akitsu nodded and stood up quickly, following Miya into the inn's small but well stocked kitchen.

Ranma watched her go for a moment, having to shake his head not for the first time at how beautiful Akitsu was and how devoted she was to him. Both thoughts no longer made him nearly as uncomfortable as they had been even a few days ago. He looked up to see Kocho looking back at him, her lips twitching in amusement, but Ranma resolutely did not ask why. "So, the question I had to you was, can you tell me where that Hayato punk and the guy who sent men after you live? I think it's time to send a message not just to the coordinator of this game but the people trying to stack the deck in their favor."

That took Kocho no time at all, even though Ranma heard an indignant sounding squawk from the rubber duck set next to the phone in the sitting room. He left the room to head upstairs he heard Matsu's tinny voice shout "Why'd he ask you for that info you gamer otaku!? I'm much better at finding out secrets like that than you are!"

Kocho's return shot made him smile. "Well maybe if you ever left your room he might have you hikikomori!"

They were still arguing as he ascended to the second floor and knocked on Uzume's door. "Yo Uzume, ya decent? Nah what am I sayin' o' course you're not decent, are you at least clothed?"

"Ha good one! Yeah, come on in bro, I could use a distraction." Uzume's voice replied.

Ranma came in and was grateful to find that Uzume was indeed fully clothed rather than wearing lingerie or something like that. Technically that would have been wearing something after all. But instead Uzume sat at her desk in jeans and her normal straining star t-shirt. She had just turned the chair around to face the door as he entered, while behind Uzume Ranma could see a few printouts of some kind. "Miya-nee said ya wanted to speak with me?"

"Um yeah..." Uzume began, her normally cheerful air noticeably sloughing off her face. "I um, I was wondering if you and Biki-chan had any plans coming up in the near future for more pictures or something along those lines. She and I talked about using my costumes and such, but um..." Uzume looked over her shoulder at the papers on her desk. "Um it turns out I need some more money quicker than I thought. Chiho-chan's medical bills are getting more expensive than I'd been told initially."

"Okay first Biki-chan? Man I get in enough trouble calling her Nabs, I seriously want to be around when you call her that for the first time," Ranma said, causing Uzume to grin, some of her good humor returning. "And as for your question, I'll pass it on. I know she's got some Martial Arts construction exhibition matches set up this weekend. Suppose you could join in for those too. Even if ya don't know any, you Sekirei are a lot stronger than normal people, so you'd be useful for brute strength if nothing else."

"Just tell me the time and the place and I'm so there. I might even like to learn how to actually use this construction art of yours," Uzume replied. She stood up, crossing the intervening distance quickly to throw her arms around Ranma's shoulders in the most normal hug she'd ever given him. Even so Ranma felt her large breasts smushing against his chest, not that he made any comment, or minded really. "Thanks for this bro, seriously. Chiho-chan, she, she's so sick, and there's only me to care about her now, and..."

"Hey it's okay," Ranma said interrupting her uncomfortably. He was never very good with talking about feelings at all, but talking about serious things with Uzume of all people added to the strangeness despite his not having known her very long. "Any help ya need Uzume, I'll give. In fact if you really need money, I'll give you half of what I make from the construction gigs of ay more photo ops we do. As long as I can give enough money to the Tendos to pay for me and Akitsu's food that's all I need."

Ranma would like some money to use in the future, and was interested to see if Nabiki's ideas on investment panned out in the future. But really money was more a luxury than a necessity for him.

"Thanks Ranma. I, I might have to take you up on that, but I hope not for long." Uzume said, pulling back from the

hug and slugging him good naturedly on the shoulder. "But enough of the serious shit for now, has Akitsu broken you down yet? That girl needs a good seeing to or she's gonna blow."

Rolling his eyes Ranma moved back to the door. "Nice to see you're back to normal Uzume. I'll see you at dinner." At the doorway he paused, then looked back at her, smirking. "Oh and if you are free tomorrow night, I might want your help on another little project over at Overcompensation Tower."

Uzume laughed at that and Ranma left heading a few doors down to Kagari's. Knocking on the door, he waited, then knocked again twice more before he heard a grumble from the other side he decided to take as an okay to come in.

Inside he found Kagari laid out on his bed, half in and half on his sheets. He was still wearing his pants, but he was currently shirtless, and with one boot on. There was also a half mask hanging from the light on his night table. Ranma ignored that, figuring however Kagari had to dress up to make his costumers happy was his own business. Instead he shook his head at how pale Kagari was. Akitsu was pale too of course, but Kagari was even more so, and it didn't look as healthy or natural on him either. His thin chest was on display given his shirtless state, and Ranma could see that while he had little muscle definition he also didn't have much fat. *Definitely a Bishounen with a look like that, heh, he looks like one of those sparkly vampires from America.*

Kagari cracked an eye open to stare at his guest, only for his eyes to widen for a moment as he noticed it was Ranma. Then they slumped back, Kagari was just too damn tired to try and get away from the bizarrely cursed younger man. "Ugh... what is it Ranma?"

"Well I wanted to get some guy advice about Akitsu from you and why you've been avoiding me, but I figure how tired you are I'll just ask the first one. Though seriously if Miya's right that you sometimes protect other Sekirei from being forcefully winged we should start to work together. At least try to work out a patrol schedule, and I bet we could get Musubi and Uzume to join us, maybe even Tsukiumi."

At the name of the water user Tsukiumi rolled his eyes but said nothing about that, instead waving a hand to indicate Ranma should get on with it. "You said something about needing some advice?"

"Yeah..." Ranma hesitated. While this subject was possibly just as important as working with Kagari to protect unwinged Sekirei, it wasn't one he was nearly as comfortable with. "Um, okay see the thing is, while I'm not nearly as comfortable with the whole Ashikabi/Sekirei thing, I know she believes it, and I know that she um, she..."

"Loves you?" Kagari interrupted, his lips twisting into something like a smile and scowl rolled into one, though he didn't say anything. "Is it that hard to say?"

"Kinda, yeah." Ranma shrugged awkwardly. "Um, but she believes it, so I suppose I kinda have to? But um My question is, she um, she's into chains and um, kind of kinky stuff. The question is, is that really something she's into, or should I assume that's a product of her thinking she was broken?"

Kagari grimaced at that. To Ranma, Akitsu was simple someone with a problem caused by someone else. But to Sekirei, she was just that: broken. She would never be able to bond with an Ashikabi, never feel that power, never use a norito or achieve the power or skill she could otherwise have done. It was far more of a profound thing than Ranma seemed to think.

No doubt that did have an impact on Akitsu's personality, but Kagari didn't think it would have to extent Ranma seemed to think it might. "I think from what you've said and what Uzume has mentioned that Akitsu is indeed a real submissive." He watched in amusement as the younger man blushed brightly at that, but didn't tease him as Uzume would have. As tired as he was and honestly as still freaked out by magic being real and Ranma's curse as he was, Kagari just wanted to get this conversation over with. *Then again, I'll have enough fun with this just taking it seriously without a need to outright tease.*

"Being in a relationship with a submissive there are a few things you should know," Kagari went on, ignoring how Ranma's blush seemed to intensify when he heard the word relationship. "First, don't push her too far too fast. She'll go along with it, but she'll be hurt deep down, and will never actually share how much doing so hurt her. Second, don't do anything that makes you uncomfortable, that's true in any relationship. When you get far enough along you'll need some safe words just in case. Don't bring in... items too quickly. I know Akitsu wears chains, but even then don't do anything more than maybe pulling on the ones she wears for a while until you're comfortable with things."

As Ranma continued to become redder and redder Kagari went on, keeping his amusement out of his tone easily. "Don't be afraid to initiate contact, kissing, touching etc. In fact doing so is a simple way to check if Akitsu is really as submissive as she appears or is just into bondage. Oh, but don't do anything in public unless that too is a kink of

Akitsu's. There are ways to check that of course, what you do is..."

At that point Ranma fled, hopping to his feet and out the door in one single bound. "Thanks Kagari, that's enough see ya later!"

The door slammed shut behind him. Kagari laughed quietly until his head began to throb. Then he reached for a unmarked bottle of pills on his nightstand, tossing three of them back before falling back onto his bed. Closing his eyeshe wondered if Ranma would take his advice.

OOOOOOO

"Chief, I found some locals who can tell us directions to this Jusenkyou place. They look torn between laughing at us or praying for us for some reason. I don't know what to make of that honestly." One of the five specialists Minaka had sent into China said to his superior.

"That's better than the rest of us have done. As for the locals, man I'm torn between laughing and praying for us, and I don't know the local area around this cursed training ground place. Let's just go, get the crazy bastard his water samples and hopefully get out of..."

"Don't say it!" said more than one of the other agents, one of them going so far as to cover their leader's motuh. "You should know not to jinx us like that man!"

The leader rolled his eyes at that superstition but made no sign to resume his previous thought. Instead he waved the man who had spoken to the locals forward leading the way further up into the Balankala Range.

OOOOOOO

Akitsu was somewhat confused at present. She was happy to be moving over the rooftops with Ranma beside her. They had been on patrol for over an hour, but there didn't seem to be any activity at present beyond a few one on one fight's which Ranma had no issue with.

But what confused her was how red Ranma had been during the dinner they had at Miya's. The instant Ranma had laid eyes on Akitsu his face had exploded into color, which had remained for a while before fading. It occasionally came back, and seemed to be beyond Ranma's normal reactions to her body or her attempts to serve him.

Eventually as they continued to patrol, Akitsu decided that she would have to speak up. This was not something she was comfortable doing, but the reaction was so strange she had to. *And besides, Ranma-sama has often asked me to speak up if I am uncomfortable about something.*

With that thought giving her courage and when next they stopped to decide where to go next Akitsu turned to look at Ranma rather than scan their surroundings as she was supposed to. "Ranma... is something bothering you?"

"What, no Akitsu, why did you think that?" Ranma asked turning to look at her quizzically. His eyes seemed to track down to the chains she wore around her chest and back, then back up to her face and away, another flush taking over his face.

"Because you cannot look at me without blushing and looking away. Did I do something wrong? I have not tried to sneak into your bath or your room in several days, did I do something else wrong?"

"Wh, no Akitsu! It's nothing you said, I just, um, let's just say that Kagari gave me some very blunt advice." Ranma's eyes trailed down Akitsu's body again, staring first at the chains wrapped around her chest and shoulders then the kimono she wore, her breasts pushing up and out just enough to look a little beyond what should be seen in public, though that could be said for many of the Sekirei Ranma had seen. But there was something about Akitsu her porcelain, skin, her curves, her inexpressive face which only showed emotion when they were alone, that heightened the impact of her looks.

Y'know this could be a good time to see if Kagari's advice was any good. Flushing a little at the thought Ranma felt a surge of interest and something else go through him at the idea.

Reaching forward Ranma hesitated, his hand hovering just over one of Akitsu's chains for a moment before he grabbed it, his fingers pushing underneath between the chain and her kimono. He watched as Akitsu flushed, a light tint of rose coming to her face, but she didn't move away, indeed, she looked at him somehow expectantly.

"Y'know, you won that king of the mountain game Akitsu. I say that deserves a reward, don't you?" Ranma asked,

tugging at Akitsu's chains.

They clinked together rubbing into her kimono clad body here and there, causing Akitsu to shudder not in fear but excitement. The look in Ranma's face, the desire there coupled with the fact he was finally, finally initiating things caused heat to bloom within her. Akitsu **loved** that warmth, the warmth Ranma could awaken within her, craving it like a freezing woman craved heat. "What, whatever Ranma-sama desires," she murmured. Looking down.

Ranma frowned, not liking that answer. He pulled harder at her chains, lifting his other hand to grab the second loop on the other side of her chest, tugging her to him. This caused Akitsu to look up, while Ranma shivered slightly at the odd feel of the silk of her kimono on the back of his fingers while holding her chains. The feel of her breasts heaving with her heavier breathing under the silk of her kimono enhanced the sensation to a whole other level. "That's not an answer Akitsu. Do you think you deserve a reward?"

"Ah... hai, Ranma..." Akitsu said, staring up into his face, answering as firmly as she could this time as she wound her arms around his back. Then her eyes widened in joy as she watched Ranma lean down towards her. Her tongue flicked out over her lips as she leaned up, feeling Ranma's lips touching hers.

The kiss started slowly as the rest of the world disappeared to the two of them, but when Ranma's hands shifted up over her shoulders following her chains to pull her closer to him Akitsu took the chance to open her mouth. This time Ranma didn't hesitate, his tongue plunging into her mouth to twine and twirl around her own forcefully. And when Akitsu moaned, he deepened the kiss, both of his hands shifting from her chain down to grasp her kimono clad rear to her, squeezing just hard enough to sting. At that Akitsu moaned again, her arms tightening around Ranma.

As her adjustments had not been finished, Akitsu's grip around Ranma would have broken a normal man in half. But Ranma barely grunted, one of his hands moving up to her shoulders pulling her tighter to him, her breasts now squished against Ranma's chest.

Akitsu quickly began to shudder in place, the euphoria of the moment overwhelming her as her Ashikabi her Ranma initiated something for the first time. But before she could once more reach the clouds and rain they were interrupted by a shout and a massive splash of water slamming into Ranma from the side. "Get away from her thou dishonorable cur!"

"Gah!" Ranma shouted, wrenched sideways out of Akitsu's arms.

She twisted slightly, but lost her grip on Ranma and fell to the ground. She stared first in shock and then rising anger at the sight of the now female Ranma slamming into the side of the taller building separated from the rooftop they been standing on across a thin alleyway.

Tsukiumi stood on a nearby rooftop, glaring angrily at where her water assault had carried the man she had just spotted forcefully attempting to wing Akitsu. "Damn monkey! Are you well Akitsu? Where is Ranma? You should know that you should be able to defend yourself from such as h...hi...him..." Tsukiumi's voice trailed off as she blinked in astonishment, staring at the redhead embedded in the wall across from her.

Ranma grumbled, pushing herself out of the body-shaped crater the attack had made in the wall, hopping back to land back on the rooftop she/he had started on a moment ago. "Damn it Tsukiumi, what'd ya go and do that for?!"

"Wh... Ranma... you... what, what is going on here!? Was, were you just crossdressing with a wig for some reason?" Tsukiumi asked, her mind grasping the only conclusion it possibly could from the evidence at hand.

"No, I wasn't crossdressing, yessh." Ranma replied then paused for two reasons. For one thing, she had just realized that she had never explained his curse to Tsukiumi, the one Sekirei she/he had thus far met that would almost certainly over react. *But surely she's heard about it by now, like from those rumors about when I ousted my curse to Hibiki and her sister, right? Oh who am I kidding, of course she hasn't she'd have mentioned it by now and that would be way too easy. **FUCK MY LIFE!***

For another, the air around the rooftop had become so cold that Ranma could see her breath. The water left over here and there in puddles from Tsukiumi's sudden attack had also begun to freeze.

Turning, Ranma looked at Akitsu. She was now staring at Tsukiumi her face impassive. Yet while that impassivity might have fooled someone who had never met her, Ranma did, and could see her fingers twitching at her sides her chest heaving slightly, and not just from the effects of the kiss.

Before things could get out of hand Ranma stepped between them her back to Tsukiumi for a moment as she locked

eyes with Akitsu. "Calm down Akitsu, I'll handle this. Tsukiumi doesn't know about my curse, so she really was trying to protect you, no need for you to get angry, ok?"

Akitsu stared back at Ranma, but her anger didn't seem to be dissipating for a few seconds. Then she simply sighed and reined in her powers, the temperature around them going back to normal as she stepped back. "Yes Ashikabi-sama."

Wincing Ranma realized that Akitsu had called him that deliberately, her little way of getting back at him/her for interrupting her righteous vengeance on Tsukiumi.

Leaving that aside, she turned back to Tsukiumi who had been glaring at both of them, one foot tapping on the rooftop irritably. "I am still waiting for an explanation!"

"Look Tsukiumi it's pretty simple," Ranma began hesitantly. "Um, I'm cursed. Full on, magic-is-real kind of cursed. I was in China with my old man a few months ago, and we went to these training grounds..." From there Ranma launched into her well-rehearsed explanation of her condition. Idly she wondered if she should ask Nabiki to make up pamphlets. *Could maybe even sell them then, make some more money that way. Nah, that feels like an idea that would come back to bite me on my ass.*

At first Tsukiumi listened incredulously to Ranma's explanation, then in rising anger. "You, you foul deceiver!" she suddenly shirked, interrupting Ranma's explanation. "You let me think you were no threat, a woman rather than a man in order to get me to lower my guard!"

"Wha, why in the hell would I do that! And it ain't my fault I've been in my female form every time we see one another. I never tried to hide it, it was just damn bad luck! And look at it from my perspective, I was born a guy but now I have to deal with being a woman a lot of the time." Ranma shouted, dodging Tsukiumi's attacks and once more waving Akitsu away, not wanting this situation to spiral any further out of control.

"Bah, why should I believe you now!" Tsukiumi bellowed.

"Because if I wanted to try and wing you would I need to be a guy while doing it!?" Ranma shouted, ducking below another battering ram of water which had been launched towards her chest. "Besides, I hate the curse, I'm barely getting used to it myself, why would I go out of my way to tell anyone else about it?"

Tsukiumi blushed at that, but began to calm down. "That is true at least, but you should have at least told me about it when I stopped by a few days ago at the Tendo Dojo. Such would have been the perfect time to do so."

Seeing Tsukiumi calming down Ranma rose from his crouch, continuing to speak calmly. "You're right and I'll apologize for that. But you really don't have anything to worry about Tsukiumi. I'm not interested in winging anyone let alone you."

"Let alone me? What is that supposed to mean!?" Tsukiumi said, flaring up once more. "Dost thou think I am not good enough for you, you damn monkey?"

"Gah, no, nothing like that, you're gorgeous and strong, anyone would..." Ranma babbled, eager to hold off righteous feminine anger even though she was one.

"So you do have designs on me!" Tsukiumi shouted in triumph. "No one is going to wing me, I need no man to become as strong as I can be!"

"What, ahh, damn it calm down, you freaking tsundere!" Ranma shouted, once more having to dodge Tsukiumi's attacks. But this time instead of retreating she closed the distance, dodging and ducking this way and that.

"What did you just call me!?" Tsukiumi tried to adjust her attacks, firing off smaller streams of water in an effort to overcome Ranma's speed advantage, but this proved useless when Ranma simply sped up. When she attempted to create a water sword to protect herself Ranma grabbed her arm forcing it away and out from between the two of them.

Her other hand came up to tap lightly under Tsukiumi's chin. "Now if I was interested in winging you against your will I could do so now. But I'm not. Yes, you're beautiful as hell, but I have already got Akitsu and this whole marriage contract thing hanging over my head, I don't want to add more romantic-like trouble to my life."

"Thou art calling me trouble now!?" Tsukiumi growled, trying to pull her hand free and bring up her other hand only for Ranma to grab it in turn. Now the redhead held both her wrists in her hands and despite being shorter Tsukiumi realized Ranma could easily overpower her, but wasn't doing so.

"Yes! Hell look how you just reacted! I don't want to lose a friend over this Tsukiumi, but I ain't gonna let you wail on me either. Now I'm going to let you go, and we're going to keep talking like civilized people, okay?"

Tsukiumi glared at the redhead, but after trying to reach her arms free once more calmed down. Ranma released her, and Tsukiumi stepped back, frowning as Akitsu moved in quickly, standing by Ranma's side. "Very well, I will need some time to think about this, but I still say you should have told me about your curse."

"I'll apologize for that, but I'll also note you reacted just like I feared you would." Shaking her head Ranma looked over at Akitsu. "Come on Akitsu, let's get back to the dojo. We'll see you around Tsukiumi, stay safe yeah?"

Tsukiumi watched the two of them go, feeling a discordant feeling of loss and irritation she didn't have words for as she watched them disappear over the rooftops. As if she had just missed her chance at something there. After a second she shook it off and decided to head to her temporary hotel room in the north of the city, no longer feeling any desire to be out and about for some inexplicable reason.

OOOOOO

That night after everyone else was asleep Ranma snuck out of the Tendo house and out onto the rooftops. From there he made his way towards the southern district of the city, stopping occasionally to look down at science to make sure he was going the right direction and following Kocho's directions. From there, he found the walled mansion that belonged to the Ashikabi of the South Mikogami Hayato, circling around it slowly as he made note of where the cameras were.

You'd think that he'd have cameras pointing up rather than down toward the ground given he knows about Sekirei. Or does he trust in his own flock so much he doesn't think a Sekirei could get close to him?

With that Ranma backed up, and leaped high up into the air coming down on the other side of the fence directly behind one of the slowly swiveling cameras.

Before either of the cameras on either side of that one finished their own rotations which would cover that portion of the yard, Ranma had already rolled and was in amongst some bushes. From there he snuck through the property circling the mansion slowly, marking out where further cameras and other security features were, including a few pressure traps and various alarms. This also included two Sekirei that were slowly patrolling around the house.

One of them was one of the two blonde bimbos Ranma had seen before, though given how alike the two of them were and the fact it was dark out he couldn't tell which one. Indeed he had only seen the blonde hair thanks to the lights still on in some rooms in the mansion. The other was a Sekirei Ranma hadn't seen before, a short heavily muscled girl with a massive two headed battleaxe visible on her shoulder.

Both of them were moving around the entire property, which allowed Ranma to hide in a tree just close enough for what he wanted to do without either one the wiser. *And besides, I don't have to be sneaky getting out. Though I'm still surprised Kocho was able to find an actual blueprint of the house, you'd think rich folk would make certain that kind of thing wasn't part of the public record. Now... where is the main office?*

Once he was situated outside his target room Ranma reached into his pocket and began to pull out several stones around which paper had been wrapped. Then he aimed at the window to the mansion's main office, and began to hurl stones through it rapidly, so fast they blurred through the air.

The first one punched through the window with the sound of tinkling glass barely heard from where Ranma was hiding, followed by several more. There was a series of louder crashes and thumps from the other side of the now broken window which roused the Sekirei inside the mansion to the fact that something was going on. One of the Sekirei on patrol heard the noise and started toward that side of the mansion too, which Ranma spotted out of the corner of his eye.

After that, Ranma quickly left, the first sign that he had even been there being one of the cameras catching his back and his signature pigtail as he leaped over the outer wall. *Now, do I have time to hit up the Higa-aho and MBI tower? Na, best to leave it for now, hit one place up each night. At least that way I'll have something to look forward to while I'm dying of boredom in school for the next few days.*

OOOOOO

"How the hell did someone get close enough to throw stones through our Windows!" roared Mutsu angrily staring at the not two, but four Sekirei that had been on patrol. Two of them had been patrolling the mansion's grounds, while

two had been patrolling the blocks around the mansion.

"We don't know!" groused the Sekirei with the battleaxe. "One minute's everything is fine, the next there's this noise of things breaking. Who the hell is he anyway?"

"His name's Ranma, he and I have met in person once a few weeks ago. He's an egotistical ass, but a tough bastard and sneaky too it appears. Still he should never have been able to get this close to our Ashikabi Clara!"

"That's enough," said Hayato, smiling and shaking his head as he read the messages on the stones. "There was no real damage done..."

"No damage, look at your computer!" Mutsu yelled, pointing at the wreckage of the computer's screen.

"So what? Everything important is on back up anyway. Besides, the game wouldn't be interesting if it didn't have an antihero in it. We'll need to step up our training schedules though. And no more patrols of below three people I think. And we'll stay well away from this Nerima district put it under the same heading as the North for now."

OOOOOO

The next evening after an uneventful day Ranma hit up MBI tower in a similar fashion, with Uzume's help once more. Though not exactly the same as the first time, the messages were just as inflammatory.

OOOOOO

"What is going on down there among the peons now," Minaka asked himself, sighing as he stared down from where he was gazing out over the city to see several hundred of MBI's drones once more outside pointing and staring up at the building. "I thought we got rid of the overcompensation message," he grumbled.

Moving back to his desk, he toggled through the security cameras until he found one of several that were on nearby buildings facing towards MBI Tower. There he paused, scowling angrily. Once more someone had been able to get onto his building and write out messages. "I suppose I should feel happy that he wasn't able to get in a position to hurl stones at my office like he was the brat of the South. Still, this needs to stop. It's threatening both the security of the game at this stage and MBI's position as the game manager."

"Where are the disciplinary squad?" he barked into his pickup to their Ashikabi, Natsuo Ichinomi.

The handsome man on the other end of the pickup smiled blandly. While he was a narcissist of the first degree who truly loathed the world in general, he also had a bit of a sadistic streak. As such he was somewhat enjoying the threats to his authority sent Minaka's way of late.

"Benitsubasa is being seen to by the medical section." He replied blandly. "She took a bad knocking about last night when she was involved in a fight with a Sekirei at the nightclub she had gone to, number 03 Kazehana. Apparently, she simply through Benitsubasa around like a leaf on the wind after Benitsubasa started a fight about 03's... most obvious features. She was actually called off from finishing Benitsubasa by the young man she was apparently drinking with, so I suppose we should be thankful for scant favors there."

Minaka blinked, actually shocked for a moment. He had thought that Kazehana would pine after him until she was forced to fight in the game during the second stage, but if she had been out on a date, that might not be the case. *Well good then, she'll be forced to play the game just like all the others,* He grumped mentally, his ego rather bruised by the idea but not wanting to show it. "I see. And the other two?"

"Haihane is out dealing with a Sekirei that is trying to leave the city with her Ashikabi. Besides, given her apparent friendship with this Ranma fellow and her odd sense of humor I doubt that she'd be willing to obey orders to try to punish him again, especially since the last time failed so miserably."

"I actually wasn't going to send them out against Ranma again in a direct contest. No, I was going to have them pressure the Nerimites more forcefully." Minaka replied dryly. "If we can't gain control of Nerima as a whole then the influence we can maintain there is minimal at best."

"Ah, that could actually work. As could cutting them off from electricity and water, and making a public announcement of it being a punishment for Ranma's actions?"

"Hmmm.... I like that, excellent thinking! Yes, we'll cut the district off from public transportation first, then if Ranma persists in ruining the game and attacking MBI's position as game manager, we can cut off their water and other

utilities. After that, having anyone who works outside the district fired from their companies will be the next stage."

"A concern though," the Ashikabi of the Disciplinary squad said, holding up a finger in the pickup of the video. "If we escalate like that, will this Ranma fellow escalate right back?"

"... Perhaps, but what can he do on his own?" Minaka said, waving his hand airily. "If he does, we can cut out the middle man and sic the whole Disciplinary Squad on him."

"Karasuba is out on a mission, one of the assassination missions we have to feed her to keep her satisfied. I would recommend we wait until she returns to do anything."

"Dammit!" Minaka muttered, but understood the other man's point. "The moment she's back, send her to my office. In the meantime look through the unreleased Sekirei and pick out at least three more who are strong enough to induct into the Squad."

The messages that so infuriated Minaka were in many ways the same Ranma had delivered to Hayato. They consisted of a few single sentence messages. 'Stop overcompensating', 'Sekirei are not Pokémon'. 'Every time I stop yours Sekirei from capturing a Sekirei I owe you one punch in the face.' While Ranma had no real wish to hit a child, his parents might be due a few smacks.

The message on MBI towers walls was much more general than that last one. 'Every time a Sekirei is winged against her will, I owe you, __, one punch in the face', with a line of a fill-in the blank category between next to it. Already Minaka saw several emails from his section chiefs about people wanting to quit.

Nor was Minaka the only one irritated by this act. Takami was also enraged, furious that someone had once more been able to actually get onto the building to write out these messages. And also afraid at what it meant: that MBI was losing control. "What do you mean we can't adequately cover the Tower so this shit doesn't happen again?"

"Ma'am said the engineer she was glowering at rather timidly. "We're stretched to the breaking point as it is. We're trying to wire up the entire city after all, and we still have a lot of areas that just don't have any coverage. We can keep working on that or we can see to the security of the tower. We can't do both. We don't have the men."

"Then concentrate on the tower," she ordered and held up a hand before the man could object. "After this fiasco I bet Minaka will agree with that one. We'll put off the next stage of the game for a few days more in order to secure our own security."

OOOOOO

The next day was Thursday and Ranma picked up Akitsu after school at the Tendos and took her over to Doctor Tofu for their appointment with him. Doctor Tofu smiled at the expressionless Sekirei, bowing and introducing himself formally. While he had seen her over at the Tendos a few nights back, they hadn't actually been introduced.

With that done, she gestured Akitsu to sit down on the table/bed for a moment. "Now Akitsu, have you ever been looked at by a doctor before?"

She nodded, but did not answer his question further until Ranma asked her to. "...We Sekirei were examined very often during the adjusting process, Ashikabi-sama" she said in a monotone voice.

A lot of the progress Ranma had made with her had seemingly disappeared the moment she heard she was going to be looked at by a doctor. Indeed it was only Ranma's presence that was forcing her to reply at all beyond single word answers and her body language had closed down even more than normal. Ranma had noticed this, and had taken her hand in one of his, the warmth of it helping her keep the fear at bay.

"Perhaps I should rephrase. Has a purely medical doctor looked at you with intent to see if you had any allergies or sickness? Not like a specimen," Doctor Tofu said, his mouth twitching from a smile into a frown at those words. "The doctors who treated you like that are not worth their caduceus."

"Occasionally." Ranma squeezed her hand and Akitsu elaborated. "I had a physical several months before the accident which forced this on me," she said, gesturing to the mark on her forehead.

"That mark's the main reason we're here doc," Ranma interjected, his thumb moving on the back of Akitsu's hand, though he didn't realize it. The touch did at least help her to calm down. "that and making certain she's got no homing device or something in her system."

"very well. We'll start with the physical exam before looking into that. Oh, and Ranma I also have enough time to get your physical done today too." Dr. Tofu said, not looking at the younger man as he picked up a stethoscope.

Ranma scowled, having hoped that Tofu would have forgotten. And with Akitsu right there getting a physical he couldn't very well get out of it. "Oh, fine, but in that case let's do Akitsu and my physical first, then move on to examining that marking."

Tofu nodded agreeably, then asked Ranma to leave the room so Akitsu could undress for the next series of examinations. When Ranma turned to leave though Akitsu refused to let go of his hand. He looked at her, and though her face and even eyes were expressionless, Ranma got the impression she was pleading with him not to leave.

Sighing Ranma turned back stepping so that he was on the other side of the bed from Tofu and still holding Akitsu's hand. "It looks like I'm going to be staying doc. Besides, much as I don't want to say it, I have seen Akitsu's body before." *And ooh boy did I enjoy it a lot*, a portion of Ranma's mind thought, before being pushed back into its cage.

Akitsu allowed her lips to quirk up into a very faint smile. The memory of the time she had joined Ranma in the bath was one she treasured. Standing up momentarily Akitsu then began to undress, her chains clinking to the top of the bed as she undid them, then the center wide belt of her kimono, before letting it fall off her shoulders.

Tofu, certified doctor and incredibly controlled young man, gulped at the sight of Akitsu's body. It was both angelic and sinful, proportions few human women in the world could match, white skin that resembled a pearl almost and a taut, flat belly.

But Akitsu couldn't care less about the doctor's reactions. She knew with her Ranma-sama there she was safe and was much more interested in Ranma's reaction. Despite having seen her body several times by this point, Ranma was entranced, staring first down at her body then into her face, keeping his eyes locked on hers with difficulty. As he did, Akitsu realized she rather liked that better than if he had simply ogled her.

Thankfully for both men Akitsu was wearing a bra and panties else even Tofu and Ranma's self-control might not have saved them from death by blood-loss. "Ahem, right. Now, could you breath in for me?" Tofu said, taking some deep calming breaths himself.

As Ranma had anticipated, Akitsu's physical went off without a hitch. She was as fit as any athlete in the world, fitter even given how little body fat she had. Tofu idly noticed that her breasts were a marked contrast to how little fat she should actually have on her body, his professionalism pushing through his awe at her figure.

But the good doctor's real issues began with Ranma's physical. Ranma at first refused to take her clothes off after transforming then had to exit the room to get a bra to change into. While he had one on his person just in case, Ranma had yet to perfect the fast changing technique. Then when Tofu tried to test her reflexes Ranma nearly punted him into the wall. After that the doctor nearly had his hand broken when performing a few examinations.

The end result was just as bizarre and out there as Akitsu's. The muscle to fat ratio of the two girls was noticeably beyond even the fittest female athletes in the world, which stood out as a marked contrast to Ranma's chest and hips, which really should have been much less pronounced. Ranma's dexterity, hand eye coordination and reflexes made a snake look like a snail, well beyond even Akitsu's. All in all Ranma was a better than healthy young woman, her body seemingly fully functional.

Which brought Tofu to the worst moment of the examination. "Ranma, I realize you have probably been given the Talk, but I would wager that was only for the male side of things. I believe we need to speak to the physical side of things...."

What followed actually could have been described more as verbal torture rather than a simple explanation. By the end of it Ranma was twitching badly, her hands clenching and unclenching, and she could not change back to her male body fast enough. Even Akitsu was looking a little freaked out and when Ranma asked her later admitted to not having known quite a bit that Tofu explained.

With that finally over with, Tofu began his more thorough examination of Akitsu. His hand glowed a very light green as he held it up over the mark on her forehead, smiling at her. "Don't worry, this won't hurt a bit "

This didn't stop Akitsu from worrying but with Ranma holding her hand she sat still as the doctor examined her.

"Hmm... this is very interesting. I have to say that she has a lot of ki in her system, far more than most humans. Can I use you as a comparison Ranma?" When Ranma nodded Tofu placed his still glowing hand on Ranma's chest,

nodding slowly. "She has quite a bit more ki than you, but this mark on her forehead is indeed acting like a blocker. Or perhaps a better description would be a knot. Her own ki has been fouled or scrunched up by some great shock to her system and the image on her forehead is acting like a visible sign of the knot... i'm sorry, words are not very good at describing what I am seeing."

"That's about what my old man could tell, if a little more detailed. Can you tell if there's anything foreign keeping the block there and how can we get rid of it?" Ranma asked, leaning forward intently, squeezing Akitsu's hand.

"I don't think so, a foreign element might have started the process but it's all her own ki now." Tofu demurred. "As for solving it, that's going to take a lot of research. I think I will need to contact several doctors I know to see what they think about it. I can think of two ways to get rid of the blockage, but I am not going to say more until I figure out the long term consequences."

Akitsu's eyes had widened noticeably when Tofu mentioned there might be ways to get rid of her mark, but then wilted as he went on. She looked to her side however when Ranma once more squeezed her hand, smiling at her reassuringly. "Hey, it's progress Akitsu, what's that phrase, Tokyo wasn't built in a day? We made progress today, let's be happy about that okay?"

"Ahh... yes Ranma-sama," She said with a nod, almost back to how she was before they arrived at Tofu's office.

"There is one more test I want to do. You asked if I could tell if someone had embedded tracking devices. I can do that, so if you could lay down Akitsu I believe we can finish this last aspect of the examination quickly." Tofu said, looking a little uncomfortable seeing the look in his patients' eyes.

At Ranma's gentle encouragement Akitsu lay down with her face down on the bed, while most of her body was covered by a sheet up to half of her back. This examination didn't take long at all after Tofu brought in an x-ray machine before Tofu stopped, gesturing to where Akitsu's neck met her shoulders is. "The only foreign object I found is something embedded in her spine right there. I don't know what it is, my equipment isn't powerful enough to tell me more beyond its existence and it's size."

"That's right over where the symbol of the Sekirei/Ashikabi bond should be," Ranma said grimly. "There's no way that's a coincidence. Can you remove it?"

"No," Doctor Tofu said with a sigh. "That would be beyond my skill as a doctor. It would take a surgeon of some skill to remove it, let alone to emplace it in the first place. If it's any it actually doesn't seem to be on at present."

"That actually does make me feel better. Thanks Doc," Ranma said with a sigh moving around the table and pulling Akitsu to her feet after she had finished dressing.

Heading home after what was possibly the most embarrassing moment of her entire his/her entire life, Ranma was itching to head out on patrol and hopefully find something to hit. Or barring that, Ranma would be willing to head over to Miya's place and letting out some of her frustrations in a spar against Miya or Musubi.

Stopping in at the Tendos he found Nabiki waiting for them. She took one look at Ranma's face and winced shaking her head. "Sorry Ranma" she said, moving over the past him on the shoulder. "Everyone's gone through a physical like that at one point or another in their lives."

"Yeah I know," Ranma said with a sigh. "It's just, well, it's not my body you know?"

"I think you really do need to get used to it being your body," Nabiki said with a sigh of her own. That was one of several things that she had to come to grips with if she was interested in Ranma. Was she willing and able to accept the curse? She didn't feel threatened by it, and could intellectually find the little busty redhead beautiful, but that was a far cry from finding her attractive enough to kiss or anything else.

Setting that thought aside however, she decided to tackle the actual problem she had hoped to today. "Anyway, I was going to head out to do some shopping and I'd like to bring Akitsu along. She can't always be wearing the same thing after all, and she's just different enough than Kasumi and I that we have to change some of our clothing for her. That's worked so far, but it can't last. And since were rather flush with cash after the sale of those pictures I figured we could buy her some more clothing."

Ranma nodded, reaching into his pocket and pulling out some cash handing it over to her as he looked over at Akitsu expecting to start an argument. Akitsu however simply nodded, looking at Nabiki speculatively. "Ahh...I will go with her Ranma," she said, hesitatingly slightly but not showing any further sign of worry.

Surprised, Ranma nodded. "Okay, I'll head out myself then. I'll meet you guys back here after my patrol." With that said, Ranma turned around immediately and hopped up onto the rooftops and away.

Akitsu and Nabiki stood there in the sitting room for a moment looking at one another, then Nabiki held up the cash. "So, do you want to go shopping? Or would you rather talk here?"

After a moment's thought Akitsu nodded toward the door. "I need new bras and panties at least." She had finally gotten into the habit of actually wearing said items by this point, but she didn't have many. Nor did she have that many outfits beyond her normal one, not having bought many while she was out with Uzume and Miya and Ranma that one time. And she had learned recently that while she was fine going around with Ranma dressed as she was, she didn't like doing so without him around. "I will go change."

When she came back, dressed in jeans and a blouse Akitsu's eyes once more began to bore into Nabiki's and Nabiki sighed realizing they were going to have to have this out now rather than after they had finished shopping. "Okay" she said, looking at Akitsu seriously after locking the door behind her. "I can tell you know something's up, I take it you want to talk about the whole fiancé thing?"

Akitsu nodded. Ashikabi-sama said that... Ranma said that," she corrected herself. "That you all were looking for a way out of the arrangement, but that might not be possible. I had heard about it, but had not realized he might not be able to get out of it until he said that."

"That's true, but you're not stupid Akitsu, you've seen how I look at him at times. I know you saw me flirting with him after the movie a few nights back."

At Nabiki's question Akitsu nodded sharply, more sharply than she normally would move at all outside of combat. Her gaze also narrowed like a laser entering Nabiki's head despite the fact that her expression hadn't changed.

"I'll admit I am interested in Ranma okay?" Nabiki said holding up her hands defensively. "But I'm not interested in forcing him to choose between us, although I don't know at this point whether I'd be willing to share either."

"I will fight for my Ashi..." Akitsu corrected herself once more. "I will fight for Ranma-sama and my place next to him."

"And I don't know if I'm that interested in Ranma. I understand that you think you're in love with him Akitsu, but humans don't work that way. I am attracted to Ranma, intensely attracted to him," Nabiki admitted.

She'd had a dream or two about Ranma occasionally after seeing him exercise shirtless or performing one of his amazingly complex katas. "But whether that could become love? I don't know. And I'm also leery about showing any interest in him at all once my father returns from this training trip of his. You've only had a few days of putting up with him and Ranma's father, but I can tell you that the bit pair of them are not happy with the way that Ranma and the three of us are holding off on this whole engagement thing. I have been looking into reasons why, but my sources in on the law side of things are not nearly as quick to get back to me as my friends are at school."

Most of that went over Akitsu's head, so she simply nodded. "You do not wish to be exclusive with Ranma-sama?"

"No," Nabiki said quickly, knowing that was the main point Akitsu was concerned about. "I am not willing to push you out of his life Akitsu," she went moving to take Akitsu's hand, the Sekirei allowing her to do so. "You've gone through too much, suffered too much for me to want to do that. I'm just saying that I'd like to see where Ranma and I could go."

Akitsu slowly nodded, staying quiet as Nabiki led them down the streets of Nerima's shopping district. It was small, far smaller than the mall that Akitsu and the others had gone to on that first shopping trip, but there were a few things that she could buy here which Nabiki thought she might be interested in. And it was in Nerima. The odds of running into any other Sekirei or MBI agents were nil.

For her part, Akitsu didn't know what to think about this. On the one hand, she was a Sekirei and had been indoctrinated to believe that she would eventually have to share her Ashikabi with other Sekirei. The idea did not throw her off all that much, though she still felt jealous at the idea of having to share Ranma's affections with anyone.

That being said, she liked Nabiki, almost as much as she liked Kasumi. The two of them had welcomed her into her their home, befriended her, and treated Akitsu as an individual, not like she was broken at all. Between the two of them and Ranma, Akitsu knew now that while her powers might not be where they could be, she was in no way broken as she had felt she was before meeting Ranma.

She had come into this discussion hoping in some part to corner Nabiki and make her back off, because she had

indeed noticed Nabiki flirting with Ranma in the past. But now they came to it and Nabiki had been so up front about it, and indeed had stated that she had no desire to push a wedge between Ranma and her, Akitsu decided she could go along with that for now. "...How long does it take humans to realize they are in love rather than affectionate towards one another?" she asked as they entered the shopping district.

Nabiki looked at her startled, then chuckled shaking her head. "There is no set timeframe for that kind of thing Akitsu," she said with a smile that would've caused shock and consternation among many of our friends and factors. "I can't tell you that. All I know is that I'd like to see what happens between me and Ranma, okay?"

"Will Kasumi do so too?" That Akitsu probably would not be happy with. Having one person in compete with for Ranma's time and attention was okay, but having more than one was not. In fact she was very happy that since their confrontation with her that while Tsukiumi had not stopped by again.

"No, Kasumi and Ranma like one another well enough as friends, but I don't think there's any danger of it ever going beyond that. Ranma's a breath of fresh air that Kasumi really enjoys since it's changed up our daily lives, but I don't think she'd enjoy being too close to the action. I don't even know if I'll be all that happy frankly if I get involved in some of the chaos you two are taking part in." Nabiki replied, shaking her head at the very idea.

"And you are positive you won't try to separate us?" Akitsu said stopping suddenly and moving close to stare hard into Nabiki's eyes.

"No chance. You two are too damn cute." Nabiki said simply, not reacting at all to Akitsu's attempt to intimidate her.

Akitsu slowly nodded, and turned away to resume their walk.

Deciding she really needed it to be verbalized, Nabiki caught up with her, taking Akitsu's hand again. "So does that mean you won't try to freeze me if I step up my flirtations?"

Akitsu shook her head. "I will not."

"But..." she paused once more to look at Nabiki seriously. "But whatever your emotions become, I know I love Ranma-sama. That will not change. I might not be able to be winged by his kisses, but I refuse to give up that warmth." All of this was said in the same monotone she always spoke with, but there was a fierce determination that carried over despite that and her inexpressive face.

"Duly noted," Nabiki said sighing. "We'll cross that bridge if it comes to it. At the moment, I'm more interested in living in the now." Looking around she changed the subject. "Tell me, has Ranma talked to you about maybe learning how to add a weapon to your style?"

OOOOOO

Ranma headed straight out on patrol from the dojo rather than heading to Izumo House first, knowing this was the day of the monthly anniversary of Takehito's death. He had seen her yesterday and knew the pain there was still a raw thing. Nor was it something he could help her with except maybe to jolly her along. But with Miya at the cemetery, Ranma was in no hurry to go head to the inn. Musubi was fun, but not good enough to give him a real spar like he wanted right now.

Instead Ranma decided to push his patrols deeper into the eastern territory, telling himself that was because he wanted to stop more forced wingings and that the eastern and southern areas of the city were the signs of most of those. But really after the embarrassing time he'd had earlier Ranma just wanted to really wail on something. And thankfully for Ranma, he found something quickly.

Hearing a commotion down on the streets of honking horns and shouts of "Stop!" Ranma moved in that direction. From a few blocks away he spotted a young man racing between traffic away from a gang of men in suits, who had just come out of a van. The van had been parked outside what looked like some kind of restaurant, but the guys in suits were well out of position to chase after their quarry.

The boy, young man whatever, Ranma wasn't really good at guessing ages especially from several blocks away, was hauling along a woman. Again Ranma couldn't make out any of her features from this distance except she was wearing a tight purple dress of some kind.

But the most important part of this whole scene to Ranma was that there was a Sekirei on the rooftops nearby. She was thin, with short blonde hair and a boyish body but she wore tight clothing with stripes of black and yellow across her top matching her long tight gloves. For pants she wore bloomers of all things.

At almost the same time Ranma saw her, the Sekirei turned and spotted him, pausing from leaping down after the boy and the probable Sekirei he was dragging along. She turned, glaring at him as thin strings fell from her fingers, flicking along the top of the roof. "You! We've all been warned about you, Higa-sama wants you dead! But that's not my mission. If you butt out, I won't have to hurt you."

Shaking his head Ranma didn't say anything, in no mood to banter with the girl. Instead he closed rapidly watching her fingers closely.

The girl flung one of her hands forward as if she was trying to toss a ball underhand, but Ranma saw the strings attached to her fingers flicking out at speed. They also glinted like metal and Ranma knew that they would hurt like hell if they landed.

So he dodged them in midair, landing directly in front of the girl, one hand up and pushing her other arm out and away. But she moved with it, twirling around and bringing her other hand around complete with the string she was using. Ranma jumped over that lashing out with a kick that caught the girl in the side of the head, hurling her away.

Still, she was able to get her feet under her and leap away from his follow on attack, trying to get her strings around him once more. A few ripped into his clothing, but he still dodged them enough to not be tagged. He then got in close and smashed a punch into the girl's chest.

Leaping away after lashing out with a kick at Ranma's balls just to get him to back off for a second, the Sekirei gritted her teeth. "Damn it, you really are as good as they say you are. Well, let's see if you can handle this!" with that she raised her both hands over her head to either side like a Y shape, the strings attached to her fingers falling in two cascades to either side. Then she began to glow, the glow originating from the back of her neck and spreading outward. "Sekirei #31! By the blades of strings, my Ashikabi's enemies will be ripped to shreds!" So saying she lashed out with her strings far faster than she had previously.

Ranma was still able to dodge her attack if barely, watching in shock as it sliced into the rooftop and several surrounding buildings, slicing several feet beyond the walls into the interior of the buildings. And Ranma also gasped as his arm exploded in pain despite his having dodged the attack, or so he thought. Staring down at his arm Ranma saw a long gash there, bleeding badly but already healing.

What the hell, was that just because of the air pressure?! Even as fast as it was going it shouldn't have projected that much air pressure around the point of attack! Growling Ranma lashed out with his own long range attack, a blast of gold and blue energy lashing out from his hands.

So busy was she with her own attack, Sai couldn't dodge in time and she screamed as the battering ram of pure light energy smashed into her, hurling her backwards to crash off the side of the building. She tried to land on her feet, but Ranma was after her. She barely had time to look up before a blow to her temple knocked her out. Her limp body was thrown against a nearby parked car, crashing into it with wrecking ball force.

Staring from the unconscious Sekirei and his arm Ranma growled, shaking his head. "Let that be a lesson Ranma old boy, don't underestimate Sekirei despite most of them being arrogant and delusional. That must've been one of those norito things, damn dangerous they are. Now, where was I?"

With that Ranma hopped back up onto the rooftops, moving around quickly until he found the man trying to drag the girl away. They were still being followed by the gang of suit wearing thugs and Ranma decided it was about time to step in. With that thought after the kid raced into an alleyway Ranma leaped off the roof to land in among the thugs.

They all had a brief second to gasp at his sudden arrival then Ranma's feet and hands flashed out, slamming them this way and that. One of them had the presence of mind to duck as he landed, pulling out a tazer. While smashing another man into the alleyway's wall Ranma felt tazer touch his skin, followed by a jolt. But it wasn't nearly enough volts to make him twitch, let alone actually cause him pain.

"Yeah," he said smacking the tazer out of the man's hand smirking at the other man's look of wide-eyed shock. "That's not going to work on me." With that he looked around thoughtfully. Spotting a nearby dumpster he grabbed the man who had used the tazer up in one hand and headed in that direction, holding him in the air as if he weighed no more than a feather.

"You don't know what you're doing kid, we work for..." the man began only to stop as Ranma shook him .

"Does it look like I care?" Ranma asked, picking up another guy in a suit and looking over at the man that they had

been chasing. He looked a little scruffy, but Ranma felt he had seen him before somewhere. "You're the guy I nearly ran over with Ryoga aren't you?"

The young other man nodded at him slowly. "You um, you look kind of familiar too, and I, I haven't seen any other guys running around and jumping off buildings."

"Yeah martial artists like me aren't exactly common around here unfortunately. Can you get that dumpster lid for me?"

"Oh um sure," the man said, politeness overriding curiosity for a moment as he lifted the lid up with his one free hand, not letting go of the the girl he was holding around the waist with his other one..

"Don't do it you fucker!" the still conscious kidnapper said, only to find himself in the air tossed up and into the dumpster. He was followed by his fellows in quick succession, two of them smacking into him and hurling him back down into the starch at the bottom of the dumpster.

"Hopefully you lot have some cell phones to call for help, if not, meh, you'll probably make it to the landfill safely," Ranma said cheerfully, waving at the cursing man as he closed the lid before turning back to the scruffy man. "My name's Ranma," he said cheerfully, having worked out all of his earlier frustrations and feeling quite a bit lighter now. "What's yours?"

"Minato," the man said holding out his free hand to shake. "Are you involved in this whole Sekirei game thing?"

"Well, I'm not really involved... I am more the wild earthquake that's trying to shake the chessboard rather than an actual piece. I take it that you and this lady are a pair?" Ranma asked, shaking Minato's hand. This close he could tell Minato was actually older than him, maybe a year or so older than Kasumi.

"Um, sort of," Minato said hesitantly. "We, er, Kazehana-san and I, met a few days back. A friend of mine took me out drinking too... well to get over failing my tests again... Do you go to university?"

"Nope," Ranma said cheerfully, moving to take the girl from Minato. She was a little older than Minato, but was gorgeous as most Sekirei seemed to be. She wore a tight purple dress and had long, black hair, thick pout lips, and a beautiful face. She also had the biggest bust that Ranma had ever seen, or even imagined could ever exist. *Holy shit, those are larger than even Musubi's! Maybe Nabiki was right that the Sekirei made some secret agreement with a God somewhere to get bodies like this.*

On top of that, Ranma noticed she looked almost green rather than unconsciousness like he had thought. Her purple eyes were tracking, but her head was lolling this way and that. Feeling her pulse, he frowned. "Was she drugged?"

"I think so. We were, well we were out on a date," Minato said blushing and looking down at the ground, his feet shuffling unconsciously. "I know what you're thinking, she's not in my league or anything but well we hit it off, or I guess she found something in me to like I don't know what..."

"Okay stop right there!" Ranma ordered, taking a step back and making a timeout sign with his hands. "I really don't care about your insecurity issues, or whatever she sees in you okay? If she does, and if you like her equally that's enough for me. Tell me what actually happened, and do it as we move. This is not a friendly part of town."

"I wish I'd known that when we were planning our date." Minato said sighing and looking around as Ranma hefted the girl into his arms. The woman rather, Ranma could in no way called this Sekirei a girl.

"Anyway, I thought Kazehana-san looked a little queasy after only one drink, and that's just weird for her. So I didn't drink anymore, and tried to talk her out of drinking, but Kazehana kept on drinking two more glasses before she stopped. By that time she looked almost dead. I realized something was wrong and got us out of the back of the restaurant, which seemed to have taken whoever those people are by surprise. After that they started chasing us. If you haven't come along we'd have never gotten away from them."

"that was pretty good thinking Minato," Ranma said, then looked at the other man. He then sighed, kneeling down. "Get on my back. We're going to take the high road kid. Surely your girl here has done that a time or two with you right?"

Yeah, but no offense, this way doesn't look nearly as fun," Minato said, getting on Ranma's back.

"For you and me both Minato. Now hold on, this is going to get bumpy. From there he leaped up onto the nearby rooftops and away ignoring his passenger's yelp of shock.

Luckily by the time they got back to Izumo House Miya was there having come back from her visit to the cemetery. She took one look at Ranma and his burden, and sighed theatrically. "Oh dear, I knew it would come to this eventually Kazehana, you've finally drunk so much you couldn't handle it. Just set her down in the main room Ranma, I'll dump some water on her head until she comes around."

"You know this lush?" Ranma asked, putting her on the floor much more gently than Miya had indicated he should. "And I don't think it's because she was drinking, Minato you tell her. She obviously knows about the Sekirei plan, just tell it straight."

Minato stared in awe at the very elegant looking purple haired girl woman for several seconds before bowing quickly. "Thank you for letting us into your home miss, I um, and my friend..."

From there Minato explained what had occurred, inching back as Miya's visage began to go dark, an ethereal vision appearing behind her for a moment. It disappeared as Minato got to the part where Ranma arrived on the scene. At that point Ranma took up the tail, telling about how he had run into his first norito attack.

"I see," Miya said darkly. "And this happened in the East? Perhaps I need to take a brief sojourn to the east of the city and express my **displeasure** with this act."

"Meh, I've already made plans to do just that, I'd say leave it to me. There's this little thing called Tokyo that might be broken if you start to act out," Ranma said with a shrug, but little to no hyperbole in his voice. Even now Miya's ki was like a bonfire to the scattered candles of the others in the inn. "Could be fun, but probably a bit overkill. No, I've already got plans to pay him back."

From there Ranma explained his nightly escapades and that Higa was going to be his next target. After a moment Miya nodded, but decided that this weekend she would stop in at MBI. Regardless of anything else, her feathers were supposed to be allowed to search for their destined ones without interference. Drugs especially were well beyond the pale. And if Minaka could not protect her feathers, their agreement was null and void.

OOOOOO

Heading back to the Tendos Ranma was happy with how the night had turned out. *My day might have started shitty, but it certainly went uphill after I left the Tofu's.* With that thought he hopped down into the Tendo's backyard, wondering where Akitsu was.

"Hey Ranma, have an interesting night?" Nabiki called from her balcony.

Ranma looked up at her and waved. Kind of yeah. Found another Sekirei that was almost forced into being winged by someone in the east, as well as a possible Ashikabi who desperately needed some help to get away. What about you and Akitsu? And where is she?"

"It turns out that she isn't able to actually read very well, so she and Yashima are studying together in Kasumi's room with her." Nabiki replied, gesturing to the room next to hers on the right.

Indeed that was where Akitsu was, though she was only remaining there at present because Kasumi was giving her The Look™, and forcing her to stay put despite Ranma having come home. Kasumi loomed over both Sekirei a pair of round glasses perched on her nose, a riding crop of all things in her hand as she glared at them. "Neither of you are leaving this room until I am satisfied with your progress, is that understood?"

Where did she get the riding crop? Both Sekirei wondered, cringing before Akitsu moved back to the table where she had been sitting.

At her friend Sayuri's, Akane looked out the window suddenly after having told her friends how her arm had been broken. "Someone has awoken Task-mistress Kasumi. May Amaterasu have mercy on their souls."

"Amen," chorused her friends.

Back in the Tendo's Ranma winced, both because he suddenly felt guilt for not having thought of that and also because he could all too easily remember how Kasumi had been when she was helping him with his Language Arts essays. "Damn, I didn't even think about that."

"It turns out that it might have been down to the adjusters who were operating on the Sekirei to decide if they were taught how to read or not," Nabiki said, gesturing Ranma up to join her. She smiled as he simply leaped up, landing lightly on her balcony stepping back into her room.

It was only now that Ranma realized what she was wearing: a tight T-shirt and yoga pants that hugged her rear, waist and thighs like a second skin. He gulped, blushing lightly and looking away. But Nabiki didn't seem to notice Ranma's reaction, gesturing him to sit down as she moved back to the bed.

There she lay down on her back before starting some leg lifts above her head. "I wanted to talk to you anyway. With another one of you Sekirei slash martial artists leaving here we'll need to push forward with another moneymaking scheme soon. Unless you want to dip into the savings account that I started for you after I sold the photos from last time?"

Ranma shook his head. "Nah, let's go with another moneymaking scheme," he said, trying to concentrate on Nabiki's face and voice rather than the way her chest moved as she moved her legs, or the bare, toned skin of her legs as they shifted in the air above her. *Dammit, does she know what she's doing?* Despite his experiences with Akitsu, Ranma really didn't understand the line between innocently showing off and purposeful flirtation. Nor had he realized that Nabiki was interested in him.

"Good idea," Nabiki said and nodded firmly. "I certainly don't want to go into my savings for any reason. In fact, if we push forward with enough of my ideas, we might be able to make enough money for both of us to head to college, and enough besides to maybe let Kasumi go back to school. That is if your father is able to break my father's... stasis I suppose you could say and he can come back and take up more of the monthly upkeep for the house."

Her lips quirked. "And with her arm broken Akane's not going to be adding as much to the monthly bills as much in terms of the number of concrete blocks we have to buy. Though Kasumi already had to warn her to stay out of the kitchen, so maybe it will even out." Again there was something there in Nabiki's eyes that went beyond her dry wit to something actually cutting, but Ranma couldn't tell what it was.

He simply nodded, having gotten the impression that the man of the house had pushed a lot of the running of said house on to Kasumi's shoulders soon after he had arrived. "You think Kasumi wants to go back to college?" Ranma asked.

"She graduated high school despite basically taking care of Akane and me," Nabiki said shrugging her shoulders. "And I know she's taught herself quite a bit since. I bet she could test into a girl's college somewhere. Not a high end one, but certainly a decent enough one to get by."

"And what do you want to do?" Ranma asked. He'd heard some of Nabiki's plans for the future while they were talking about setting up a savings account for him. But they have not gone into any details.

"I want to go to Tokyo University," she replied promptly. "I want to be the first person to go there from Nerima, and I want to graduate and move into business. Well, maybe on that last one. I'm not certain I'd be able to deal with the 'men's only club' that I'll run into in the business world. I do know that I want to be rich and respected, maybe a **little** bit of fear mixed in there too," she finished smirking wickedly as she held up her fingers about an inch apart.

Ranma laughed. "That makes sense. Now, what kind of moneymaking deals are you thinking of, and can you include Uzume in them? I just talked to her this evening, and she needs more money. Not certain why."

"Easily. Some of them have to deal with taking pictures, but others, well I talked to her Uzume about ideas based around her skill with costumes, and I bet I could figure out a way to work you into those. Beyond the martial arts construction gigs I can line up for you this weekend anyway. What do you think about dressing up as a female clown or something like that to play beside Uzume in some of her costumes?"

The two of them talked about that for a few minutes then the discussion moved into the agreement between their families. Nabiki reported that she hadn't discovered why their fathers had sprung this on them or had started to push for them becoming official fiancés so quickly. She also told Ranma that she was backtracking Genma's trail over the years. If he created other agreements like with Ukyo that would hopefully nullify the honor agreement between their families. Unfortunately as head of the family that decision would be ultimately up to Soun whatever anyone else wanted.

"Until then, we'll just have to make the best of it maybe even get to know one another," Nabiki finished. There was a hesitant tone to her voice as she looked at Ranma.

Ranma however didn't notice he simply nodded. "I suppose that makes sense. Though I'll tell you straight, I don't really have any interest in Akane. And Kasumi I don't know, I mean she's really pretty, but she's not my type."

"So I'll pencil us in a date for this weekend, would that be alright?" Nabiki asked.

"What?!" Ranma squeaked, yes, squeaked, Nabiki noticed, laughing internally. "Well um, I like talking to you and I think you're a friend, but a date, er, I know you're a girl and also a friend," Ranma said hesitantly. "But, but well..." he spluttered to a halt trying to think of a way to say that he was attracted to Nabiki without just blurting it out even as he imagined how this would affect his life going forward before shaking his head and moving on. "But there's this whole thing with me and Akitsu to think about anyway."

"Is it so hard to say you find me sexy Ranma?" Nabiki asked, some of her own confidence having returned at seeing how uncertain Ranma was in their current situation. She turned on her side, doing side leg lifts for a moment as she propped her head under one arm, smirking at him. "You've certainly been trying not to stare since I invited you in here."

"Stop teasing me," Ranma said looking away quickly.

Nabiki twisted her body further around, flashing her legs before setting them down and moving over to him. He looked back when he felt her touch his shoulder, then gasped as Nabiki sat down on his lap, wrapping her arms around his back. The look in his eyes as she did made Nabiki feel more feminine and powerful than any amount of moneymaking schemes had ever done. "Is this blunt enough?" she asked sarcastically, pushing forward so that her forehead rested against his.

"But, but Akitsu! Yeah, you're hot and I like you, but, but..." Ranma stammered.

"I've already talked to Akitsu and I told her what I'm telling you now. I'm not interested in splitting you up, I'm not even certain I am more than physically attracted to you. I mean I like you well enough as a friend, but... I've never been in a relationship before Ranma," she said somewhat more timidly leaning back now and hanging onto his shoulders as she did. As confident as she was about her looks, when it came to emotions that confidence went out the window. "I just want to see if maybe there can be something between us okay?"

"...You're not going to try to fight Akitsu or compete with her or try to split us up?" Ranma asked looking shocked. He wasn't as surprised at the idea of Akitsu accepting it, having figured that Sekirei might be indoctrinated to think that a guy having multiple partners was normal. But the idea of Nabiki, a normal girl, accepting the same kind of thing was kind of weird to him. He liked Nabiki sure, and yes was attracted to her, but if that messed up what was building between Akitsu and him, Ranma wasn't going to chance it.

"Yes I know, but despite my reputation Ranma I'm not the ice Queen that I portray at school," Nabiki said, still hanging by his shoulders as she wrapped her legs around him and the back of the chair. She then flushed a solid bright red for a moment as she felt his reaction to her through the thin silk pants he was wearing. *Okay, he is definitely attracted to me wow!*

She quickly let go of his arms, before adroitly falling backwards, flipped herself back up and over onto her bed, blushing and looking away as Ranma quickly did the same, taking a moment to adjust himself. "T, that was a little too much. Sorry." she muttered

Ranma nodded, but then looked back at her. "So um, you were saying?"

"I was saying that Akitsu doesn't deserve to be pushed aside by me or anyone else. And while you might still have issues with it, she does love you." Nabiki said, surprised that she didn't feel any jealousy as she said that.

To her surprise Ranma simply nodded at that. "I am kind of getting over my issues there. I still don't like it, I still don't like how fast it's happening but there's only so often you can hear that someone cares about you like that without slowly beginning to believe them and to return those feelings."

Nabiki nodded in turn, now feeling some jealousy at how Ranma had said that but overcoming it easily. "Anyway, she and I have both agreed that I can at least try to see where this is going with you, so that's why I mentioned the date."

"All right," he said slowly nodding his head. "How about this then: I'll take Akitsu out on a date before patrolling tomorrow night, and then I won't patrol on Saturday at all, I'll take you out then instead. Will that work?"

"That's perfect Ranma. In fact, we can probably leave straight from Miya's place. We can do one of the two Martial Arts Construction jobs I have lined up for you in the morning, have lunch here with everyone then head there and talk with Uzume about the long term jobs while taking some more pictures."

"That works," Ranma said with a nod. "Like I said, Uzume really needs the money."

"Something to talk about with her then." Nabiki replied, frowning slightly as the words registered this time, Nabiki having ignored them before so focused had she been with flirting with Ranma. The money Uzume had earned from

their photo session was pretty good, certainly enough for several months worth of payment on an apartment like Uzume's, or even for two classes at a college. *It could be for her Ashikabi, but what kind of medical care would cost so much?*

Ranma shrugged and to both of their very carefully hidden relief, the discussion shifted back to money making matters for a time, before Nabiki glanced at the clock and said they needed to head to bed. Ranma nodded and stood up, making for the door but Nabiki called him back.

" There's one more thing Ranma," she said gesturing him over to her. When he did, she leaned up, and quickly kissed him on the lips. It wasn't a deep kiss and it wasn't as passionate as the kisses Ranma had shared with Akitsu, but it was meaningful

For Nabiki it was her first kiss, and she felt a thrill feeling Ranma's lips on hers. They were somewhat coarse those lips and they pressed back against hers with just a bit more force than she was pressing against them. it felt good, very good for both of them.

Nabiki smiled as she leaned back and Ranma did the same, licking her lips as they tingled lightly from the kiss. "Oh yes, I'm very interested in seeing where this is going Ranma." She said, pushing at his chest to signal they were done. "I'll see you tomorrow okay?"

Gulping Ranma nodded, and headed towards the door not realizing that he too had a smile on his face.

End Chapter

A solid mix of action and character interaction here, despite the fact I didn't cover all the events I wanted to. I wanted to cover the dates and a few other events, a solid week of in fic time, but simply wasn't happy with how those scenes were flowing in outline format, and decided to wait on them until next time.

About Tsukiumi and the romance in general: I think given the fact she feels, rightly in a way, that Ranma has if not lied to her at least mislead her, Tsukiumi would not push forward to start anything with Ranma at this point. She would take some time to think about it. I also think Ranma is not mentally ready to deal with a tsundere like her, regardless of his attraction to her physically and may never be. In the main though, I intend to leave the romance aspect open and building along the story rather than leaping to the end game as it were.

Chapter 8: Chapter 8

I can't draw, and I understand that gravity would not be a Sekirei's friend with those proportions.

As everyone who reads my stories should know by now, I run a series of polls to determine which story will be updated in any given month. The choices here on fanfic are limited somewhat, but I routinely have two or more polls going on over on my patron page. This was the case this month: I had three polls going over there, two of which linked back together afterward, with the two most popular choices being the two small stories I update here. I did this so that I could give some of my stories that are still technically active but which haven't been updated in a while a shot in the arm. I am happy to say it worked.

Fate-Touched won first place with a staggering showing, bringing in 295 votes here on fanfic letting it take second place here and once the patron votes were added in, took in a total of 1,527. This puts it far and away the winner.

In second place by the narrowest of margins, is another story that hasn't been updated in a long while: Anything Goes Game Changer. It brought in 176 votes via fanfic, with a total of 1184 votes.

Nipping at its heels was the first place winner here on fanfic, FILFy Teacher. It brought in a total of 1177. AGCC won by only 7 votes.

I thought FILFy would win and actually put in several days' worth of work on it, but, the people spoke and I had to listen. Then too, AGCC is one of the two stories I can see ending sometime this year if it keeps winning.

In fourth place, with a decent showing was Stallion of the Line with 962, 213 of which came from fanfic votes. Scoring an even 200 points here and bringing in a total of 874 was GDWHOM. Semblance just can't seem to bring in enough votes here on fanfic to really contend without massive patron support: it only brought in 80 here and won a total of 500.

The other choices were for patron content, which will remain a mystery, unless you go and sign up LOL.

This has been beta-read by Hiryo, and checked over via Grammarly once more, as well as Justreadin' now, another of my patrons. Hopefully we've caught all the larger mistakes LOL.

Chapter 8: Zounds, Escalation Abounds!

"This is it? I mean really?" said one of the Special Forces operatives to his teammates as they all stood at the top of a small hill, staring out across the large valley before them, the valley of Jusenkryo. "All this way for a bunch of puddles with bamboo poles stuck in them? I mean it's interesting that some of them are steaming and some of them aren't even when there so close to one another, but that's it. The way this place was spoken about in our briefing, I expected something a lot... grander."

"Sir does not know what he speak of. This is cursed springs. Its looks are deceptive, yes, but its power is undeniable. Every spring you see is having separate curse where something drown. Fall in, you become the something when wet, hot or cold." Said their guide.

He was a short rather rotund man, wearing an old communist uniform, complete with green cap. The sight of that had caused a few of the team members to reach for their guns when he came out of his hut a few miles back. From there he had led them directly up from the trail a mile back and had not let them out of his sight since.

The team leader had begun to wonder if they would have to do something about him before taking some of the water samples. The rest of his team though were still wondering why the man sounded as if he was speaking a foreign language, despite the fact all of them could speak Putonghua, the language used in the majority of China.

Hearing this last bit of mangled Putonghua the team leader shook his head. "You and our boss, believing in magic in this day and age? Pu-lease! Anything you call magic is just an unknown field effect randomizing the quantum properties of matter. Or perhaps telekinetic powers." He added after a second, thinking about a lot of the Sekirei he had seen in their abilities.

The guide blinked slowly at him then shook his head. "You is a very strange guest sir. And rather sad too. You not understand Jusenkryo's power."

"What I don't understand is why you're still speaking pidgin when we all speak Chinese perfectly well," said one of the others, finally voicing the question they had all been wondering.

"That is part of the curse upon the guide young man," said a new voice, causing all five mercenaries to turn, their rifles rising. "None of that now gentlemen," the voice said sharply while they all stared at its diminutive owner, their trigger fingers twitching. She was a **very** old looking woman, sitting on top of some kind of staff that was half again her own diminutive height. She had long gray hair, wide eyes, and a face that only a prune could love.

"Hmm, now this is most interesting," the crone said, hopping around them for a moment even as their guns turned to track her. "What are trained soldiers from Russia, America, Canada, Ukraine and... I can't fix your accent... It sounds like a mix of North American and Australian, but you look like you do not come from either of those countries."

"Ah, um, the accent's an affected one," the man so addressed said, staring. "Er, I'm originally from South Korea."

"An old prune is talking," the American, who was the team leader, said dumbly staring at the woman. "And it's hopping around on a pogo stick."

"You Americans do not have the legends of Baba Yaga, then?" the Russian asked, to a muttered agreement from the Ukrainian.

"Hmhf, the name's Cologne boy, and I both know that legend and do not take kindly to that comparison!" Cologne retorted, before suddenly disappearing to their senses. The next instant she was beside the Russian, smacking him hard on the shin with her stick and then away.

He began to hop on one foot cursing, in Russian, which was a really good language for that kind of thing. In response, the others all raised their weapons.

"Oh please if I really wanted to hurt him, he'd be without his leg right now." Cologne cackled. "You soldiers always think those guns of yours are the be all and end all, but you are wrong."

"We'll be the ones making the threats here!" said the main from Ukraine, raising his rifle to his shoulder and pointing it at her. "Now what the hell are you doing here? And how did you do that disappearing reappearing thing?"

Cologne simply shook her head. "It wasn't a 'disappearing reappearing thing' as you put it," she said dryly. "It was simple speed. And as for your being in a position to threaten me..."

She gestured, and suddenly five arrows embedded themselves in the ground in front of the men, each one directly beside their rightmost foot. There was a bare inch between the arrow, which was now stuck in the ground halfway up their length. Since the ground was solid earth that was extremely impressive.

All of the men cursed, falling back and dropping to the ground to limit their profiles before raising their rifles, looking around for targets. But there was no one in sight, not even to their trained eyes. That meant the locals were either further away than anyone with a bow should be to accomplish that kind of shooting, or they were better at hiding than five Special Forces veterans. That was a scary thought, made scarier by the fact that the old woman hadn't moved, simply sitting on her pogo stick and cackling at them.

After a moment when no more attacks were forthcoming, the team lead waved the others to their feet. "All right, you've made your point," he said coolly. "But why are you here?"

"That is my line!" Cologne said with another cackle. "You're in our territory. This is Amazon land. In fact, you've been in our territory for the past five days. For mercenaries you move rather slowly," she finished, cackling again at their expressions. They all thought they had been making pretty damn good time given the terrain. "Now tell me, why are you seeking out the cursed springs?"

"Our employer recently discovered something that convinced him these cursed springs were real and ordered us to come here to get some samples," said the team leader.

"Interesting, I didn't think anyone in this day and age would believe anything written down about magic unless..." Cologne paused, then chuckled shaking her head. "I don't suppose you lot have come from Japan have you?"

"Yes, we have. Is this going to be a problem, our taking sample I mean?"

"Taking samples from the cursed springs? Oh, it's not a problem for us," she cackled again. "It will be a problem for you though. You see the moment you enter that valley down there, you will start to be affected by the magic of the

place. No one comes to Jusenkyo without being cursed in some fashion."

The American, Russian and even the Canadian scoffed at that, while the Ukrainian and the South Korean looked as if they were having second thoughts. "How does that work ma'am?" The South Korean asked, making his tone as respectful as he could make it.

This won him an approving nod from the old woman, and she gestured down at the springs. The magic of Jusenkyo goes beyond the springs themselves. The entire valley is cursed and will make certain you fall into the water one way or another. Either the side of the spring you're kneeling beside while getting your sample will erode and you'll fall in, there will suddenly be a geyser from one of the hot springs, or an animal will startle you into them. If you were a martial artist and came here to train on the poles one of them might break under you. It will seem like a random event, but it will have the purpose of getting you cursed. This is fact."

"You noticed the guide?" Cologne asked, gesturing to the rotund man, who had bowed his head when she appeared and had not spoken since. "He was cursed to act in that manner it is a mental rather than physical change, one of many mental changes you can run into if you fall into the wrong spring. The guide is forced to sound like a foreigner who can barely speak the language to anyone who talks to them regardless of the language involved."

"I don't believe in this magic crap, there has to be some other explanation for it," the American said shaking his head. "I'll thank you for the advice, but I think we can handle it."

"Ah, famous last words, yet they still keep getting used even today," Cologne said with a cackle. "Still, if you want to throw yourself onto the primed grenade that is lady luck, who am I to argue? I'll just sit back and laugh."

A few moments later and her words proved prophetic. She was indeed laughing.

OOOOOO

Ranma moved through the nighttime skyline of Tokyo (he was never going to call it Shin-Teito, not even in his mind), taking care to not be seen by anyone in any way, in particular by the numerous cameras set up around the city. There were even more of them now than there had been when he arrived, a sign that the infrastructure for the Sekirei Plan that Minaka had begun was still ongoing.

Not that it mattered. Ranma could still avoid them pretty easily. He doubted anyone but another martial artist who specialized in mobility or a similar Sekirei could've done the same, considering it involved running up and down buildings, hanging by his fingers, and then leaping across twenty-five to fifty feet of open sky to the next building without being seen. To Ranma, it was actually fun.

It was also fun to pass Sekirei as they moved around in the same fashion. They didn't worry about being seen by the cameras, though they were moving around the rooftops like he was. As he stopped, hiding in the shadow underneath a window, Ranma watched as two Sekirei hopped around below him, moving purposefully away. *The odd thing about humans and Sekirei, they don't look up. Sekirei routinely take to the rooftops, and when they're on the ground they do look up automatically, but once they're up here, they stop looking up for some reason.*

In this manner he was able to cross the entire city, eventually arriving near to the headquarters of the Ashikabi of the East, Izumi Higa. Flipping himself upwards, Ranma paused, holding himself there in a sign of amazing arm and core strength while he made certain there were no cameras in position to see him.

There were a few cameras here, two of them one each in a corner across from one another, but they were currently facing downwards, moving on mounts to cover both the area around the building, specifically the shorter buildings around them, and their own rooftop. He paused there for a second, timing it, then just as the camera on the nearest corner would have seen him he finished the flip, then instantly leaped from there onto the top of the maintenance shack on top of the building. From there, he stared across to his actual target, the hospital that the Ashikabi of the East apparently owned via his family's pharmaceutical company.

Pulling out a pair of binoculars he had taken from Matsu, Ranma stared at the building. In particular, he examined the sides and the roof while he contemplated the information the two computer experts had put together on his target. *I sooo do not want to know why Matsu of all people had binoculars. No, Ranma focus.*

Izumi Higa, bishounen asshole, with a major ego thrown in. Hmmm, should his name be bishole, or assounen? Meh, whatever. Treats his own Sekirei more like employees and not very well-liked employees either, at least from what Kocho and Matsu were able to find out. Treats not-bonded Sekirei as targets to be brought into his 'company' by any means necessary, but doesn't seem to target normal people or be sadistic about it, just egotistical. Matsu found some

notes and pictures, which might point to him treating a few of them better, a few worse, but nothing concrete.

Moved his operations entirely into the hospital, because it was both in the inner city and more easily defended. Kocho said he moved into the highest levels of the hospital, which is one of the three largest buildings in the city and owned by his company.

Mainly he's got the same attitude problem the brat of the south has, only worse. This guy is older than me, and should seriously have been raised to better appreciate other people's feelings or how to treat them as actual people. Mikogami, he's just a bratty ass. This guy... well, I'm not willing to do more than humiliate him just yet, but that might change in the future.

Eventually, he had surveyed the entire building and frowned thoughtfully putting away his binoculars in his paused, staring at first at the hospital than out towards MBI tower, barely visible given the height he was standing at he was still able to see it. *I wonder which building was built first, and who began this comparing sizes thing. Still, I found a way in.*

The video cameras on the building and those around it weren't able to see higher than the twentieth floor. If Ranma could get up onto the building above that point, he could climb the rest without any cameras spotting him. *Mind you, most wouldn't be able to get there given the large area between the hospital building and the nearest buildings.* There were several smaller buildings around the main building, as well as a parking garage, all of whose roofs were fully covered by cameras.

With that in mind, Ranma pulled out his rope once more, twirling it idly then hurling it upwards, and across the intervening distance at an extremely high angle. Even Ranma couldn't jump 300 yards straight up. Hurling a grapnel with enough force to embed it in the concrete that far away though that Ranma could do. The grapnel wouldn't last long, but it wouldn't have to.

Soon he was across clinging to the side of the building, before pulling the grapnel out, letting the rope fall. *Getting back out of course won't be a problem* Ranma thought, actually grinning at the idea. Then an idea occurred to him, and he smiled, staring into the distance as he figured out where he was going to take Nabiki on their date.

Shaking that thought off Ranma began to crawl upwards, his fingers digging into the concrete, leaving tiny little indents as he moved. He stopped occasionally seeing movement inside, ducking out of the way before any guards could see him. *The security's no joke*, he thought, watching as one Sekirei made her way into the room outside of which Ranma was currently clinging. She looked around, then moved on to the next one to the right, making a thorough sweep of it while on the floors above and below her human guards did the same.

Still, it's obvious that they still don't understand how vulnerable they are to Sekirei type infiltration, well at least they should think of it in those terms. If they were, they would have their exterior security on the building all the way up rather than just the first 20 floors. MBI tower also has that problem or did. I bet after my and Uzume's last trip there they are solving that little issue.

On the top floor, however, Ranma ran into a problem. While there were several windows here, he couldn't see anything like a bedroom in any of them. Shrugging, he moved over to one that looked in on an office, and slowly began to cut the window with a tiny knife, its edge sharpened with his ki. Fearing that the latch would have an alarm on it even this high up, he didn't open the window, instead cutting the panel out before gently easing it down inside then hopping in after it.

The room was a quintessential office, though done perhaps a little larger than most, with a desk to one side and a computer screen currently facing the window. Across from it was a doorway leading out, and Ranma quickly moved in that direction, looking the door over with a little flashlight he brought along just to see if there was any more security. There didn't seem to be on this side of things and he unlatched the door quickly.

Ranma found himself in what looked like a makeshift sitting room and nodded, turning to one side then the other looking at the two doors leading off. One of them led toward what Ranma felt was the center of the tower, probably connecting to a hallway there. The other led into a corner of the tower, and Ranma realized that must be his target's bedroom.

Moving in that direction, Ranma tried the door and found it latched. Shrugging, Ranma began to slowly remove the doorknob then reached into it, and unlatched the actual lock. Despite that, he was not surprised when the alarms began to go off as he forced open the door.

Inside Ranma saw a man stirring in the bed, obviously his target given the reports on the other man's looks. A few

lights had also begun to go on with the alarm, giving him a better view. He seemed a somewhat tall, thin young man with blonde hair wearing a sleeping shirt and shorts. *Great, he's sleeping alone, with Sekirei that ain't exactly a certainty. Still, makes this a lot easier.*

Before the man could fully rouse himself, Ranma had crossed the intervening space and a jab to the side of his neck knocked him out quickly. Moving back towards the door he locked it once more then moved to the bed.

Pulling open the man's shirt, Ranma took out a permanent marker from his pack, noting offhandedly that the man had some definition for a non-martial artist, but didn't look anything special. There were no marks or scars to speak of on him, and his skin was a pasty pale, even paler than Akitsu's, to Ranma's eyes. He began to write out a few messages with the marker then pulled out some color dye, pouring it liberally onto the man's upper body and neck, working it into the skin quickly from the chest up. Then he began to shave the man's head, his hands going so quickly the hair seemed to literally explode off his head.

The martial artist was halfway through that when the door behind him exploded and four Sekirei raced in, followed by several human guards. "Step away from our Ashikabi!" shouted the first one, lunging forward, her twin swords reaching for Ranma.

But Ranma hopped away towards the wall furthest away from the charging Sekirei, a wild grin on his face. "You lot really need to work on your security, not that it would have stopped me if you had." Ranma's face hardened and he raised his fists, causing the four Sekirei, who recognized him from reports about Ranma's activities in the city, to stiffen and spread out.

Smirking at that Ranma went on. "Tell your Ashikabi when he wakes up that if he doesn't change how he is acting, towards both his own Sekirei and those still free that I'll be back." With that Ranma smashed his fist back against the wall, shattering it for a yard in either direction, then turned and leaped out into the air.

For a moment the four Sekirei stared then they and the human guards raced over, gaping down at Ranma. As they watched the intruder flipped several times, then flung his arms to either side slowing his descent before he flipped himself twice more, landing and rolling on the nearest rooftop. Coming to his feet he raced on without pause, seemingly unhurt.

"What the hell is he!?" muttered one of the Sekirei.

A nearby guard heard her of course and looked at her goggling. "You, um, isn't he one of you lot?"

"Not likely, not with that curse of his," she replied, but not going into any details. After all the guard didn't want to know, sighing, she turned to her fellow Sekirei. "We might as well wake our Ashikabi up if we can. He..." she paused, staring at him, then bit back a giggle as the other people in the room did the same at Higa's new appearance. "He's really not going to like this."

OOOOOO

Ranma had actually missed a few tiny cameras here and there, and the hospital's cyber-security wasn't nearly as good as Higa thought it was. This was because Minaka had retained one of the three brain type Sekirei for MBI. With her help, they were able to watch everything that Ranma did once inside the building.

Roused from sleep because of his orders to be notified of any incident involving the cursed martial artist, it took Minaka more than twenty minutes to regain control of himself. By the time he did, he had a plan on how to use this going forward.

*It is almost time to start closing the city and declaring the game openly anyway. Even though many of the Sekirei have yet to be released we can move that up, make it a response to the many incidents that go against the rules. I can also use that to segue into cutting off Nerima from public transportation. Let us see how Ranma reacts to other people paying for his folly. That is all I can do until Karasuba returns from her assassination mission unfortunately. And that could take a week or more! For now, it serves both my own entertainment and the game for the wild horse to be allowed to roam free of my designs. Though I wonder how young Higa will react to the *snort* affront to his dignity.*

At that Minaka couldn't stop himself, and he pulled up a loop file from the computers which had witnessed Ranma's 'assault' on Higa, cackling all the while.

OOOOOO

Job done for the night, Ranma stopped by Miya's place to pick up an anxious Akitsu, who he found hadn't moved

since she had followed him there earlier that evening. Akitsu had somehow just known he was leaving the Tendo house despite her being asleep in Kasumi's room when he tried to leave.

She had then come out onto the roof, and the sight of her had nearly caused Ranma to pass out, his blood having traveled first to his face and then down south so quickly it left him light-headed. Akitsu had stopped sleeping naked thanks to Kasumi's influence given she slept in the oldest Tendo girl's room. But the diaphanous silk negligee and barely-there white panties weren't much better, framing her body against the moonlight in a way that made all her curves stand out to a degree Ranma would never have thought possible.

Thankfully, Ranma had convinced her to at least change her clothing before coming with him. Else the trail of men who had died via nosebleeds would have given their progress through the city away.

To his surprise, Miya was also awake sipping tea quietly next to Akitsu, both of them sitting on the patio in the backyard. "Did you have an interesting evening?" Miya asked as Ranma landed on the grass before them.

Ranma shrugged. "Not so much interesting, but it was fun...for me anyway," he finished with a grin. "It won't be so much fun for the Asshole of the East once he wakes up tomorrow."

"And what did you do to your poor target?" Miya asked, smiling slightly as Akitsu stood up instantly from where she had been sitting silent vigil next to her the entire time. She moved to stand beside Ranma, staring at him from head to toe to make certain he was all right before taking up position next to Ranma and slightly behind him.

Miya felt her smile widen when Ranma reached across and gently tousled the other woman's hair, letting his hand linger on her cheek in that for a second before he turned back to Miya. *Seeing Akitsu-chan's devotion to Ranma is always cute, but seeing Ranma's growing affection towards her is even better given Akitsu-chan's unique situation.*

Despite her simple pleasure in the growing and surprisingly deep bond between the two, Miya was very interested in the current topic. Anything that made her feathers' lives better during this damn game was something she was very concerned about, especially anything that dealt with the power-hungry Ashikabi who were willing to use their current feathers to gather more to their flocks.

"Well let's see, first I broke into his building, showing that it could be done despite all the additions to the security they've been adding since this 'game' began, Kocho and Matsu were right about that. Then I found Higa, broke down his door, knocked him out, and began to draw messages on his body like those I wrote down for the little brat of the South and a bit more too. My favorite... let's just say it was built around an arrow pointing downwards and a phrase involving removing certain parts of the body."

Miya giggled, one hand rising to hide her mouth, not noticing Ranma frown at that gesture. "Mah, that does sound like a message with an... 'edge' ... to it. Not, that it isn't a pretty picture, indeed if not for my agreement with Minaka it is something I would already have seen to. Anything else?"

"Died him blue from the chest up," Ranma said with a smirk. I was going to make the bishole - bishounen asshole- look like one of those American Smurf creatures, and had just begun to shave his head when I was interrupted. I got away clean enough, oh, they obviously knew who I was, but beyond that clean." He smirked, cracking his knuckles. "And if Higa's dumb enough to send his Sekirei out looking for me in revenge, that means there will be less of them to cause trouble for other Sekirei."

Miya nodded at that, then gestured him away. "Very well, but it's getting late, and despite what you might think, it is still a school night. I do not want to hear about you having to skip school, and I have convinced Akitsu-chan to tell me if you do."

Ranma turned a mockingly pouting glance to Akitsu, who flinched a little but met his gaze stoically. "Miya-san is scary," she said simply.

"True enough," Ranma said with a grin, throwing an arm around her shoulders and hugging her slightly. "In that case Miya-nee, we'll head off now. See you later."

Miya nodded at that, and watch the two of them hopping away over the rooftops before she let loose another laugh, making no effort to cover it this time. *My word, Ranma certainly does bring a certain flair to his duties! I wonder what the others will think about this when they hear?*

On their way back, Ranma once more slowed down then came to a halt once they had entered Nerima area, pausing on a small three-story apartment building. "Akitsu," he said hesitantly. "I, I talked to Nabiki earlier, and I was... Erm...

have you talked to her?"

"Yes," Akitsu said, looking at him closely now, her body moving automatically to follow him even so.

"And, what do you think about it? About her and me dating to see where it goes?" Ranma asked. He personally wasn't certain how he felt about it. He liked Nabiki, sure. She was intelligent, witty, funny and sexy. But Ranma was worried he'd try to make them both happy only to make neither happy and wreck what he already had with both girls.

Realizing her Ashikabi wanted her real opinion, Akitsu swallowed her initial words, which would have been to say it was up to him as her Ashikabi. Instead, she replied honestly. "Ahh...While Sekirei are supposed to be able to share their Ashikabi, that is not something I would enjoy. I like Nabiki as a person, and she is not a Sekirei, therefore no threat on that level. I, I also have her word that she won't try to, to..." she paused then looking down, the words catching in her throat.

Sighing, Ranma pulled her into a hug. "She said she won't try to replace you, and I wouldn't let that happen anyway," he pulled away, tapping his chest with two fingers. "She can't replace you here it's just not going to happen. She might make her own place there, but that doesn't mean yours will disappear."

Slowly a smile crossed Akitsu's face, and it was perhaps one of the most beautiful things Ranma had ever seen. It was, loving, tender and a few other emotions Ranma couldn't place. She hugged him tighter, staring up at him with that smile before she turned away just enough to lean against his shoulder.

"So warm," he heard her mutter.

In Akitsu's mind, she had always felt she was an ice flower which yearned for the warmth of the sun, which should melt her but instead was freeing her heart. And while she was still broken, the sun currently hugging her as tightly as she was him had begun to warm her inside and out. Each time they had a moment like this, she felt that warmth spread further. "...thank you, Sun-sama," she said now.

"Sun-sama?" Ranma asked, cocking an eyebrow at her.

She smiled, her smile slightly changing to show some amusement along with the myriad of other emotions Ranma could see in her eyes. "Ahh...You seem to like giving nicknames to people, that is mine for you. It is either that or Ashikabi-sama."

Ranma laughed, his hands moving to trace the chains. "And if I say you can't use either?"

"Ahh...I would hate to disobey Sun-sama," Akitsu replied after thinking about it for a moment, her eyes actually twinkling in the light of the moon above them.

Ranma laughed, then using her chains to pull her over slightly he kissed her on the lips. He didn't let it go too far though, stepping back and keeping her in position by the use of her chains. "All right. I just wanted to make sure you were okay with the idea of Nabiki and I going on a date. Now let's go. Miya was right, it is a school night."

Once they were on their way, he said, "Oh, by the way, I'd like you to think about where you'd like to be taken out on a date too. That's going to happen before I take Nabiki on one."

Behind him, Akitsu's smile widened even more at that, as the warmth within her soul grew again.

OOOOOO

Higa was furious, utterly and completely furious in a way that he had never ever been before in his life. The image staring back at him from his full body mirror explained why he was so furious neatly of course. Before this, he would not have actually described himself as vain, but incredibly pretty people sometimes didn't see themselves that way until they no longer had those looks to be vain about. This was certainly the case for Higa now.

On his stomach and sides were myriad small messages either attacking his morals and masculinity or making coarse threats to his 'pretty boy face' or... extremities. That could have been borne, but above that started the real travesty. From the bottom of his pecs up Higa's skin had been dyed a deep, almost comedic blue. On top of that, half of his hair had been shaved, while the rest was still in place. The fact it was the front portion of his hair rather than one side or the other did not make it any better.

The dye would eventually come out and a permanent marker could be washed away with the right solvents. They would sting, they weren't supposed to be used on skin after all but it would work. The hair, however, there was no

easy way to solve that issue. *Not unless I have a hair transplant or try some of my company's more... bizarre pharmaceutical experiments.*

Higa supposed he could wear a wig to hide his deformity, but to do so he would have to shave off the rest of his hair, or somehow contrive to find a wig life-like enough to fuse into his own.

Grimacing, Higa reached for his personal organizer, made a note to look into those wigs and sighed, before pulling out the large bottle of solvents that would remove the permanent marker. As he did, his eyes caught the one message that was written in an arrow, and shuddered a little, before his anger caused his fear to disappear once more.

Moments later Higa's skin was still somewhat bluish, and his head entirely defoliated, Higa marched into the sitting room outside of his of the room where the assault had occurred. "How did this happen!?" he barked out, rage deep in his eyes.

That rage was not helped when one of the two Sekirei waiting for him with his second-in-command began to choke in an effort to hide her laughter. Luckily for his personal health, his second-in-command simply pushed his glasses up his nose, then relayed the information they had found out after a night spent examining the incident. He handed over pictures taken of the outer wall where Ranma had climbed. We have cameras on the rooftop, but not from the twentieth floor up. We just didn't anticipate someone being able to get up that high without being seen. Even the messages written on MBI Tower's exterior didn't go that high so we had no anticipation of someone being able to do so.

"We think that this Ranma guy somehow crossed from one of the other buildings going upwards at an angle steep enough for it not to be caught by the cameras," said Toyotama. She was a green haired woman who insisted on going around with a belly top that looked more like a bikini than anything else, a Sekirei crest on one side. "It wouldn't be easy, but if someone was able to string a rope between the two buildings, it's possible. Getting in silently after that point, that would've been way more difficult for most of us."

Sitting down, Higa leaned back in his chair frowning angrily. He was tempted to beat the Sekirei on duty last night for this breach of security, but it would have been pointless. They were not involved in the electronic side of things after all. "Have all the guards on duty last night fired," he said instead. Move the day shift to the night and hire new guards for the daytime. Then you Toyotama, Ichiya, I'm assigning you to find this Ranma and liquidate him. He is becoming a liability to our plans going forward."

Ichiya, a butch looking woman with a slight tan to her features who fought with her fists nodded gleefully at that. But Toyotama, who had met and fought Ranma twice by this point, shook her head. "We might need to call in some serious backup to do it. I hate to admit this, but that human's far more skilled than either of us, even together."

"You'll get all the aid you need once you have found him, or..." Higa frowned, looking off into the distance. "Perhaps we should bring in some assassins to do our dirty work for us. After all, while he might appear to have some superhuman qualities, his proof against bullets has yet to be explored."

And even if he is immune, if he is human, and he certainly seems to be given the fact he actually has a paper trail, there might be other beings out there that can match his abilities without possibly costing me valuable pieces in this game. Indeed, finding any such to put on retainer for the future could be a good idea if the first batch of assassins fails, Higa thought.

"Yes," he said abruptly, turning to look at the duet pelts. "That is a better idea. Remain on your current task, and pass orders to your fellow aliens that they are to fall back if Ranma ever challenges them while you are all hunting for more of your kind to bring under my banner Sekirei. We'll act as if we are responding to his threat at this point until the specialists I will hire arrive." He saw the Ichiya scowl and rolled his eyes. "If they fail, you will be free to try your own luck."

OOOOOO

"So the two of you have decided to live here then?" Miya asked one hand on her chin thoughtfully. While she was smiling lightly, her eyes were slightly flinty as she looked at the two people in front of her. "I'm not certain if I am happy to have more tenants, or unhappy that one of them is a drunken lush and the other a perverse man who might take advantage of her in a time of weakness."

Across from her sat Kazehana and Minato. Kazehana she knew very well from their time together on the first generation of the Disciplinary Squad and after. She was independent, carefree, and strong, but also careless and a

lush. Minato, on the other hand, she had never met before he arrived with Kazehana the night before.

"You say that like I wouldn't enjoy every second of it Miya," Kazehana said, with a laugh, throwing her arms around her new Ashikabi. The moment she had recovered from whatever drug she had imbibed Kazehana had pulled Minato into the deepest, longest kiss their lungs could manage. It hadn't been as long as she wanted, but then again Kazehana knew practice made perfect.

The fact that she had found someone that she truly enjoyed being with, who had made her react after Minaka had rejected her was an astonishing thing. There **was** some physical resemblance between the love of her past and the love of her now, but Kazehana couldn't care less about that, or even the growing suspicion that Minato was Minaka's son. She didn't care at all. Kazehana was happy, and that was all there was to it.

"We won't do anything under your roof that you disapprove of Miya-sama," the man said, nodding his head rapidly.

"Why would we have to?" Kazehana chimed in with a laugh. "That's what love hotels are for."

Nearby Musubi smiled somewhat wanly as she saw this. She didn't know what hotels had to do with love, but they must be really nice. On top of that, seeing another Ashikabi and Sekirei pair get together hurt a little given that Ryoga had yet to return. Ranma was certain he would though, and probably suddenly. That gave her hope, and Musubi was good about living on hope.

Despite that, Miya noticed Musubi's sadness, and gently bopped Kazehana on the head with her ladle gesturing her out the door. "If you have that much energy, perhaps it is better to make use of that energy in more profitable ways. Go get some groceries," she ordered. "And when you get back, we'll talk about what else you have to do to remain living here Kazehana-san. That list starts with remaining somewhat sober during the day and ends with you aiding Ranma-san in his patrols around the city, so do not think living here will be a sinecure."

OOOOOO

Despite not getting back until around three in the morning the fear of Miya's response was so strong that Ranma forced himself to go to school the next day. Though he did fall asleep in class pillowing his head in his arms, a book open and stuck on its bottom in front of him. The teachers knew that he was asleep back there, but after one demonstration of what happened when a teacher chucked chalk at him, they stopped attempting to wake him up. Seeing a thin chalk stick embed itself in the wall next to where you were standing would do that and provide the next teacher an obvious reason to not go that route either.

At lunch Ranma sat with Nabiki as had become his habit, dozing off against the tree rather than eating something, something that had Nabiki's eyes widening in shock. *He must've really tired himself out last night, this is the first time I've ever seen him not gorge himself on Kasumi's food.*

This observation did not stop Nabiki from asking Ranma to take her over to Miya's so she could talk business with Uzume after school however. Feeling those arms around her, one under her legs the other behind her upper back, Nabiki almost missed the look on Akane's face as the two of them were about to go out over the rooftops.

Her younger sister was still getting some very odd looks from the students, given her broken arm but at least Kuno wasn't back yet. *That brightened both our days right there*, she thought, before shaking her younger sister's look of anger and irritation from her mind so she could stare around her taking in the view as they were hopping along. "This is never going to get old is it?"

"Hasn't yet for me. I love being up high like this, it's somehow the best way to see the world y'know. Less cluttered and noisy than on the ground," Ranma replied.

"I um, have a question. Would you mind waiting until next weekend for our date Nabs?" Ranma asked as they moved towards Miya's place. "Finally, I got Akitsu to admit to actually wanting to go someplace, and like I said, I want to take her out on a date first." That'll take some time to set up, and this'll give me a chance to round up some things for our own date too."

"What do you have in mind?" Nabiki asked then added almost absentmindedly. "And don't call me Nabs."

"Wouldn't that be telling?" Ranma asked, not teasingly, he was honestly confused. "I thought the guy was supposed to surprise the girl with the date."

"Sort of but not quite. Unless we agree on something beforehand, yes the actual 'thing' we're going to be doing on the date should probably come as a surprise. But it's not like you have to keep the entire event a secret." Nabiki replied,

somewhat hesitant herself. She had never gone into romance novels or even talking to her friends about romance, so she actually wasn't certain about what went into setting up an actual date.

Ranma nodded, thinking that maybe he needed to write that down somewhere. "Well this whole dating thing is new to me you know?" he said, giving voice to both their thoughts at that moment. "Anyway, Akitsu wants to go to the ocean, to the beach specifically, and that's going to take some doing given the fact that she isn't supposed to leave the city according to Minaka and his merry band of sycophants."

"Ooh," Nabiki cooed, leaning away from his chest to give him a mock-surprised look. "You used a big word, Ranma I'm so proud of you AAKKK!"

Ranma made to drop Nabiki as he leaped from one rooftop to the next, and she quickly clung to him, pressing her chest against his. That chest wasn't quite up to Sekirei standards. "You can walk on your own you know," he drawled. Despite that, his arms around her were gentle, even the hand which had found a grip on her rear somehow.

"Point taken. Truce?" Nabiki squeaked, though whether or not that was because of her scare or the fact Ranma's hand had just squeezed her rear she couldn't say. "Um, you were saying?"

Ranma smiled moving his arms slightly so his one arm went under her legs once more, the other around her shoulders not having moved. "I was saying that to get to the beach we'll either have to sneak out or breakout and that'll take some planning. As for our date, yours and mine..." Ranma went on, after hopping to the next group. "Well, ya like being up high, so I figured I'd look around for places up high where we could have a picnic. Are there any kind of foods you particularly like or want to try?"

That, Nabiki frowned at. Personally, she preferred actually eating at a restaurant rather than have a picnic out, the more high class the better. But she was willing to compromise on that. Ranma was actually planning their date, and despite not knowing him more than a few months Nabiki knew that was pretty big. "I suppose I'd like to try French, I've never had it, or perhaps some Italian. I love Kasumi's cooking," she said hurriedly, "I mean her cooking is amazing I'd put her up against any regular restaurant out here, but she doesn't do foreign cooking very often. Mainly because our younger sister and father didn't like it when she attempted it in the past."

"My dad'd feel the same way," Ranma said with a snort. "Though I think your little sister might surprise you. I heard her talking to a few of her friends at school, and they were talking about a new American restaurant downtown."

"American is **very** different from French or Italian you plebian," Nabiki said drolly. "And if you don't know the difference, maybe I should be the one to choose the restaurant."

"We can try that the next date," Ranma said equably.

"Mm, that works," Nabiki said with a nod, smirking at the fact that Ranma had just basically stated there would be a second date.

Soon after that the two of them were at Miya's place, where they hopped down.

There they found two people that Nabiki hadn't met before this, which Ranma introduced quickly. "Yo Minato, and er, Kazehana right? Guess you're feeling better huh?"

Kazehana's bust size made Nabiki's jaw drop, being larger than even Musubi's, who had been sparring with Miya nearby. The man, Minato, seemed to be a nondescript college-aged boy. Beside his shaggy hair and wide-eyed look, there didn't seem to be anything that would stand out about him.

The two of them had been airing out a few futons together in the backyard when Ranma landed next to them. Kazehana quickly turned, her hand rising, then paused as she noticed who it was. "Well, if it isn't our savior from the other night," she said, winking at Ranma then smiling down to where Nabiki was still in his arms. "And is this your latest rescued princess?"

"Hah, hell no," Nabiki said as Ranma set her down. "Not only have I never wanted to be anything as useless as a princess, but I'm human. I'm not involved in this game, and I actually rather like being the outsider looking in. I might enjoy a bit of excitement, but getting into actual fights is rather barbaric in my mind."

Kazehana gasped taking a step backward and placing a hand over her chest, causing it to wobble noticeably. "Ouch, that hurt," the wind user mockingly, then winked at that Nabiki as she simply laughed. "Nice to meet you all the same."

"I still can't thank you enough for helping us Ranma-san," Minato said earnestly to the younger Ranma, using the honorific for the young man, though it made Ranma wince slightly. "If you hadn't come along and saved us as you did, Kazehana and I would never have..."

"Danced the beast with two backs!" Kazehana caroled, pulling a blushing Minato into kissing the side of his face. "This afternoon was fantastic!"

The two younger people were now blushing, though it was hardly noticeable on Nabiki's face thanks to her self-control. "Well that's nice," she said, "but we're actually not here to talk to you. I'm here to talk to Uzume. Is she here?"

"My drinking buddy? Sure, she's up in her room."

"Not anymore," said the brunette, hopping out of her window to land next to them, grinning at Nabiki and Ranma as she threw a friendly arm over Nabiki's shoulders. "Hey Bro, Nabiki. Bro, said you'd have a job for me?"

"I've got a few actually," Nabiki said, holding up a folder after pulling it out of her book bag, which Ranma had on his back the entire trip. "Are you free today? If so, I can call and get you involved in a few kid's parties this evening as a mascot animal. They're always welcome, even if they don't match known characters. Kids like large fluffy things."

"Heck yes!" Uzume said, grinning. "Just tell me what kind of costume I need and I'm so there. I've got like a dozen to choose from, cheering up Chiho-baby's given me access to a lot of them."

Nabiki blinked. "Um, all of them? You're probably going to have to change after each party and there are four I can schedule you for tonight. They'll be small things, not a lot of money each, but it'll add up. And then, Ranma said you might want to be involved in some of his martial arts construction jobs over in Nerima." Nabiki replied, making no effort to shuck Uzume's arm off. Even after only meeting her a few times, she had gotten used to Uzume's cheery, overly friendly ways.

"Sure I guess, though I don't know anything about construction. Still, I'm pretty strong, so I guess I can help lift things and such. I really need the money, so anything I can do to help..." Uzume said, trailing off and looking away.

"That and a few other things," Ranma said with a nod. "I can teach you some of the construction techniques on-the-fly, you Sekirei have a natural speed and strength advantage like you said, so we'll work with that. Beyond that, Nabiki here had a plan to bring in more money."

"You have all of those cute outfits, but do you have anything that'd bring in an audience of a slightly older persuasion?" Nabiki asked circuitously, wagging one eyebrow at Uzume from about a foot away.

"What'd that old program I saw one time call it?" Uzume said with a grin. "'Something for the dads'? Yeah, I can figure something out if you give me an hour or so."

"Why don't you and I work on that for a bit, Ranma I know is anxious to head home to grab Akitsu and go on patrol. Then we can finalize our agreement here." Nabiki said, pulling out another folder.

Uzume looked at it in surprise. "Actual paperwork? You don't need a legal ID for that?"

"I know where you live and what you look like, and, well Ranma vouches for you," Nabiki said, adding the last bit on as if it pained her, making Ranma roll his eyes and Uzume to laugh. "That's enough for this kind of deal."

Ranma went home and grab Akitsu, heading out on patrol. They saw a few fights going on, but all of them were one-on-one, so they didn't get involved beyond at one point Ranma stopping the fight when it looked as if it was going to spill over down the regular streets.

Back at Izumo House Nabiki was having a much more hair-raising discussion. "So tell me, Nabiki exactly what is your relationship with Ranma hmmm?" Kazehana asked as she lounged across from the middle Tendo at the dining table.

There was a faint smile on Kazehana's face even if one of her hands was twitching as if she desperately wanted to be holding something. But Miya was sitting there too and the fear of number 1's ladle kept her from bringing back any alcohol. Her taking Minato, and subsequently taking over two hours to get back, had pushed things as it was. Even Kazehana knew not to push her old captain too far.

"Oh no, you're one of those aren't you?" Nabiki mock-groaned, though her lips were twitching somewhat as she did. "A romantic busybody."

"Tsk, I prefer to simply call myself a romantic, and drop the busybody. I'll raise my hand to being nosy though," Kazehana replied cheerfully. "Now, stop dodging the question."

Miya coughed delicately from where she was sitting down at another side of the table, causing Kazehana and Uzume, who was also there, to stiffen. "Ahem. I would like to know about this as well. I can see that something has changed between the two of you from the first time he brought you over. But I also know that he and Akitsu-chan are becoming ever closer. So I would like to know your intentions towards my student."

Hearing that from Miya made even Nabiki sit up and answer honestly. The woman was Ranma's chosen master and big sister figure, so Nabiki knew she had to say on the gorgeous landlady's good side. "Okay, well you know about the agreement between our families. Well, Ranma and I have decided to give dating a try."

"OH!" Musubi said from where she was sitting next to Kazehana. "Does that mean Ranma is your destined one? Kazehana-san told me about dates and what they meant. Though she refused to explain the phrase 'bumping uglies'. Why would anyone want to bump uglies?"

If Minato was there he would possibly have died of the blood rushing to his head too fast, but thankfully he wasn't there. Both he and Kazehana had been given chores around the place as part of their staying in Izumo House, and today was his day to clean the bathhouse.

Uzume collapsed sideways guffawing as Kazehana giggled until Miya began to frown, her Hanya mask peeking out from behind her. All of them froze at that, Uzume mid-guffaw, quailing under the glare of the thing made of utter darkness. Nabiki seemed to stop breathing feeling a pressure all around her as her monkey mind gibbered at her to run and hide. "Corrupting innocent minds is forbidden in Izumo House."

As Kazehana gabbled apologies and promises that she wouldn't try to educate Musubi further, Miya turned back to Nabiki, the mask now gone. Even so, some of its fear leaked through to the civilian. "Now, please answer the question."

"Um, well love doesn't work like that between us humans Musubi. We date in order to get to know someone. Ranma and I are um... kind of interested in each other? The whole agreement between our families is serving as impetus, but that's it. And he and Akitsu are very much an item already, which neither he nor I want to damage." Nabiki said, her words coming out in a jumble and at times not well chosen, but heartfelt for all of that.

"Very well. That makes some sense." Miya said, then smiled brightly, the last vestige of darkness leaving her expression. "Now, who's up for some tea?"

The quiet of course didn't last for long. "So, what about Ranma attracted you to him? Does he live up to his name?" Kazehana asked.

Uzume quickly joined in. "How many dates will you force bro to take you on before you decide to ride the wild horse?"

Rolling her eyes Nabiki replied. "Actually it was more because he was fun-loving and a breath of fresh air in my rather boring life than any kind of physical attraction. The body doesn't hurt though." She finished with a laugh.

Rolling her eyes, Miya stood up from the table. "Come Musubi, let us put your time to better use than listening to these gossips." It was obvious to her that Nabiki, Kazehana, and Uzume were going to get along all too well.

OOOOOO

Surprisingly the next week passed somewhat more peacefully, even if many could tell it was the calm before the storm. Uzume's job as a giant party favor went off without a hitch. She was surprisingly good with kids, and her costumes were so well made she retained a lot of mobility and they didn't smell, a noted bonus to the people who hired her. The next day, her work with Ranma at his demonstration of martial arts construction also went over very well. Her choice of what looked like a sleazy version of a southern belle's outfit went over very well with the male portion of the onlookers, and Nabiki was beginning to think that she could be the centerpiece for a whole ad campaign.

On the Sekirei side, MBI had slowed the rate at which it released the last dozen Sekirei, which allowed for more fights around the city. Better in Ranma's perspective, Mikogami and Higa had seemingly taken Ranma's warnings to heart, or at least had started to become more circumspect in how they hunted more Sekirei to add to their harems. Ranma actually wasn't certain if harem was the right word to use in the southern brat's case anyway.

That wasn't to say there weren't incidents. Most of which could be used as examples of the phrase 'unintended

consequences'. Some of them didn't even directly involve Ranma, while others most certainly did. The first such incident occurred on Monday at the Tendo's house.

Kasumi stared down at the ninja as the ninja stared back, a large sweatdrop appearing on his face. After a second, the homeowner's eyes slowly narrowed. "While I have not attempted to stop you from observing my home or the dojo from the roofs around us, I do not appreciate you using my rice cooker as a hiding place Mister..."

"Uh, um, I'm Sasuke, Kasumi-san. I, I'm not from anyone official or the MBI or anything like that miss, and I'm not so much observing your house but observing Ranma and the Sekirei who come here. My mistress is interested in them given the injuries one of them was able to do to her brother." Sasuke hastened to reply. Something about this woman made him completely unable to not answer her questions.

"Be that as it may, it is rather rude to observe them on the family property. If you wish to observe us, then you must come in and act as a guest is that understood," Kasumi said sternly.

For some reason, Sasuke couldn't find it in him to argue and he simply nodded, "Yes mistress."

"Good," she said smiling and gesturing him out of the rice cooker. "Now please come have some tea."

Just then, the doorbell rang, and Kasumi sighed. "Take a seat at the table, I'll be with you in a moment. And do not try to hide around our property, I will know where you are, and I will be most cross if I have to chastise you again for your lack of manners."

Feeling like a little child who had been scolded by his mother, the ninja sat at the table docilely as Kasumi moved to the front door. Outside, she found Haihane and Tsukiumi, glaring at one another, though with little heat. They were not friends or even friendly, but there seemed to be something almost honest about their rivalry, which had sprung up during their time coming to the dojo.

"Hello girls," Kasumi said smiling politely. "Please come in. Ranma and Akitsu left earlier to go on a quick patrol before Kazehana-san takes over, but they should return soon. Are either of you hungry?"

"That is a loaded question to ask any Sekirei Kasumi-san," Tsukiumi said, chuckling as she followed the homeowner in. She had a great deal of respect for Kasumi, whose attitude reminded her somewhat of Miya, though without so much steel visible under her exterior.

Both Sekirei paused as they saw the little man sitting at the table. "Oh, this is another guest, his name is Sasuke, and he was asked to observe Ranma and Akitsu for some reason by the owners of much of this territory, the Kunos."

"Is he an enemy then," Tsukiumi asked, straightening up abruptly and scowling at the little man.

"N-no!" Sasuke said hastily waving his hand and getting to his feet bowing politely to the ladies. "Not at all! I was sent to simply observe. Essentially my mistress wishes to know how strong Ranma is and his stance towards MBI. I'm supposed to observe him and Akitsu unseen, but I suppose that's just not in the cards any longer."

I apologize if my finding you will get you in trouble. On the other hand, if you observe from a distance, I doubt Ranma will care one way or the other. He's probably already noted your presence anyway." Kasumi said.

"Oh thank goodness! It would be a mark of great shame for me to have to do this, the honest way I suppose you could say," Sasuke said, chuckling and rubbing at the back of his head ruefully. "We ninja are always supposed to perform our missions in the dark."

Tsukiumi rolled her eyes at that but sat down across from Kasumi while Haihane stood there. Then she drooped, poking at the ground with one finger. "That's a ninja. So not living up to expectations. Naruto and Ninja Scroll were so much better," she mumbled.

Sasuke heard this and actually growled, showing the first bit of aggression Kasumi had yet seen from the diminutive man. "I'll have you know that that particular animation is not about true ninja but overpowered child soldiers who lack any true understanding of what ninja truly are. As I said, we ninja do our work in the darkness, unseen. We are not about throwing around superpowers, one-on-one fights, or overpowered teenagers acting as if they have had a botched lobotomy, let alone stupid eyes that allow us to cheat our way to strength!"

From this, it could be deduced that Sasuke had a bit of a complex about the anime Haihane had named. Since he shared a name with one of the main characters this should have already been obvious.

Haihane's eyes narrowed dangerously at that, but she sat down across from Sasuke. "Okay, convince me. But first, tell me this at least: is the shadow close technique real?"

"Well, it is real for a given value of real. I can create clones like that, but I certainly don't retain their memories or anything like that. But they are very useful."

As Haihane began to grill Sasuke on what a real ninja was like, Tsukiumi looked at Kasumi for a moment. "By the way, Miss Kasumi, didst thou know that public transportation is no longer going into or out of Nerima?"

"I have, but it doesn't really matter much to us here. Yes, public transportation is nice, but there's no place farther away than a day's walk where I needed to go. And I would wager it's the same with much of the other people in Nerima. We're almost our own little community here really in many ways.

"True. Indeed, the dedication of this area to martial arts and the way that I hath not been harassed here as I hath been elsewhere brings me to another question. Dost thou know any place that has an apartment for rent? Specifically one who is being rented out by a woman?"

"I do. In fact, I would be fully willing to introduce you to the owners. Though I think they would balk at taking the MBI card if you were thinking of paying with that." Kasumi cautioned.

"Wilt they taketh cash? I can use the card to get out cash elsewhere in Shin-Teito and bring it here to spend."

At that moment, Akane and Yashima came in to find the two new Sekirei sitting there along with an unknown and very short, rather rat-like man. Akane glared at them all equally, but with her arm still banged up, there was nothing she could do about their presence. And she actually liked Tsukiumi at least, since her attitude towards men was somewhat like Akane's own. She simply nodded at them all, then headed upstairs, Yashima and Sayuri and Yuka following quickly.

"So that's Tsukiumi, wow you weren't kidding when you said she's stacked!" Sayuri said in an undertone.

Tsukiumi still heard her though, and flushed somewhat but didn't reply otherwise, continuing her discussion with Kasumi about apartments or houses for rent.

Then the front doorbell rang, and Ranma's voice shouted out. "We're back!"

Sasuke made himself scarce quickly, disappearing over the wall, much to Haihane's amusement, and Ranma and Akitsu entered. "Hey girls, we weren't able to find any action out there, so I hope the two of you are up for some serious sparring!"

The two Sekirei sitting at the table might not have liked one another, but their attitude towards combat and training was much the same. So it did not surprise Kasumi when her two remaining guests stood up as one and said, "always!"

Kasumi and Tsukiumi's discussion had far-reaching consequences, which Tsukiumi would never have predicted. The first consequence was that the denizens of Nerima slowly learned that MBI had cut them off from public transportation. This didn't matter much, as Kasumi had predicted, but the belligerence level of the area rose sharply. The second consequence was that other un-winged Sekirei began to move into the area, thinking it a strange safe haven somehow.

One such event occurred when Ranma and Akitsu were heading out of Nerima. They were passing over the main road out of the town when Akitsu paused, not making the full leap as she should have and instead landing on top of one of the lampposts. Ranma noticed this and turned, but her eyes were not on him for once, but she had already leaped backward out of sight.

Frowning, Ranma turned and leaped after her only to hear a voice to grab his attention mid-jump. "Ah, my proud tigress Akane, what varlet has so wounded your perfect form!? Tell me, so that I might smite him for you and secure your heart!"

Right, Kuno's back, damn it. Ranma thought, landing on the same rooftop as Akitsu and crouching down next to where she had hidden behind the protective wall around the rooftop, which was one of the many garden rooftops around here. *And Akitsu's still a little freaked out about him, which is entirely understandable come to think of it.*

At the end of the street, Ranma could see Akane, scowling at Kuno as Yashima stood next to her, clad in one of Akane's dresses and frowning as she looked at Kuno. Akane's build was the closest to Yashima's of the Tendo girls,

though the chest area had to be taken out a little bit. The two of them had left before him and Akitsu since Ranma had to talk with Nabiki again before they went out on patrol.

Kuno stood nearby having just rounded a corner and spotted them. He wasn't in his traditional kendo outfit, rather he was wearing a decent men's kimono, with a large cane in one hand as he walked. His stance also wasn't quite up to normal, looking a little unsteady.

"Kuno-senpai, I see you're feeling better," Akane grumped. "I didn't see you at school though. What a pity."

What she meant with that last line was open to interpretation, but Kuno decided it meant she had missed him. He laughed wildly, throwing his arms wide. "Ah my fierce tigress has admitted she has missed me, my day is complete! Alas, my family doctor has not yet allowed me to take up the sword once more. I have yet another week until my body is once more fit to let me date thee and win the affections of the glorious Yuki-onna from the vile company which hath placed her with that cretin Ranma."

Beside Ranma, Akitsu shuddered, then her eyes narrowed just a tiny bit at Kuno's insult to him. She stayed put though, which Ranma thought was rather smart of her.

"That's...nice, Kuno-senpai. I am sure the school has missed you." Akane replied though it was of course quite forced. Oddly for all her anger at perverts and men in general, Akane was also a stickler for the proprieties of treating those in higher grades with respect, something that confused Ranma.

What also confused him were the looks of confusion on two passersby as they heard Akane speak. They were both nondescript types, the woman was quite short, even shorter than Ranma's female form, her age somewhere in the freshman college or high school level. The man looked a bit older, but not much more, his black hair shaggy and longer than the girl's blonde hair. He wore jeans and a jacket, whereas she wore something like a modified schoolgirl's dress and skirt combo.

Their body language though was what caught Ranma's attention: they both looked like they were ready to run at a moment's notice, and not like normal Nerima passerby. These two looked like they were used to being chased. *And in this city, that normally means the girl's a Sekirei these days.* With that in mind, Ranma asked Akitsu to take a look at the girl.

She popped her head up, staring over at the duo as Kuno continued to spout at Akane. "Ahh...I cannot tell Ranma-sama. She isn't one of the Sekirei I know, and other than her physical abilities, the only way I could tell if she was a Sekirei is to see the crest on the back of her neck."

Ranma nodded, but for some reason he could tell that made Akitsu a bit depressed. So when she ducked back under cover he leaned over, pressing a gentle kiss to the crest on her forehead. *Damn, I'm getting way better at this whole showing affection thing.* "Don't worry about it Akitsu, it was just a question."

He watched as a rosy tint entered Akitsu's cheeks and she leaned against him as Ranma raised his head to watch what was going on below.

As Ranma looked on, the man with the girl made the mistake of speaking loud enough for Kuno and Akane to hear. "Huh, that's kind of weird Kuno, that wannabe-actor seems to have the same name as you. Weird coincidence."

Kuno turned quickly glaring at the man. "You there, cur! You should know not to interrupt the speech of your betters. But what is this lie thou hast spouted, that this plain-faced girl has the same name as the noble house of Kuno!?"

"Erm," the man backpedaled quickly. "S, sorry man, Um, I didn't know that was your last name. It's just yeah Kuno here has the same name. Sorry about that."

"Bah!" Kuno roared, seemingly enraged at the very idea as the girl wilted both under his glare and his earlier insult to her looks. "You thinketh to use the name of Kuno, of which I am the living patriarch, without repercussion? Even the stars themselves would quail at such effrontery, plotted or no!"

The fact Kuno was the head of his house or at least had deluded himself into thinking that, was interesting. As was the fact he was about to attack the two passersby. And dispelling the idea she was a Sekirei, the girl looked was getting ready to run instead of fight, while the guy stepped forward to confront Kuno. *Huh, so she's not a Sekirei then, just someone with an unfortunate name.*

Deciding to step in at this point before Yashima or Akane dealt with Kuno physically, Ranma motioned Akitsu to wait there and leaped from that rooftop to a lamp nearby, waving Akane back from where she had been about to punt

Kuno away. After all, I'm kinda hoping he comes back after the pasting he took with some new techniques or skills. If he hasn't, well, that'll just be sad. And worth an immediate return to the hospital.

As Kuno made to raise his cane like it was his bokken, Ranma grabbed it at the upswing, holding it still. "That's about enough of that Kuno." He smirked when the girl also responded, cocking her head as if she was wondering what she should stop. "These two ain't martial artists, that's obvious. If you want her to get her name changed, fair enough, but that's something she'll need to do via the law, not something you can force her to via threats. Now, why don't ya go back home and make some plans for when yer free to come to school again? Your kendo clubmates've been slacking in your absence."

"Tsk. Verily thou speaks well once more Saotome, while your sister didst gain all the family's good fortune in appearance, you seem to have gotten some skill in oratory. And the news of my junior's actions most displeases me too," Kuno mused, pulling his cane free from Ranma's hand as the pigtailed boy let his grip slacken.

"I will go, but know, though messy-haired lout, that the name of Kuno is one that shouldst not be infringed upon!" With a final huff, Kuno turned and walked away as the others watched him.

"Erm, thanks for that kid, though I could have handled it." the shaggy-haired college-aged boy said. "What loony bin is missing a patient, eesh."

Akane shook her head, moving up to stand beside Ranma as Yashima did the same. "No, you couldn't have. Even wounded and with a stick, Kuno would have smashed you flat with a single blow. He's one of the strongest martial artists in Nerima." That rather galled Akane, since she knew he was stronger than he had let on in their fights, but she had no choice but to admit it at this point given how badly she had overestimated herself of late. Akane was prideful, not stupid.

An instant later Akitsu landed behind Ranma, causing both the girl Kuno and the as yet unnamed man to jump back. Ranma ignored that, looking at them quizzically. "So yer name's really Kuno? Ya might want to change that if you're going to be around Nerima for very long. Go by your last name or come up with a nickname everyone can use for ya."

"Kuno doesn't have a last name, she's a Sekirei like that one." The man replied, gesturing to Akitsu and staring hard at Ranma. "Huh, so you're the Ashikabi who can fight like a Sekirei? I thought you'd be older looking, no offense. Um, I'm Shigi Haruka, and this is my Sekirei Kuno."

Akane blinked, staring at the girl who seemed to shrink in on herself before turning and glaring at the man, her one good arm rising into an attack position. "If she's really a Sekirei why the heck does she look ready to bolt instead of fight!? Did you do something to her you pervert!"

"What, no! Nothing like that, we just, Kuno is just weak that's all!" Shigi replied backing way as Kuno did the same, quailing slightly as she looked at the three women who she assumed were all Sekirei, even Akane with her broken arm. "And we don't want to fight at all!"

"Huh?" Ranma said, holding up a hand to ward off Akane. She huffed, but subsided, still glaring at the older boy.

Quickly Shigi explained. Kuno was physically speaking very weak in comparison to most Sekirei, and while she had a special power to offset that, she couldn't use it very often. Her sound based attacks were decent, but hurt her throat and were of limited range too. She also was not at all interested in fighting, and Shigi was unwilling to risk their bond in the game. They had been running from fights ever since. "That's why we're here. We heard about you Ranma and wanted to see if you would help us escape the city."

Hearing this, Ranma scowled. Why anyone would want to not fight when they had the abilities of a Sekirei, even a weak one, was beyond him. He also didn't like the idea of running away at all, and the idea of escaping the city was weird too. "You do know if you escape the city MBI would just send people after you? They might not be able to do so openly as they can in Tokyo but they would still do it. You'd spend the rest of your life running."

"Well if that's off the table, what about us getting a room somewhere here in this district?" Shigi asked. "We're desperate. Anything we can do to not play this mad game we'll do! I've even gotten rid of Kuno's MBI card."

Sighing Ranma waved around, kind of fed up with the guy's cowardice. *He was so quick to try and protect her from Kuno when he thought Kuno was just a crazy guy, but when it comes to it he isn't willing to fight? Blech.* "I suppose ya can look. And if anyone comes after ya, me or one of the other martial artists around can help. Now if you'll excuse me, Akitsu and I need to get going."

With that, he leaped up onto a nearby roof, followed instantly by Akitsu, who had remained silent throughout this discussion. Kuno looked at her as she passed, wilting even further, but neither Akitsu nor Ranma noticed.

Akane sighed. "Come on, I'll show you around the district, I was doing that with Yashima already. Though I won't be able to help you find a job or a place to live, you'll have to ask my big sister about that."

And of course, there were moments in Izumo House too. This was to be expected when there were two new tenants, especially when one of them was Kazehana, Sekirei number 3. Boisterous, fun loving and teasing with a body to match, Kazehana was the sort of woman whose personality could fill a room if she wanted. Plus, she and Uzume were drinking buddies, having met up a bare week after Uzume had escaped earlier than she had been scheduled to be released. This needless to say led to an incident.

Ranma and Miya danced across the lawn, their limbs flickering so fast Akitsu could barely follow the action. Ranma leaped, twisted, danced around the more immobile Miya, spending more than half the time in the air, attacking with both ferocity and skill. But Miya simply matched him, precise, controlled her speed still beyond his and her strength such that his hands tingled even when he redirected her blow in order to remain in the air. None of his jabs penetrated her defense, while her sword sheath did pass his, punching through here and there over his body, leaving light welts.

Sitting on the patio alone, Akitsu simply watched her Ranma-sama in action. Musubi was not there at the moment, having been teamed up with Yashima to patrol the area, making certain to step in and stop any unfair fights. This was something Musubi was happy to do even though she didn't think she should really join the Sekirei Plan without having already found her destined one. Later on, Kazehana would go out on patrol too though she did so alone, Minato staying at the inn most of the time, though he had found a job at a nearby bookstore. Given her power over wind, while sober there was no way she could be caught if she ran into trouble she couldn't fight her way out of, and such occurrences would be rare indeed for the ex-Disciplinary Squad member.

Ranma, Akitsu, and Nabiki had arrived about an hour before. Ranma wanted to get in some sparring time, and the two students had met up with Akitsu outside of school, heading straight here. Nabiki had wanted to come to finalize some more plans with Uzume, who was quickly becoming a real friend to the younger girl.

Sooner than Ranma would have liked Musubi and Yashima appeared over the rooftops. Yashima smiled and waved at the people in the backyard, but turned and left without hopping down to join them. She was quite leery of Miya for some reason and appeared somewhat jealous about Kazehana and Minato, and she wanted to get back to Nerima as quickly as possible.

Musubi didn't notice this as she leaped down exuberantly, her large breasts bouncing so much even Ranma, with all his self-control, could only gape for a moment. However, he controlled himself quickly, turning away as Musubi landed smiling happily at Miya. "I'm home landlady-san! We didn't see anything while on patrol, so can I please spar with you too?"

"Mah, I suppose you can. You certainly have a lot to learn before you can catch up to this one," Miya replied, a small smile on her face as she gestured with her sheath at Ranma. She set it down then, picking up her ladle. Using even the sheath would be too much against Musubi. "Ranma, if you could go and rouse that lazy drunkard for her patrols? After that, I'm afraid I have to ask you to look at the dishwasher for me."

"That's fine Miya-nee. Have fun Musubi," Ranma said, hopping over to the patio. Akitsu was instantly by his side, and the two entered the inn as behind him Musubi charged forward.

Inside Ranma headed upstairs to the room Kazehana and Minato shared. Officially, Kazehana was supposed to have her own room on the other side of the hall. But even Ranma knew she spent her nights in Minato's room. They didn't do anything, of course, they went out in the mornings for that kind of thing. Oddly mornings were the least busy in terms of the Sekirei Plan.

Inside the room, he found not only Kazehana but Uzume, Kocho, Matsu, and Nabiki. All four Sekirei were drunk, drinking from their own small sake bottles and laughing having a great time as they watched something on a small computer screen set up on the futon to one side.

In contrast, Nabiki was passed out, a saucer set nearby, though she was just as undressed as the others. Her uniform's skirt halfway off, unbuttoned with one arm out of the sleeve. Her skirt was down by her knees. This showed off that Nabiki was currently wearing white lace underwear, which was quite sexy in Ranma's opinion, an opinion created in the .00025 seconds in which he took in the view before turning and facing a wall.

"What the hell!?" He squawked loudly, so loudly it carried around the property. "What the hell were you five doing in here?"

"Oh, this and that, mostly talking about boys, men, romance, and funny cat videos," Kazehana replied, almost sounding sober, or as close to it as she ever sounded. "Dreams for the future, dreamy guys, what these two were looking for in an Ashikabi, that kind of thing."

"Mmm, Kenji Tenzai," Kocho moaned, falling to one side and giggling uncontrollably, her hands moving down her body, her normal staid, self-control gone. "Heheheh, you can fit your data chip into my core anytime..."

"We've found out that Nabiki-chan here finds you almost as attractive in female form as in male," Kazehana said, patting Nabiki familiarly on her bare ribcage. "And that she's a lightweight when it comes to drinking, something to keep in mind when you go on this fabled date of yours. You're rather cruel to put that off for so long though. Not that she hasn't been doing good work, but still, a girl likes to see some enthusiasm when it comes to dating!"

Of all the people he had met since getting his curse, Kazehana had taken it the most in stride. To her, it didn't matter at all, she was going to tease and taunt him whatever body he was in. Minato, on the other hand, had fainted and looked rather uncomfortable with Ranma the few times he had seen Ranma in his female body.

"Boo, bad number 3," Matsu muttered, clearly drunk. If her tone wasn't enough the fact she missed when tried to reach out and poke Kazehana, who was sitting right beside her, would have proven the point. "Bad, bad, Kazehana, can go out, goes out, free, free like a birdie." Her attempt at poking Kazehana having failed, Matsu seemed to collapse. "Not likes me, me, old number 2, needs ta, ta shtay here, to hide, hide from the man, from MV, no MBI, thash it. Wanna go, wanna see shome sights."

She reared up, throwing her arms wide, this time clocking Kazehana in the side of the head, though the wind user hardly seemed to notice watching all this with a grin. "Want's to get an Ashikabi!" then Matsu deflated once more, pouting at Kazehana. "Bad old number 3, won't share."

"At least let me have a month with him before you start to try and beguile him, Matsu," Kazehana reproved. "Or like you said, go out and snare your own man."

"NOooo," Matsu said, whining and now digging her face into the futon. "Can't go out, the black crow will get me!"

Ranma groaned, looking at Uzume who hadn't turned from watching a few kids and a large tabby cat playing around on the video screen. "You got Nabiki drunk? Nabiki, the always in control, never letting her guard down, Nabiki? Really?"

"Ara, now this is rather unpleasant," said a voice from the doorway, causing all of them to turn. Akitsu was nowhere in sight, having retreated away from the doorway to allow Miya to stand there her ladle raised, a Hanya mask already appearing behind her accompanied by the wailing of souls in torment.

She stepped forward and Ranma ducked around her, saying he'd be back to get Nabiki later but it was best if she slept it off for now.

He reached Akitsu's position quickly, by which time the four inebriated Sekirei were pushing through the realm of sobriety into the cold, terrifying depths of the scared-out-of-their-minds. Miya stood over them now, looking down like a vengeful goddess about to smite the sinners. "There are so many things wrong here that merely one rule just does not cover it. So let us list all the things you are doing currently that are FORBIDDEN in Izumo house... then we will discuss your punishments..."

As screams began behind him, Ranma grabbed Akitsu by the hand, reaching out to grab Musubi's with the other. "Come on you two, let's get out of here. I don't think Izumo House is going to be fit for living in for a bit..."

OOOOOO

Eventually, Ranma decided to just go with it and see if he and Akitsu could just run out of the city. With Haihane's connivance, Ranma was able to figure out the Disciplinary Squad's schedule and where there was a hole in it. It wasn't really considered an actual hole of course since most people would think the two heavily armed squads of guards at the checkpoint complete with automatic weapons and a roadblock formidable enough on its own without the Disciplinary Squad. Even most Sekirei would be slowed down by that, especially if they had to defend their Ashikabi at the same time. Ranma and Akitsu however, could simply bull their way through.

Friday came around once more and found Ranma and Akitsu once more roof-hopping out of Nerima. As they crossed

the almost visible line between the martial arts crazy district and the rest of the city, Ranma paused, frowning as he saw Kuno and her Ashikabi walking along a road nearby. "Akitsu, have anymore Sekirei shown up in Nerima who don't want to fight?"

"Ahh...only one more," Akitsu said after a moment. Since she went around on errands with Kasumi on a nearly daily basis Akitsu actually knew more about what was going on in Nerima on a street level than Ranma was. "Besides Kuno, another Sekirei-Ashikabi pair have moved into the territory. The Ashikabi in question is a young boy, around 12 years old. The Sekirei in question is not willing to gamble her bond in the game. All the others who have moved into Nerima are more than willing to fight, they are just not willing to be rushed to find an Ashikabi."

"Which means that Minaka-aho can't object to their presence," Ranma mused then laughed. "I love that."

Akitsu nodded. She wasn't certain that the other more powerful Ashikabi would agree to let their weaker brethren band together as they sort of were at this point, or are that the Disciplinary Squad would not be sent after Ranma eventually for his interference in how the game was supposed to be: I.E. a free-for-all where only the strongest survived. Then again, given what the Haihane had said the last time she had been at the dojo she, Benitsubasa and the two new members of their squad were very busy. And since Ranma had proven he could fight any one of them pretty easily, the fact they were waiting wasn't that unusual.

The two of them remained silent for a time, simply enjoying one another's company as they raced through Tokyo heading southward and out the other side where they hopped up onto one of the highways, racing along the protective wall on one side. There they passed several dozen cars stopped for inspection by the troops set there to make certain that no Sekirei was trying to make a break for it.

Despite that, Ranma had been surprised that there had been no incidents just yet. Most people seemed to be taking a wait and see attitude to the new changes Minaka had forced onto the city, the traditional Japanese desire to not make waves going along with people's desires to not die. But that record was about to be broken.

As they saw the checkpoint Ranma and Akitsu didn't slow, continuing moving forward racing now almost as fast as a normal car could go on the road. Soon enough they were spotted in turn by the inspection teams.

"Halt!" shouted one of them, raising his gun and pointing it towards Ranma and Akitsu. He paused as he noticed that Ranma was moving just as fast as Akitsu. But he still shouted, "No Sekirei is allowed to leave the city limits! Turn back, or you and your Ashikabi will be fired upon!"

"Let's do it Akitsu!" Ranma said slowing down just enough for Akitsu to nearly run into his back.

"Hai Ranma-sama!" Akitsu said, her normal slow response utterly gone as usual when faced with combat. The two of them had also talked about what they needed to do at this point.

She gestured forward around Ranma and a wall of ice appeared, flashing forwards towards the men at the checkpoint. They fired, but their bullets spanged off of the yard-thick wall of ice, startling them. Two of them began to race to the vehicle set to one side of the checkpoint which had a heavier weapon on the turret.

But before they reached it, Ranma was on them from above. He had leaped up into the air the instant Akitsu had conjured her wall, betting on the fact that despite their equipment and uniforms these troops would be green, unable to break their attention away from the sudden appearance of an ice wall and a rampaging Sekirei.

He had been right, and now he landed in among the four men racing for the APC. He lashed out, tapping each man gently- for him - in the chest, sending them flying. Several times he caught their weapons, tossing them to shatter against the concrete wall.

He then grabbed the microphone from one man who had been in the process of calling in help. "None of that!"

"You, you can't do this, MBI, the president he'll send out a kill team for yoGAHH!" The man babbled as Ranma lifted him up hurling him to slam bodily into several more men.

"Meh, I don't want to leave the city entirely, just for the day basically. I promise to be back by 10 o'clock tonight," Ranma said, holding up his hand mockingly as if he was performing a vow. "We're just going on a beach date, that's all."

The men who were still conscious blinked owlishly at that through their pain filled eyes and Ranma handed a few back their weapons after Akitsu passed, nodding politely to them as he had asked her to. The quixotic nature of their politeness after the event would be sure to throw the men, sticking in their heads more than if they had simply rushed

by. And now that they had an actual reason for Ranma and Akitsu having left the city, they probably wouldn't object to it as much as they would have otherwise.

"Well, that happened," said one of the men lamely, watching the two of them race out of sight over the horizon. "Um... who's going to call it in to mister crazy pants?"

"You," said everyone else there, causing the first man to groan.

OOOOOO

Minaka looked down at his phone thoughtfully. *This, this could provide me an excuse to get rid of both the broken Sekirei and her Ashikabi, though obviously, he can't really be her Ashikabi, he's simply her lover.*

I could just eliminate her now suppose, activate the self-destruct at the base of her skull. But then again, there was that report about it possibly being broken in 07's case due to the cold temperatures reported in the lab when that fool adjuster attempted to force an Ashikabi bond on her. That lab's walls were still frozen solid from one wall to the other, covered with inches of ice.

I can also choose to use this incident as an excuse to sic Karasuba on Saotome later. Yes, that is a better idea. Besides, given some of the plans that Higa has put in place, perhaps I personally won't have to lift a finger. That would be better all around, considering my first attempt at escalation seems to have fallen flat entirely.

Then again, the unforeseen gathering of single-pair or still free Sekirei within Nerima has also allowed me to identify other problem children, and placed them where they will always be visible. So I will let it continue. For now, as long as they are willing to play the game, I will look the other way. If that changes, so too will my response.

OOOOOO

Ranma and Akitsu reached the beach he had chosen for their day trip, which was called Tatadohama after about two hours' worth of running at Akitsu's best speed. It was not the nearest beach to Tokyo, but it was off the beaten path enough for it to not have much in the way of crowds. It was down a hill from the bus stop to the beach, giving a great view of the ocean and the cliffs to either side. The beach wasn't very large, but the waves were great, and out to sea there were a few rocky outcroppings sticking out of the shore. There were also a few food stalls set up here and there near the back of the beach, which abutted the cliff.

Once there, Ranma forced himself to enter one of the family changing areas after sending Akitsu into the girl's only changing rooms. Thankfully the children's restroom was empty at the time. Staring into his reflection in the mirror, he mumbled "Okay Ranma, you can do this. Remember it's for Akitsu. She doesn't have a problem with your female form, it's not a problem at all in fact. It's just a thing. A thing you have to embrace in order to swim or be around cold water at all."

He sighed, then before he could have second thoughts about the whole affair, splashed himself with water from the tap, triggering the change. Once in his female form, Ranma reached into his bag, pulling out her swimsuit.

A moment later, she met up with Akitsu outside the changing area. She was already surrounded by men attempting to flirt with her but she was just ignoring them, staring intensely at the door leading into the family changing area. When Ranma came out, her eyes seemed to soften slightly and she moved swiftly to Ranma's side. Ranma could instantly feel happiness somehow radiating off her despite her expression not changing at all, as usual.

As the two women stood there, any observer would've been forced to comment that the difference between the two of them was like night and day. This was indeed the central observation of the four men who had been attempting to flirt with Akitsu. The next few observations had to do with commenting on their bodies of course.

Ranma was the picture of an outdoorsy sort of girl in excellent health. Her skin was lightly tanned, her red hair done up in her simple pigtail, and she wore an equally simple blue one-piece on that covered her from crotch on up without any break. It was only the body underneath that made it at all attractive.

In contrast, Akitsu was pale though not sickly, just obviously paler than most people. Her tan hair was shorn short, but still looked well cared for. Her outfit was also quite a bit more elaborate. She wore a choker around her neck and bracelets that looked almost like they were handcuffs, but without any chains linking them. Her swimsuit itself was a shiny black two-piece, which stood out starkly against her skin.

Ranma smiled at Akitsu, taking her hand and looking her up and down, blushing slightly. "You, um you look nice Akitsu! Very, very nice. But you know you always do and ya don't gotta um..." Ranma shook her head. "Right, stop

the compliment after the first sentence gotta remember that."

Despite the stumbling words, Akitsu took Ranma's appreciation to heart. Her little smile made an appearance, and she moved even closer, pressing her body into Ranma's side. "Thank you Sun-sama."

Blushing Ranma took Akitsu's hand, leading her towards some lounge chairs nearby. Two of the boys attempted to talk to them, but Ranma once more ignored them, actually batting one out of the way as if he was a fly when he got too pushy, trying to invade her personal space. The fact that the man flew three feet before landing on his rear caused the other three men to stop and stare at the very short redhead before deciding to move on to easier targets. "Did you put on any sunblock Akitsu? You got the kind of skin that looks like it'd burn easy."

"Ahh...forgot," Akitsu said, reaching into her bag and pulling it out.

Feeling one of his newfound urges, Ranma smiled, pushing Akitsu down to sit on the side of one of the chairs. "Let me Akitsu."

Akitsu did not shiver when Ranma squirted some sunblock onto her arm, but she did shiver when Ranma began to work it into her skin. Her eyes closed when Ranma moved to her back, then her sides. She arched her back, her head lolling backward as Ranma began to put some lotion on her legs. For Akitsu this was the equivalent of a loud moan. The feelings didn't dissipate as Ranma, fighting the urge to let his hands wander, worked her stomach then her face.

It came almost to a shock to Akitsu when Ranma pulled her hands away without letting them do more than brush her bikini-clad chest. The redhead backed away slightly, coughing and looking away. "Um, all, all done Akitsu."

"...Ah...thank you Sun-sama," Akitsu replied, the look in her eyes a heavy-lidded one. Nonetheless, she looked to the side at the sound of the ocean and some kids screaming as they raced along in the waves.

Ranma understood without words and tugged Akitsu to her feet. "Come on Akitsu, let's go."

Akitsu followed and the two of them made their way to the shoreline still holding hands. Just as they were about to enter the water however, Akitsu realized she had forgotten to tell Ranma one of the reasons why she had wanted to come to the beach. "Ranma-sama... I cannot swim."

Blinking at that, Ranma turned back to her opening his mouth and then visibly thinking before actually saying anything. "I guess that makes sense Akitsu. Still, I suppose I can teach you how to swim easy enough."

Still holding Akitsu's hand Ranma pulled her into the water. "Get used to being in the water first, sometimes the waves bother first-time swimmers."

Soon the two of them were standing chest deep, on Akitsu, in the water. "Okay Akitsu, now let yourself float for a moment..."

A second later Ranma regretted that suggestion when a wave caused Akitsu head to submerge and she seemingly panicked for only the second time since Ranma had met her. Unlike with her first meeting with Kuno however, she didn't freeze, rather she froze the water below her, pushing upwards quickly.

"Okay, so maybe this could be tougher than I thought," Ranma said, her eyes narrowing.

This trend continued for a time. For a bit Akitsu would be fine, slowly moving her body through the water. But the moment she tried to swim or even when her head just went under the water when she didn't expect it, Akitsu would panic. Sometimes this resulted in ice chunks appearing to help her out, so many that a few of the other swimmers started to shiver, several even leaving the water muttering about the odd ice bits that had appeared.

After one time, Ranma decided that at least half of this had to be purely mental on Akitsu's part. The redhead had been standing in front of the taller woman, holding her hands and telling Akitsu to kick out, slowly moving around as Ranma let her push them.

Hmmm, I wonder what'll happen if I give her something that'll motivate her to push past her fear. Hmm.. so what'd... yeah, that's a stupid question. Ranma began to blush, but once more, she decided to go with all of these new instincts that had started to come out of the woodwork since Ranma had begun to notice girls.

Pulling lightly on Akitsu's arms, Ranma pulled Akitsu toward her not stopping until Ranma was holding the taller girl in a loose hug around her middle. Leaning in Ranma began to whisper in Akitsu's ear. "Okay, how about this Akitsu-

chan. I think ya need some motivation. So, so every time you perform an exercise without panicking I'll do, *gulp* I'll do this..."

With that, Ranma let one of her hands slide down Akitsu's back to her rear. There she squeezed the thin latex clad rear, finding the material felt almost like rubber but did nothing to stop him from realizing how nice a rear it was, or how smooth Akitsu's skin was.

Akitsu's eyes didn't widen, but she gave off the air of being startled for a second, but also very happy. Getting Ranma to initiate something like this was a great sign in her opinion. She pressed her body against him for a moment, willing him to notice her hardened nipples underneath her bikini, but then sighed as Ranma stopped, his hand moving up her back once more. "Hai, Sun-sama."

From there the lesson went very well and by the time they were both turning into prunes, Akitsu could actually swim. And Ranma's gropes of her rear had segued into feeling her rear under her swimsuit, and even, when Akitsu successfully swam underwater for several yards, feeling up her chest under the water.

At that point Akitsu was so turned on, she had to do something, something to make the growing tension inside her snap, had to take it that last few steps. She held Ranma's hand there on one of her breasts and gazed soulfully down at the short redhead. "Ahh...Sun-sama..."

Understanding Akitsu's nonverbal communication better and better, Ranma knew what she wanted. If anyone had asked Ranma before he arrived back in Tokyo, that he would be initiating contact like this with a girl, Ranma would've called him a pervert. It wasn't like girls hadn't interested him it was just that he wouldn't have known how to do anything with that interest. Now, with Akitsu following him around Ranma had learned quite a bit both about her and about girls in general, and even 'her' own body, much to her chagrin. Yes her submissiveness was a little hard to get used to at first, but now that Ranma was, s/he found it was sort of a turn on not that s/he would have ever admitted that allowed.

With that in mind, Ranma smiled. "Well, I suppose you do deserve a reward..." The redhead reached up with her free hand putting it behind Akitsu's head and pulled her down into a deep kiss.

Kissing while in girl form was kind of weird from Ranma, there was a height difference to think of normally, even without the water. To say nothing of the feelings it evoked in his own body, the different erogenous zones. She wasn't nearly as comfortable with that as she could wish, but that didn't really matter now, nor did the fact Ranma could tell she was turned on almost as much as Akitsu by what she had been doing to the girl. Right now though, her not being comfortable with it actually helped, since ignoring her own state entirely allowed Ranma to concentrate more on Akitsu.

Ranma's tongue pressed against Akitsu's lips, thrusting inside to roam in Akitsu's mouth, dominating Akitsu's tongue and the kiss like she had been dominating Akitsu since she began to flirt with her today. That, plus the added feel of Ranma's other hand caressing her rear quickly pushed Akitsu to the finish line, and she leaned into the shorter girl as her legs turned to jelly. "Ahh..." she moaned, finally making an audible noise, the warmth in her body pulling into a crescendo.

As Akitsu recovered from her orgasm, Ranma realized they had developed a small audience. Several men were staring at them while one mother was glaring her hands over her child's eyes. Thankfully no one had been able to see anything they had been doing beyond the kiss, but two girls kissing openly was enough to garner attention. *Guess it's just lucky we're not close enough to shore to let some of the asses still on land ta record us.*

"Come on Akitsu," Ranma said, pulling the other girl along gently. "I think we're done swimming for the day."

After that, Ranma bought them a beach ball, and they kicked it around for a time, just generally having fun on the beach. Ranma allowed Akitsu to bury her and vice versa, and they started to build a large sandcastle, which Akitsu then promptly began to drizzle small amounts of water onto the castle, freezing the water as it started to soak through. This made the castle a little more permanent than the few other castles around for a time.

As Akitsu was concentrating on that Ranma's stomach began to rumble, and she groaned. "Come on Akitsu-chan, let's go feed the beast."

Akitsu, whose own stomach had begun to make noises in sympathy, nodded, quickly getting to her feet and following after her Ashikabi. Ranma led them back to the changing area, where Ranma changed forms as well as out of her bathing suit as Akitsu did the same next door.

Once they were out, the two of them began to move toward the food shacks. But their walk was interrupted at that point. There was a loud crack and Ranma grunted, twisting around as one hand rose to the other shoulder. "Ow!" Rolling around, he dodged another something, which impacted the ground in front of them. "What the hell! Someone's firing at us?!"

Looking down at his shoulder, Ranma saw a large bruise there. The bullet hadn't penetrated, and the bruise already disappearing thanks to his healing ability. After all, no bullet was going to hit with as much power as a jab from Miya's sword sheath. *Thank you toughness training! Still, I don't want to get hit in the head*, Ranma thought, trying to figure out where the shots were coming from.

They were coming from one of the cliffs, connected to the main beach by an area which had been marked on the map at the top of the trail leading to the beach as being too dangerous. *Either that sign was a plant or someone ignored it*, Ranma thought, noticing that Akitsu had also begun to duck and dodge, her eyes like lasers as she stared around for the threat to Ranma.

"Akitsu, get ready!" He said as he reached down, grabbing tiny pebbles and seashells.

He hurled them ahead of them on an angle at the nearby water, racing in that direction rather toward than toward the strip of land which connected the cliff to the beach. Each of the pebbles slammed into the top of the water at near supersonic speed, creating large waves.

Akitsu understood what she needed to do without needing to be told, and she raised her hands pushing her freezing powers into the water, freezing it instantly to block the next few bullets. Then as they moved, she shattered the ice, hurling that ahead of them, before the two of them did the same thing advancing quickly.

The speed with which they close obviously surprised the sniper, but he had help. Three other people nearby pulled out guns from their hiding places and began to fire machine guns at them as the normal beachgoers screamed and began to run away. Luckily the shooters didn't even try to fire at them, they were here to kill Ranma, no one else.

Again Akitsu raised ice shields and Ranma took to the air, leaping up over her last ice shield as it shattered, pushing off the bits and pieces as he pushed himself higher into the air. At the same time, Akitsu took control of the ice shards, hurling them at the group of three shooters, impaling two and causing the other to roll away before turning and running.

Gaining the cliff face Ranma landed on top of the sniper before he could escape, his two feet landing on the man's back as he tried to run away, planting him into the ground knocking him unconscious and maybe doing a little bit of permanent damage. Not that Ranma cared particularly. Guns were seriously uncool in his opinion and anyone who used them too.

Akitsu dealt with the last man by closing the distance, her hand lashing out with a speed she would not have been able to perform at a bare week ago. The blow hurled him backward, unconscious.

Ranma looked away from watching this when he heard a noise on the far side the butte, an engine starting up. Another man roared out to open sea on a tiny speedboat.

Before he could go very far, Ranma grabbed up a stick from a nearby bush, and brought it around, using one of his sword-based ki techniques. "Fierce Dragon Slash!"

The blast of ki caught the boat near the back. Even at this distance it still retained enough power to slice into the ship, cutting about halfway through it from the place it struck. The ship quickly careened to the side, crashing into another rock outcropping and dumping the man overboard.

Before he could try to swim away, Akitsu was on him, gesturing with her hands as she landed on the rocky outcropping having made a prodigious leap even for a Sekirei. The man soon found himself encased in a yard wide icicle from his neck down. "Ahh...stay." She said.

The battle over with Ranma jumped down toward the two men Akitsu had skewered, dragging the sniper with him. There he began to do some very rudimentary first aid as the bystanders began to come out of their various hiding places. Ranma figured since these idiots hadn't attempted to make this attack a bloodbath, he could make certain they all lived. *Even if they won't exactly be mobile for a long while*. Luckily Akitsu had missed their vitals, though one guy had lost a few fingers to a speeding ice spear, and another an ear.

After that, he turned to find that Akitsu had come up towards him, albeit far more slowly than she normally would

have. This was because she had pulled the ice cube and the man frozen in it after her. Ranma smiled at that, nodding in appreciation before looking at the last captor. "Now I wonder who sent you lot after me?"

Akitsu paused, wondering if her Ashikabi wanted the man to reply, then realized he was already unconscious from the impact of the ground. "Ahh...he is not able to reply Ranma-sama."

"Yeah I know," Ranma said with a chuckle. "Besides, there's only a few it who it could be. Minaka, the bishole of the east or the southern brat. Mikogami didn't strike me as the type to use hired killers, and Minaka would've wanted to send troops wearing the uniform of MBI so that everyone knew what would happen to people who try to break the cordon around Tokyo. So it's probably the pretty boy. Well..." Ranma paused wincing. "Unless it's someone from my old man's past trying to get at him through me. I shouldn't ever really discount that idea."

"But I'm gonna assume that it's the bishole, trying to get back at me for my break-in or our activities stopping him from winging Sekirei by force. The question is should I just escalate right back? Hah! Who am I kidding!" Ranma laughed at his own joke. "Nah, the real question is 'how' not 'should'."

Even Akitsu could tell this question was rhetorical and she stayed silent, looking down at the men she had defeated so easily, then around at the damage done to the beach by the battle. In the distance, she could hear the sound of sirens and incoming helicopters.

Before she could mention this Ranma had moved towards her. He put his arms around her, grabbing her rear slightly and lifting the girl up into his arms, kissing her hard. Akitsu had no defense against the sudden onslaught, and she moaned, her arms going around Ranma in turn, her entire body suddenly flaming with warmth once more.

Then Ranma pulled away, their tongues intertwining in midair for a moment, before breaking off as he breathed heavily. "You know Akitsu, we make one hell of a team!"

"Hai, Sun-sama," she moaned, gently moving her hips where they ground against Ranma's hard stomach willing her Ashikabi to continue, ignoring the gathering onlookers or even the distant sound of sirens. But unfortunately, Ranma had noticed both and put Akitsu down quickly. "Come on, it's time to get out of here."

OOOOOO

Ranma and Akitsu entered Tokyo the same way they had exited it, causing a few of the guards on duty to stare at them. These were obviously not the same guards that had been on duty earlier that day, but they had been warned about the Ashikabi and Sekirei pair that had escaped earlier that day.

Ranma waved at them cheekily as they went by, shouting out "Don't worry, that's probably the last time we'll be out of the city until this whole 'game' thing is solved."

Grumbling, the men made no move to try to stop them. The two passed the checkpoint moving into the city and continued on their way, still balancing on the protective wall on the side of the highway as they raced on.

It was around 11 o'clock by the time they got back into Tokyo proper and the two of them moved straight towards Nerima, making no move to go to Miya's place tonight. But they did end up stopping as Ranma noticed a flash of water followed instantly by a blast of steam in the distance.

They turned in that direction, moving quickly over the rooftops to find Tsukiumi and a man who could only be the fire user Akane had described, Homura. His clothing looked singed and pockmarked, but his mask was still in place.

He was slumped against the wall of the alleyway as Tsukiumi standing above him, her arms crossed as she glared down at him. But Ranma had been around Kasumi enough times to note the small changes in body language and face that denoted true anger and which was her worried anger. *With a tsundere, it's a very thin line there.*

"Tsukiumi, is everything all right?" he asked, hopping down from the rooftop, landing lightly next to her.

The water-user looked at Ranma and Akitsu and calmed down a little. "Where have you two been all day? I went by the dojo several times and Kasumi-san said you were out."

"We went on a date," Ranma said with a shrug, still examining Homura with his very limited medical skills. "It was kind of fun, until the team of assassins attacked us near the end. Now, what's wrong with him?"

"This is Homura, I don't know if you have actually met him before this, though you both are in the same business. He doth have taken upon himself the same task you did, and that which I have joined in much to my own chagrin."

Tsukiumi replied dryly.

"I've heard of him," Ranma said, moving over to the man and checking his pulse. He was still awake, looking at Ranma as Rama touched his neck, but his eyes slumped closed after a second. "What happened?"

"I know not. I was heading back to Nerima and home when I saw this one practically on fire. T'was as if his power over fire was going haywire, consuming him. I didst douse him immediately of course, and that seemeth to have stopped the symptoms, but I do not know what caused this in the first place."

Frowning Ranma thought about where they were in relation to the dojo and Miya's place for sighing and moving forward with the man up. "We'll put him up in the dojo for the night, and see if he gets better overnight. There doesn't seem to be anything physically wrong with him now, he just seems to have fallen unconscious from exhaustion. That's nothing a good night's sleep won't cure, but if he's having trouble with his powers, maybe Miya can help them, or doctor Tofu..."

OOOOOO

"Ah, excellent Karasuba, you're here. Welcome back and all that rot." Minaka said, smiling in his somewhat mad way. "It has been a most amazing few weeks without you around. Many things have changed, mostly for the good as much of it has added to the game in new and interesting ways. However, that does not mean that there haven't been occasions where I have missed having my true armored fist around."

Karasuba smiled back, sitting down and crossing her legs on Minaka's desk. If an observer looked closely, they would see splotches of red on her shoes and leggings. There were a few other such splotches on one of her hands. "Oh, do tell?"

If Minaka noticed those marks, he didn't care. "Indeed. I think it is time to remind people why the Disciplinary Squad should be feared..."

End Chapter

For those wondering, Kenji Tenzai is a 'character' from Red Alert 3, one of the commanders the player works alongside with on certain missions if he plays the Empire of the Rising Sun.

This is not actually the chapter I had intended to put out, but I felt that I was cramming too many events into one weekend. So I decided to space it out, showing some of the other scenes that would've happened afterward before this date, then ending the chapter here before things escalate once more with Nabiki's.

Next chapter will showcase the fire user finally stepping into a normal character role, and further canon events start to occur while the conflict between Higa and Ranma escalates further and the eternal wanderer returns just as Karasuba and Ranma meet for the first and possibly last time.

The poll for July should be up by tomorrow afternoon. If you want to have more of a saying in what stories I concentrate on, please consider signing up over on my Pat R on page. There you will get four votes in **each** poll - the small story poll and the Star Wars Crossover story poll (which includes ATP when I can say that I will be able to update it) - for every dollar, and access to my Ranma/Fairy Tail crossover Making Waves as well as several teaser chapters, omakes and future story concepts.

Chapter 9: Chapter 9

Can't draw big titties nor am I even Japanese in the first place.

In the poll this month, I didn't have any HP stories since I wanted to concentrate that particular herd of muses onto ATP. That means there were four small story choices, and the winners this month were *Semblance of Hope* and *Anything Goes Game Changer*. *AGGC* won hands down with 924 votes in total, 229 votes coming from here on fanfic. *Semblance* took second place with 854 votes, though as usual it did poorly here on fanfic picking up a measly 144. *Stallion of the Line* with 801 votes total - which I was rather sad about seeing I want to go into Skypedia something fierce, but the will of the people spoke. *GDWHOM* brought in 768.

This has now been edited by *Michael*, and should have far fewer mistakes, and *Hiryo* has now given it a bit of a touchup. I have also noted a few reviewers who pointed out mistakes, and corrected them as well.

Chapter 9: Twice Is a Pattern

Kagari gasped in pain as he sat up, hands clutching at his chest. He looked around blearily, trying to piece together what had happened. *I remember fighting off two more of those idiots from the South, and then....* Kagari sighed, his hands falling from his chest as he fell backwards onto the sofa, staring up at an unfamiliar ceiling, that fact not registering for a moment. *My powers, I lost control of them. Then Tsukiumi arrived, and she must've drenched me, I suppose. Heh, a rather forceful way of helping me, but I suppose it worked. Is this her place?*

At that point Kagari twitched when he heard a female voice he didn't know say, "Are you feeling any better, sir? I was told your name is Kagari? I have water and some painkillers here for you, though I'm afraid we could not find anything physically wrong with you last night. Oh, and Ranma says he wants to have words with you about being a...ah, yes, a 'dang lone wolf.' Which I found hilarious coming from him, frankly."

It was a very nice sounding voice, Kagari mused, which put him somewhat at ease, and he turned his head slightly to look at the woman who had spoken. As he caught sight of her, Kagari gasped, heart beginning to pound as if he was running a marathon, and he felt blood rush to his face.

Before Kagari stood an angel. She was young, possibly a few years younger than himself, with an exquisite face, one even a Sekirei would be proud of, framed by honey-brown hair cascading down to just below her shoulders. Though she was wearing an ensemble his host-trained mind classified as 'young housewife,' it did little to hide the very decent looking body. All this was aided by the serene smile on her face as she looked down at him.

For her part, Kasumi was rather pleased to see that the young man Akitsu and Ranma had brought in last night was awake. The two of them had woken her up to inform Kasumi of his presence last night, but the man had been completely out of it, and none of them had any better explanation as to what had happened than Tsukiumi's initial thoughts: that the poor man's powers had seemingly gone haywire.

Looking at the man now in the light of dawn, Kasumi felt he was rather handsome—in a pretty boy manner, at any rate—which no doubt made him very popular with the ladies. *Didn't Ranma say something about that being necessary for his profession as a host? So sad that people feel so lonely that they have to search out paid company like that.*

"My dear lady, not only are you an angel, but you are an angel bearing gifts," Kagari said, sitting up with difficulty and reaching for the glass of water and painkillers. Setting aside the irritation that Ranma and Akitsu had found out about his 'alter ego,' only taking a brief instant to hope that Tsukiumi hadn't been around when they removed his mask. He let his hand linger on Kasumi's as he took the pills from her, the warmth within him growing further into a fire that threatened to burn him to ash. Indeed, it was all Kagari could do to not grab Kasumi and pull her into a kiss right then and there. *I'm reacting! I'm reacting to her. I had almost given up hope of finding an Ashikabi, and here she is! "Where have you been all my life?"* he asked aloud.

Twitching a little, Kasumi regained control of her hands, shaking her head at him. "I have been right here in Nerima. And I'll thank you for the compliments sir, but I think it best if you take those painkillers now."

"Oh, of course, of course!" Kagari said, nearly spilling the water in his haste to down the painkillers and take a swig before going back to staring at Kasumi. "You, um, you've been in Nerima? You've never ventured out of it? That seems rather unusual,..." he hinted.

"I suppose you could call me the matriarch of this house," Kasumi said with a smile. "It is a twenty-four-hour job. As for leaving Nerima, not often."

At those words, Kagari felt as if his entire body had just been crushed. "Ah I see. Of course, an angel such as yourself should would obviously already be married."

"Perish the thought!" Kasumi said with a laugh. "No, the only one even close to being married is Nabiki, given this whole fiancé business with the Saotomes and what I'd heard from our fathers about how fast they want things to be moved along. For myself, I have had dates here and there but simply no time to devote to such."

"Ah, that makes me both sad and happy at the same time," Kagari replied, going into full host mode. "Sad that no one else has recognized the beauty before me, and happy that I might be the first to give you the compliments you so richly deserve."

To his dismay, Kasumi backed a step away, shaking her head, her tone both wry and cutting. "I think that your comments show a little too much practice of their own for my taste. Are you so used to turning women's heads?"

"But all those women were only women, flies in the night, whereas you, you deserve far more," Kagari said, taking her hands again and pulling her towards him, not noticing that her expression had now turned rather worried.

Oh no. Is he reacting or whatever it is to me? Kasumi thought worriedly. *He's a rather handsome fellow, but this is a little too sudden!*

At that moment, Akane, Yashima, Ranma, and Akitsu came down the steps with Akane in the lead. She and Yashima had been comparing styles that morning after getting back from a morning run. Her new friend had actually helped Akane figure out how to design her ki-hammer, though she had no more idea where Akane was pulling it from than Akane herself.

But Akane stopped on the bottommost step, her smile sliding off her face to be replaced by a snarl of pure rage as Akane saw an unknown male in her big sister's pure, divine face, pulling her closer. immediately activated the subroutines 'male spotted' and 'protect the sister,' and her mind could only reach one conclusion.

"You, you pervert!" Akane roared her battle cry, racing forward. The hammer she had been perfecting with her friend appeared in her hands, and she brought it up and over her head to bring it down and splatter this pervert into paste.

Blinking out of his reaction fugue at this clear and present danger, Kagari turned away from Kasumi. Not recognizing Akane at first as someone he had helped recently, he brought a hand around and sent out a blast of fire towards Akane.

"Akitsu, stop the fire!" Ranma shouted. With that, Ranma took several steps forward and grabbed the hammer at the middle of its arc, holding on for dear life and heaving backwards, pulling Akane off balance as he did. *Good God! She is so strong when she's furious. Is that part of the Tendo style?* At the same time Akitsu leaped into action on her Sun-sama's orders, stepping to one side and aiming around Akane, where she conjured up a wall of ice, which she then pressed forward towards the fire user.

Fire and ice hit, resulting in water and steam, much to Kasumi's shocked astonishment and growing anger. "That is enough!" she shouted at the top of her lungs, actually stamping her feet. All of them felt it, a pressure on them that was not unlike what Miya could put out, only this was far more diffuse, simple unhappiness rather than crushing anger or dark fear. "I will not have violence like this in my home," Kasumi went on once everyone was looking at her, then she pointed a finger towards the fire user. "You, sit!"

Kagari obeyed instantly, staring at her in something like astonishment on top of his earlier look of desire, and Kasumi turned away. "And you, Akane, while I appreciate the sentiment, you cannot simply attack someone just because they were attempting to flirt with me." Kasumi ignored the twitch Kagari showed when she used the word 'attempting,' waving an admonishing finger at her youngest sister. "If this young man was a normal human being and your attack had connected, you could well have killed him."

Now that she was faced with an angry big sister and the fact that she was drenched from the backsplash of Akitsu's Ice Wall, Akane nodded, staring down at her clothing and sighing. "I'm sorry, sis. I saw him pulling at you and then I saw your face, and, well...."

"And that is why I said I appreciate the sentiment," Kasumi said mildly. "Now, why don't you go change, and then we can all sit down and have some breakfast."

"I do apologize for my overreaction to her attack," Kagari began, looking quite sheepish as Akane marched back up the stairs. "I'm sorry; my head is still bothering me from last night, and I thought she was a Sekirei."

"Akane would probably be very happy with that comparison. But that does not mean that you are without fault, sir," Kasumi said, whirling on him. "Your actions towards me skirt the edge of propriety, and what you were about to do would have gone well beyond that."

"What?" he said, a little agog. "But, I mean, I'm reacting to you. You have to know what that means since Akitsu and Yashima seem to be living here," he said, nodding towards the hammer wielder, who had moved to lean against the wall and was watching this with Ranma, who had his arms crossed now, a smirk on his face.

"I know what it is. That does not mean you can take liberties such as you were about to with a woman you just met. I would much prefer to give my first kiss to someone I know, after all" Kasumi said, turning and flouncing off in display of pure irritated femininity that Ranma had not ever seen from her before. This image was only slightly ruined by the smile she sent over her shoulder. "Now, go sit down at the table and wait for the rest of the household to arrive, please."

"I can help!" Kagari said, hopping to his feet and moving after Kasumi in an almost desperate display, in Ranma's opinion.

Despite that, he grabbed the other young man's shoulder and held him back. "I think you need to give her some space, man," he said with a chuckle, turning him around and pushing him towards the dining table. "It's best to just obey her orders for now." The blond sighed but stopped fighting Ranma's grip, and the younger man asked, "So, what do I call you, anyway? Kagari or Homura? And is anyone really unable to tell who you are with that little mask?"

"My real name is Kagari, though if you could keep that from Tsukiumi, I'd appreciate it. I want to see how long it takes her to figure out that the mask wearing fire wielder is the same as the pretty boy who lives at Miya's inn. As for the mask, no one has made the connection, and, if you don't mind I'd like to keep it that way," Kagari said with a sigh.

"Sound like fun, so long as I'm somewhere on the other side of the room able to watch and not be dragged into it," Ranma said with a chuckle.

He smiled as Kasumi came out of the kitchen, laying a few plates down and then kissing him on the cheek. "And thank you for stepping in, too, Ranma." Then she turned to Kagari and gestured again peremptorily for him to sit at the table. "And you, Mister pretty boy, please sit down and show me you have some manners, at least?"

"I'm wounded, milady," Kagari said, regaining some of his equilibrium, though not at all of it. Kasumi's somewhat barbed jibes his way showed that she was somewhat interested but was going out of her way to be difficult. It should have been something he was somewhat used to, but the shock of finally finding a woman his Sekirei genes were reacting to was throwing him off. "I realize I might've come on a little too strongly, but, you have to understand, I personally had almost given up finding someone I could react to. It's beguiling, almost, to be in your presence."

"Then I pray that you gain some self-control," Kasumi replied as Ranma moved around her into the kitchen, where he began to fix some coffee. Akitsu and Yashima both followed, taking more plates into the dining area. "We need to get to know one another before I think there could be any kind of compatibility between us. Where do you live? What is your occupation? Although I know both answers to that rather well, thanks to Ranma," Kasumi said, letting the others go about their business in the kitchen in order to speak with the fire wielder. The fact that she had indeed heard of the pretty boy's occupation was something she was holding against him, frankly, as well as his earlier actions towards her and Akane. "What are your plans for after this game of yours is over? What is your educational level, your dreams for the future, favorite color? All these things I would like to know first."

"I see I will have to fight that bad first impression, then," he said, regaining more control of himself with a smile. "Yet, you have to understand that the Sekirei-master bond is very important to us. I would prefer to bond to you now rather than later in our current courtship." Kagari made no mention of the fact bonding with Kasumi would help him control his power. That would be too much like emotional blackmail in his eyes.

"No," Kasumi said flatly. "As I said, I know about the Ashikabi-Sekirei bond, and it is like being married, yes?" When Akitsu and the hammer wielder both nodded, Kagari was forced to nod as well. "In that case that I certainly won't marry anyone without dating him first."

"But you are willing to date me? To get to know me, that is?"

"Well, it has been quite some time since I was flattered by a handsome young man," Kasumi said coquettishly. "And,

until you got a little too pushy earlier, I can't say that your flowery words weren't having any impact. So yes, I think I would like to get to know you. But **slowly**, good sir, and if you attempt to somehow surprise a kiss out of me, know that that will be the end of it."

"Oh, of course," Kagari stuttered. "I would never, that is, now that I am under control, I won't try to press things that hard again. I apologize once more."

"Then we will speak no more about it," Kasumi said with a smile, now rather amused that her playing hard to get was having such an impact on the obviously experienced man. Seeing the very pretty man so off-balance was rather cute. It softened his face from his somewhat aloof, model-level handsomeness to something quite a bit younger and far more unsure about himself, yet also more endearing.

By that point, Akane had come back from upstairs and found herself rather happy at this turn of events even as she moved around Ranma, who had moved up the stairs with a cup of coffee. Yes, she was sort of irritated that the extremely pretty boy who Akane now recognized as the same man who helped her and Yashima was flirting with her sister. *But, on the other hand, Kasumi seems to be showing interest in him too. Maybe this way there will soon be another reason Doctor Tofu will have to move on from his feelings towards Kasumi. And, if he does, maybe there's a chance for me!*

Upstairs, Nabiki opened her door and took a single step before the smell of coffee hit her. Her body immediately went into autopilot, grabbing the cup of coffee from Ranma's hands and downing half of it before she opened her eyes to look blearily at him, a small smile appearing on her face. "You're like a coffee knight, you know? Always presenting it to me first thing in the morning like a knight with a rose for his lady, only far more useful. I might even try to kiss you, but coffee breath and your morning breath...."

"Hey, I brushed already, so we're good on my end!" Ranma said with a laugh.

Nabiki laughed, taking another sip of her coffee. "Are we still on for tonight?" she asked.

"Yeah, I can put off my retribution for one night. And Uzume and Kazehana are going to be on patrol anyway." Ranma replied.

"Retribution?" Nabiki asked, her somewhat foxy (in every sense of the word, in Ranma's mind) eyes narrowing.

"I'll explain it downstairs," Ranma said with a shake of his head. "Rather would only have to do that once, y'know."

Nabiki nodded, then ran a finger down her pajama top right between her breasts, putting her chest on display slightly more, smirking as Ranma's eyes flicked down for a second. "So, what should I wear for this date of ours, hmmm?"

Blinking, Ranma had to shake his head for a second to clear it. "Oh, um, something medium formal, I suppose. I'm going to be picking up a blazer and pants, so something equal if you have it? If you don't, I can change my plans." Then he regained his equilibrium, smirking back at Nabiki. "But you might want to think about an outfit that includes slacks. I remember that you don't like the idea of someone looking up your skirt, and, since we're going to be traveling via Air Ranma, patent pending..."

Nabiki laughed and leaned forward a little, deliberately giving Ranma of very good look down her neckline. "That isn't all that bad a feeling, really, depending on who's doing the looking."

Ranma shuddered again, but at her invitation still took a look. "Um, I, I see." He could only control his response for a brief moment though, and he blushed and turned away. Nabiki laughed, moving after him down the stairs.

Several explanations later caused all three Tendo girls to share angry and fearful looks. The Sekirei Plan was one thing, just another variety of martial arts madness. Snipers and guns, though, that was serious business. Ranma, however, downplayed it, saying that Higa wouldn't go that route again, certainly not inside the city, since MBI would have to move against him if he did. That settled the three down some, but Nabiki was still looking a little worried.

Kagari, too, was aghast. The idea that Higa—and, like Ranma, he felt it couldn't be anyone else—had sent assassins not only after Ranma but out of Shin Teito entirely was a very bad sign. "What the hell did you do to him to make him so furious as to not only break the rules of the game, but act so openly!?"

"Shaved half his head and painted him blue in spots from the waist up." Ranma replied blithely, just as Nabiki was taking another sip of coffee. She spluttered and then glared daggers at him, fingers twitching toward a cup of water nearby. Ranma held up his hands placatingly at her then looked back at Kagari. "I wanted to make certain he knew pissing me off was a bad idea. After all, if I could sneak into his apartment to do that, how much easier would it have

been to slip in and slit his throat? Still, I doubt the police will find anything. And, even if they do, Higa's based in Tokyo, sorry, Shin Teito if we have to listen to Minaka. So he's kind of untouchable."

Pointing over table at Kagari, Ranma shook his head. "More importantly, if you're some kind of masked Avenger trying to keep Sekirei from being forcibly winged, why the heck have you been going around all lone ranger? You know that me, Akitsu, Musubi, even Uzume, Tsukiumi, and Kazehana have been doing the same damn thing, right?"

Looking a little embarrassed, Kagari looked away. "If you must know, your curse still bothers me quite a bit. It's a... personal thing. I might tell you why eventually, once the lovely Kasumi deigns to give me a kiss, but, until then, I'd like to keep it secret." *After that, it won't matter. I'll solidify in this body, and I won't have to worry about, about **changing** ever again.*

Kasumi rolled her eyes at that, but Akane and Nabiki saw the faint tinge of pink on her cheeks. Ranma, though, didn't and just took Kagari's words at face value. "Well then, from now on you're going to work with the rest of the Izumo Bunch, and we're going to do this right."

"Izumo Bunch?" Kagari asked, wincing both at the name and what it implied.

"Most of ya live there, after all, and I spend so much time there I might as well live there too," Ranma replied with a shrug. "If you don't like it, come up with a different name, just make it better."

"Ahh...I liked Sun-sama and His Hentai Friends," Akitsu spoke up, so deadpan that it took a moment for the rest of the table to realize she was making a joke, after which Ranma laughed and pulled her into a hug.

Later, Kagari was reluctant to leave Kasumi, but, at her shooing motion, Ranma grabbed the back of his shirt and hauled him along. Nabiki watched all this with amusement and then, when Kasumi moved upstairs to start airing out the futons for the day, followed her, smirking. "So, Kasumi, it seems you have an admirer there...."

Kasumi blushed, looking away, and Nabiki closed in for the kill. "That wasn't a denial, Nee-chan!"

At the same time Ranma found himself up on the rooftops, with Akitsu, of course, following him and Kagari racing alongside. Kagari was still slightly in shock. "I just can't believe this. All this time I've spent looking for my one and only, my Ashikabi, and you just drag me home to her like a wet kitten."

"At the time it was either wet kitten or on fire kitten, and, besides, ya dried out before ya met Kasumi, so why're you complaining about it?" Ranma asked, poking Kagari with an elbow good-naturedly.

"I'm not complaining about that so much, just... I was one of the first Sekirei let out, I've been searching for nearly a year, and I haven't even seen hide nor hair of Kasumi-sama before this!" Kagari nearly shouted, looking torn between exultation, chagrin, and sheer irritation.

"As I understand it, most of your searching was through your job as a host, right?" Ranma stated, than went on as Kagari nodded. "Well, didn't it ever occur to ya that doing so would still leave ya a lot of different types of gals out there? There's the stay-at-homes like Kasumi, the gamers and other antisocial types, the martial artist types who don't go into drinking and anything associated with it, and the just plan poor types who can't afford trips to host clubs. Oh, and the righteous type who think that kind of thing is only for deviants."

Kagari paused in his race across the rooftops to stare straight ahead, then slammed his palm into his forehead, shouting "God damn shit!" to which Ranma simply laughed and continued on.

But, despite Kagari's issues and even the attack on him, Ranma's thoughts were more about the date with Akitsu. Now that he thought about it without concentrating on the attack that occurred, Ranma admitted to himself that it had been kind of thrilling. *Taking charge like that had been pretty intense. And Akitsu, I might still have a few issues with how this all began, but there's only so long you can hear someone saying that they're devoted to you without returning that feeling, like I've said before. And if she wants that kind of thing, well, who am I to deny her?*

Stopping a few blocks away from Miya's, Ranma turned to Akitsu as she alighted on the rooftop next to him, cocking her head quizzically as Kagari continued on, not noticing that the two had stopped. But then her eyes widened slightly as Ranma grabbed her chains, pulling her to him before leaning in and kissing her hard.

For a moment all they did was kiss, and then Akitsu hugged him back just as hard as Ranma was kissing her before Ranma slowly pulled away, much to Akitsu's mewling displeasure. He winked at her then took her hand in his. "Just wanted to do that for some reason," he said with a laugh, then raced on over the rooftops while she was blushing in her own way, stumbling slightly but regaining control of herself as they reached the edge of the rooftop and leaped to

the next one.

Swiftly catching up to Kagari, the three of them were met at the door by Kazehana, who smiled happily at seeing Akitsu and Ranma's joined hands. Ignoring Kagari for just a moment, she asked, "I take it the date went well?"

Ranma shrugged and gestured her inside. "I'd like to explain this all only once, please. It'd get irritating with repetition, and I've already had to go through it once."

"Then something actually happened that wasn't part of the date," Kazehana said with a sigh, mock glowering at Kagari. "That's a little irritating. I hope you didn't have something to do with that, fire-chan."

"No, I had nothing to do with that. These two found me after I had one of my...little episodes. Tsukiumi had already helped me, but..." Kagari then grinned, a natural happy expression, not the practiced smile he'd perfected as part of his job. "But I've met her, Kazehana! I've met my Ashikabi!"

"What?!" Uzume shouted from the sitting room, echoed by a shout coming out of a little ducky that sat next to the phone in the entranceway.

"Ara, that sounds fascinating, but bad news first, I think," Miya said, coming out of the kitchen with a smile. "I must say I'm pleased to see that you're no longer hiding yourself from Ranma, Kagari-kun. But before we get to that, perhaps you need to tell us what happened on this date?"

Ranma, however, repeated what he had just said and then went to get the two computer geeks to join Uzume and the others in the sitting room. Uzume was happy, having earned quite a lot of money over the past few weeks, more than enough to pay for her Ashikabi's continued treatment. "Hey, bro! How'd it go with the little icy-miss?"

"Pretty well," Ranma said with a laugh, "and I have to thank you for helping her with that bathing suit. The wrist guards are a little odd, but, given her personal perversions, I suppose they make sense."

"You liked it~~" Uzume teased. "Just keep on trying, you'll get this whole master thing down soon enough."

"Did you mean to say Ashikabi or did you really mean master there?" Ranma asked suspiciously.

"Both!" Uzume said with a laugh, linking arms with him and pulling him down to sit next to her. When the others had sat down with them, Ranma explained about the date and what had happened, going into more detail than he had earlier with the Tendos. Kazehana and Uzume were both gleeful at how the date had gone at first but became furious, as did Miya, at the attack. "Guns can be a danger," she said, her hands clenching and unclenching in her lap. "Higher caliber or fast machine gun rounds in particular."

"Gatling guns and stuff like that?" Ranma asked.

"Exactly," Miya said.

"Tank rounds, not so much," Kazehana broke in. "The explosion would hurt like hell and the impact might break bones, but they couldn't do much damage other than that. Gatlings, though, could overcome our durability if we allowed them to hit and just continually shred us. What about you?"

"A tank explosion would hurt like hell, yeah, and break bones, but couldn't tear me apart like they would a normal person, so long as I could redirect the momentum enough, anyway. As for anything else, I'm fast enough they wouldn't be able to get much of a bead on me beyond sniper rounds. Yeah, if I'm stuck in one place a Gatling could kill me, but, now that I'm on the watch for them, I'll be able to spot anything that size coming. My healing factor, though, that can deal with anything so long as they don't get a head shot."

Ranma paused then, looking around his allies, friends, and family in Izumo. "But this is an escalation, and I think we all know who did it."

"Higa of the East," Minato said with a sigh, speaking up for the first time since Kazehana had dragged him into the room. He was new to all this and really was still coming to grips with how serious the game was being played in many ways and how serious Ranma was about disrupting it and other people from stopping him from doing so. But he was willing to have Kazehana do what she could to help Ranma now, thinking that it was only fair given how much help Ranma had been to the two of them. "He's the only one with the will, the resources, and the need to try to hit back at you like this."

"Kocho, Matsu," Ranma asked, turning to those two, "can I ask you to research him? Anything about how to take the

fight to him in ways that will really hurt, not just humiliate, Higa now." Then he blinked, clicking his fingers together. "Oh, and Matsu, would you like a job?"

Matsu blinked too at the sudden change of topic. "What?"

"You said you wanted out of the house, and, with the number of Sekirei already living in Nerima, you'd be able to come and go there easily enough. Anyway, Doctor Tofu, the guy I took to get Akitsu checked out? He needs some serious help in stepping into the modern era. He's got a computer, but he doesn't use it and doesn't seem to know much about how to do so in the first place outside typing and web surfing. He is willing to pay if you can help him."

"I'll think about it," Matsu said, frowning as she contemplated the idea of actually getting out of the house. That sounded odd to her, but in a good way.

"Now," Ranma said, standing up and grinning. "I'd like to get some practice in if that's all right, Miya-nee?"

"Surely, though I would like you to also train with Musubi when she gets back. She should be here soon from the errand I sent her on." Then Miya and every other woman there turned to Kagari like so many turrets locking on. "First, however, I would like to hear about Kagari and his finding an Ashikabi."

Wincing, Ranma twitched aside, dragging Akitsu with him and ignoring Kagari's flush and suddenly wary look. "Right, well, I'll just be outside, then."

OOOOOOO

While the others remained at Miya's for most of the day outside of heading out on patrols, Uzume left after about forty minutes of grilling Kagari, carrying a large bag within which she had a few of the suits she'd used over the past few days. Reaching the hospital she nodded at a few of the workers at the front, including the security guard, who nodded back, though he eyed her warily, knowing what she was. Uzume didn't care; wariness was to be expected there, and he didn't make trouble for her anyway.

Uzume didn't notice the receptionist picking up a phone as she entered the elevator. The hospital staff was under orders to call their higher ups whenever Uzume appeared, something she had yet to realize.

She found her Ashikabi sitting up in bed reading, as Uzume knew she would be at this time of day. "Hey, Chiho-baby, how are you doing today?" she said, a tender smile appearing on her face, just as fun-loving as her normal expression, but far more tender. She set her bag down in one corner of the room and moved to her Ashikabi's side, hugging her gently and kissing her on the forehead.

Hidaka Chiho was a young woman of around Ranma's age who had a thin, if feminine, frame; a pretty face; brown hair; and deep, kind looking, brown eyes. She looked rather prim and proper with her hospital gown done up and wearing a one-piece pajama set underneath. But it was obvious she didn't get enough sun, and her frame was just a bit too thin to be healthy looking.

"I am doing somewhat better than I was yesterday, Uzume-chan," Chiho said, her voice low but full of warmth as she looked back at Uzume. "The medicine keeps me up nights at times, but I am still regaining energy, I think. How are you? Is your new job as mascot for kids' parties, I believe, going well? Is that what is in the bag?"

Uzume nodded but sat there wordlessly hugging the girl for several moments, which Chiho returned before Uzume pulled back and kissed her very lightly on the lips before pulling away, heading behind a curtain to one side to change. She had attempted to change right in front of Chiho before, but she had squeaked and ducked under the covers, which hadn't been good for her. "Yep, Nabiki really came through! She found me six gigs, one after another, and I made enough for a month's worth of your treatment in just a week! And bro and Nabiki have even more lined up in the future. I won't say our financial problems are solved, but they're looking a lot better, thanks to those two. And look, it even allowed me to use this!"

With that, she hopped out from behind the curtain wearing what looked like a giant mouse. It was nothing like Mickey, which would've been very bad due to copyright, of course, but it was certainly a comical looking mouse, or it was supposed to be, anyway. Chiho thought it rather looked like a more comedic version of a hamster she had once seen advertised as a mascot for some supermarket chain. Not that Chiho would ever think of commenting on such to Uzume, who she knew put her all into making her costumes.

"That looks cute," she said with a laugh and a clap of her hands.

At that encouragement Uzume went into an entire routine, dancing around the room and even squeaking in a high,

yet still obviously feminine, voice. Eventually she stopped and pulled off the mask, grinning. "The kids loved it, especially these two girls who were having a dual birthday, when I was able to lift them up over my head and dance around with them up there. A girl having that kind of strength seems to tickle their funny bones something fierce."

"I imagine it would," Chiho said with another laugh. "But tell me more about this Ranma fellow. You've mentioned him several times in the past few weeks. Do I have a rival for your affections?" she teased.

"No way!" Uzume said the laugh. "Oh, maybe if his curse was real I'd think about getting him into your bed," she said with a wicked little smirk on her face, which caused Chiho to blanch and blush at the same time. An amusing feat, which Uzume took note of with delight. Teasing Ranma and the others was fun; teasing Chiho, that was pure pleasure. "I've told you about the curse, right?"

"I still have trouble believing it, but yes, you have. I just have to wonder where all the mass goes."

"Straight to his chest," Uzume said sardonically. "Trust me, she's kind of stacked for a normal human girl her age and height."

"But not for a Sekirei," Chiho said tartly, her eyes glancing down at Uzume's chest and then back up in amusement.

"Not even a little," Uzume replied with a laugh, jiggling in place and watching Chiho's eyes track the movement. She then looked up as the clock hit the hour and there was a distant chime. Visiting time was only an hour long, and she could tell that Chiho was already beginning to feel tired again. "Well, it's nearly time for me to go, but I have one more outfit I want to show you. Then I'll leave you to take a nap, okay?"

Chiho nodded with a sigh. "I am sorry. You deserve a real Ashikabi, someone who could be out and about with you, not someone who is like an anchor tying you here!"

"Don't ever think like that!" Uzume replied sternly, moving over and kissing Chiho again, though there was nothing chaste about this one. "I winged myself on you for a reason, Chiho-baby, and it's called **love**! I don't care about any of this," she said gesturing at the bed and the hospital around them. "I care about you. Whatever I have to do to make certain you keep on getting your medicine, to make certain that you are one day healed, I'll do it! I'll put up with anything for that, because you're that important to me."

As Chiho was still recovering from the kiss and the blush that statement evoked, Uzume moved back around the screen, grinning. "And, speaking of, I wanted to give you a little more incentive to get better...."

"I, I don't think I need any more incentive after that kiss, Uzume-chan," Chiho said as she shook her head trying to get over the impact of it. Then her eyes widened as Uzume stepped back around the curtain. "Oh, **oh my!**"

Uzume had changed quite a bit faster than even Ranma would've been able to, and, when she stepped out from behind the screen, she was wearing what could be termed the 'classic Southern Belle' look: very short cut off jean shorts and a tight, red, shorn off shirt tied shut under her breasts rather than buttoned. It was obvious that this look had been created for someone with quite a bit less in the chest area, since the shirt was straining near to the breaking point to contain Uzume, giving quite a lot of delightful under-and-over-boob for Chiho's eyes to feast upon along with her trim, fit stomach area and long to-die-for legs.

If Chiho's medical problems had been blood related, the fact that her face was now suffused with blood might well have caused issues. As it was, Uzume quickly whipped out a small camera and took a picture of the full facial blush that Chiho was now exhibiting.

Then she moved over and very deliberately pressed her chest into Chiho's face, holding her there in a hug that was both tender and exceptionally suggestive at the same time. "Just giving those T-cells of yours some motivation to help you get better Chiho-baby," she murmured, leaning down to kiss her lightly before pulling away. "Now, you get some sleep," she said with a wink. "And happy dreams, yeah?"

"U, Uzume-chan!" Chiho stuttered, but Uzume only cackled, grabbed up her bag and heading for the door. Outside she quickly found a bathroom where she changed back into her normal outfit. The Southern Belle uniform was a bit much even for Uzume to go around on the streets in, after all. But, all in all, Uzume was quite happy with how her admittedly far too short visit with her Ashikabi had gone. She was even whistling as she entered the elevator and started downward.

Her good mood had evaporated moments later, and she stared angrily at the man in glasses. "This is fucking extortion! Every time I come here, you raise the price for Chiho's treatments! I have the money that I was told I would

need for her weekly medical bill the last time I was in here!"

"This is not our problem," the man in glasses, whose name she had yet to learn, said calmly. "Hidaka-san needs more medicine every week to keep the disease at bay, that is simply fact."

"Oh, like it's fact that you're here pressuring me!? Don't take me for an idiot. If I'm going to get reamed, can I at least speak to your boss in person?" she said irritably.

"I'm afraid that won't happen. Not any time soon, at any rate. You will have to continue dealing with me. And you know that we have offered you several opportunities to earn that pay, Sekirei Number 10, Uzume of the Veils," the man continued, only a twitch at one corner of his mouth showing anything but cool, professional detachment.

Uzume flinched at that, her hands clenching at her sides. "If it wasn't against the rules, I would so fucking put you through a wall right now! This is fucking extortion," she repeated her earlier comment.

"Not at all. As I said," the man in glasses said, still cool as he held out the medical results of Chiho's latest therapy session, "please look at all at this and then compare our prices to other hospitals in the area. Really, we would be doing you a favor, both providing a steep discount on her therapy and medicine and the opportunity to pay it in the first place."

Uzume grabbed the clipboard angrily. "I will research it, you can bet on that." But then she subsided, almost shrinking in on herself as her anger left her to be replaced by the fear for her Ashikabi. "And my payment?"

"You have given us enough to pay for three days' worth of treatment," the man replied with a nod. "At the end of that time, however, further arrangements will need to be made."

Uzume growled, regaining some of her fire. "Fine! You'll have my answer in three days, then. But if anything happens to Chiho between then and now," she said, stepping into the man's personal space and grabbing him by the throat, pushing him against the wall, "I'll be looking for you, and no rule will stop me from doing what I have to protect her!"

"Excellent," the man gasped, still somehow in control despite Uzume's hand on his throat. "That is precisely the correct attitude to have in this case and what will make you so useful to my employer."

With a grunt of disgust, Uzume dropped him and continued on her way, now wrestling with a moral dilemma. Nabiki had lined up a few jobs for her over the next few days, but they wouldn't be enough to pay for Chiho's continued treatment. And while she wasn't very at home with the medical jargon, it looked legitimate. *But, whatever the case there, they're pushing me into a corner here! So, do, do I try to go it alone, do what I have to get my Chiho her medicine, or...or do I own up and pray someone else has a better answer?*

OOOOOO

That night Ranma stood outside the Tendo's house, pulling at his pigtail. It had been freshly tied back, and he wore a suit consisting of a dark blue blazer with a black undershirt and black pants. Matsu and Miya both said he cleaned up very well, while Akitsu simply blushed. Ranma had promised her that he would dress up like this or even better for their next date, which seemed to make Akitsu glow with happiness, even though her face didn't change at all. Ranma was growing to actually enjoy knowing what she was feeling even if he couldn't tell visually.

Now, however, he was quite nervous. There was a big difference between going on a date with Nabiki and going with Akitsu. Nabiki had expectations. Nabiki had an entire, somewhat normal life growing up to tell her what she should expect from a date. Akitsu didn't. With Akitsu, Ranma felt he could play it by ear. With Nabiki, that wouldn't really jive. That was why he was outside their house and had changed over at Miya's rather than here. He felt he needed to do these things right.

Kasumi opened the door and smiled warmly at Ranma, stepping out and actually giving him a hug. "Even if you and Nabiki don't end up an item, I have to thank you for taking this so seriously. I don't think Nabiki has been on a date in years, and I hope you'll give her a good time."

"I'm going to try," Ranma said somewhat nervously as he pulled at his collar, but Kasumi slapped his hand down with a laugh. As she did, she gave Ranma an appreciative once over. "You clean up very well, Ranma," she said with a nod.

"Kagari does too, you know," Ranma said, figuring he should throw the other guy a bone.

"Perhaps," Kasumi said smile. "Perhaps." While Kagari had gone back to Miya's, he had called several times during

the day. Kasumi had rather enjoyed that, since Akitsu was out with Ranma and Nabiki, Akane weren't home much of the time and it had given her someone to talk to. Kagari also turned out to be a decent conversationalist with an interesting view of the world in general. It had been something of a breath of fresh air, much as Ranma's initial arrival here in Nerima had been to Kasumi.

"However, I shouldn't keep you," she said with a faint smile still on her face, brushing at some imagined dirt on his chest before turning inside and calling for Nabiki.

When Nabiki appeared, Ranma gulped, staring in awe. "Um, wow! Just, wow! You look amazing, I mean...." He then remembered what he had learned on his date with Akitsu and ended the compliment before he could say something he didn't mean.

Nabiki smiled at that, flushing a little at the praise and sizing up Ranma in turn. "You look good too! Very good." *Damn, almost edible. Maybe we don't have to go anywhere. Maybe we can just go back up to my room and....* She shook that thought off and turned to look at Kasumi.

Nabiki was wearing a skirt that fell to just below her knees which looked too tight to move in, but which had a slit along the side, allowing for easy movement. On top she wore a blouse that almost looked like a business suit, but with a good bit of cleavage visible, and her hair had been neatly combed as well—though, given how short it was, Nabiki hadn't done anything special with it. She wore a bit of purple lipstick, but that was all, and on her wrist she wore an ancient looking bracelet of some kind.

Leaning forward, she kissed her older sister on the cheek. "Thanks for finding mom's bracelet for me," Nabiki whispered. "It meant a lot."

"I know," Kasumi said with a smile, hugging her. "We each have something special of hers. Now go on and knock your date dead!"

"So, where are we going?" Nabiki asked, stepping over the threshold and moving to take Ranma's arm with her own.

"Well, if you'll allow me, I think first the lady should see the city at night from on high. And then, from even higher," Ranma replied.

Nodding, Nabiki let Ranma sweep her into his arms, carrying her in a classic Princess carry, much to her embarrassed happiness. She laid her head on his shoulder and asked, "'And then from even higher,' what do you mean by that?"

"Well, it turns out that the Italian restaurant I really wanted to take you to was booked solid today. Someone was throwing around a lot of money and apparently they just bought out half the restaurant. But they do take out, and I figured for a romantic place, Tokyo Tower is kind of hard to beat."

"Tokyo Tower doesn't let you eat in its observation room,..." Nabiki objected, then blinked. "You mean we're going to eat on top of Tokyo Tower!?"

"Yep," Ranma said with a laugh, "although you'll have to carry the food. I haven't quite figured out the ki space issue yet."

"Ki space?"

"It's this martial arts technique where you can hide weapons and things inside an expanded pocket. I think it might be part of your school of Anything Goes, actually. But the only people I know who use it are our old men, Ryoga, and Miya. Miya doesn't know how to describe the technique and only uses it sparingly anyway, and pig-boy is missing in action for now."

Shrugging, Nabiki settled back against Ranma's shoulder and enjoyed the ride and the view as they traveled, talking about nothing in particular as they did. They soon reached the restaurant and ordered their take out, sitting down at the bar where both of them ordered ginger ales, something that surprised Ranma. He held up his and looked at Nabiki speculatively. "I'm not going to drink alcohol because I think it's a sign of weakness and something a martial artist should never do, but what about you?"

"Your father doesn't have the monopoly on poor decisions while drunk," she said drolly. "My father was a perfect example of a useless drunk all on his own at times before you and your father moved in. Besides, it's not only martial artists that fear losing control. And getting drunk on our first date would probably set a very bad precedent anyway."

"I suppose it would," Ranma said with a chuckle. They sat and talked for a time, waiting for their food, mostly about Nabiki and her plans for the future. Then Ranma paid, something Nabiki appreciated, and left, whereupon Nabiki took the food in her arms and was swept up into Ranma's arms in turn. Ignoring the crowd of onlookers, Ranma leaped up onto the nearest rooftop and then was away. "Quick question," she said. "Are you going to be able to get us up the side of Tokyo Tower with your hands full?"

Laughing, Ranma nodded. "It's actually kind of easy to scale most of it, all those girders, you now? Other than that, I can run up the side of it. There's this technique called 'Clinging Like a Scared Spider,' comes in handy at the oddest times."

Ranma was proven correct in this, and Nabiki squealed a little as she felt herself go vertically up the side of a portion of the tower as Ranma simply kept on running like he was the ground. "Okay!" she shouted, "In the future, none of this on dates! The view's great, but I'm not really a thrill ride sort of girl!"

"I'll remember that," Ranma said with a little bit of chagrin audible in his voice even over the rush of their passage. But soon enough they were up on top of Tokyo Tower, sitting on the rooftop of the observation deck. There Nabiki started to lay out the food and Ranma the utensils as they stared out over the city. Taking a few bites, Nabiki approved of the chicken parmesan she had ordered, smiling happily at the taste. "Have to get Kasumi to start making new things," she muttered. "I don't care if Akane and Daddy don't approve, more variety is the spice of life!"

"You're telling me!" Ranma said with a laugh. "It seemed every day when I was with my old man we'd be in a new place with new local foods. You have not lived until you've tasted hot Indian food! It'll burn the top of your mouth, but it's **soooo** good!"

From there Ranma told Nabiki about some of his travels, to which Nabiki replied with some of the places she had seen on TV, asking questions about this or that country. Ranma had traveled a lot in Asia and a bit into India, but hadn't traveled beyond the subcontinent. He had been to Thailand Taiwan and a few of the other islands, but only for short trips. "That's kind of a pity, since I think my old man neglected a lot of the soft or armed arts there."

Surprisingly, Nabiki had him beat in distance, if nothing else, having been to Hawaii once when she was younger as part of a school trip, which the principal had led. "Oddly enough, I think I was the last time any of us saw him. Weird," Nabiki said, now frowning as she thought about that before shrugging that mystery off. "But it was fun, anyway, and really interesting."

After a bit, though, the conversation shifted to the Sekirei Plan, Miya, and then to what else Ranma had learned from his father, but then they moved on to his impression of his father as an individual. That was a kind of annoying topic, but it allowed Nabiki to ask a question she been dying to ask for a while. "What about your mom? Do you have any memories of her?"

Ranma shook his head with a wry chuckle. "Nope. I think she's dead, frankly. My old man certainly has never mentioned her. Either that or I was a result of a one night stand kind of thing."

"Would...that is, would you like me to look into that? I have a lot of resources I could use for research of that nature." Nabiki asked slowly.

Cocking his head thoughtfully, Ranma slowly nodded. "I think I'd like that. I've never really thought about having a mother figure, to be honest. I mean, all I can remember as far as back as I can think is my Oyaji. I suppose you could say Miya's stepped into that role for me in a few ways, though I certainly wouldn't mention her being like a mother to her face."

"No, that seems like a decidedly bad idea," Nabiki said with a droll laugh.

She went back to eating for a moment, and Ranma asked, "What about your family? If you don't mind me asking, I mean. You seem a little unfriendly, I suppose, towards your younger sister at times, and your old man too. Given the fact that your old man sprang this whole marriage thing on you like my own did me, I can understand if that's the cause, but there seems to be more to it when you're talking about him and even Akane sometimes." Ranma had noticed that a time or two, although it had taken a while to sink in.

Nabiki sighed. "I love my family, but I think I can only really say that I love Kasumi unconditionally. My dad, I love him, but I think I lost a lot of respect for him when he collapsed after mom died. She died of a car crash, of all things, and it was so sudden. I realize that, and I know it hurt him, but he wasn't the only one hurting, and he just...collapsed. Kasumi was left to pick up the pieces, and I don't think I'll ever really forgive him for forcing that on her even if she was the one who stepped into that role willingly."

She took a drink from the large bottle of ginger ale they were using as a drink and went on. "As for Akane, she's always been Daddy's Little Princess." She looked at Ranma sharply. "Don't tell her I said that—she's mellowed out quite a bit over the years, although she still has a sense of entitlement that's larger than her means. But when she was young, she would sort of push me out of the picture."

Ranma's eyes narrowed and then trailed down her body and then back up. "You were interested in the martial arts," he said, the words a statement, not a question.

"Right in one. Should've figured you'd pick up on that," Nabiki nodded ruefully. "But yes, I was interested in the martial arts at first. But Akane, she pushed me out of the way. 'Look at me, Daddy,'" she mimicked, "'Look at me! I'm not saying I was great at it—she really did have more of a flair for it than I ever could—but it hurt all the same. And she did it again in other ways too. Acting, cooking—which I wanted to learn just to spent time with Kasumi—drawing, first choice of clothes, bedding, small things like that. Most of that I don't care about now or I know I'd have ended up dropping anyway. I mean, I might not be as bad as Akane is a cooking, but I know my limitations. Acting, there Akane, again, has a true flair for it. But it still hurt at the time, you know, and Akane never realized she was doing it in the first place!"

"You draw?" Ranma asked after a moment's silence.

"I **used** to," Nabiki said oppressively. "I was kind of horrible at it. I'm a lot better at writing and business and Akane's never tried to steal those from me."

"Families are complicated, I suppose," Ranma said with a sigh. "I don't know if I would've put up with being pushed to the side like you did, but I can kind of respect the fact that you were willing to go along with it, if you know what I mean, for peace in the family and all that. I guess, at the time, I mean, most of this was happening after your mom's death?" When Nabiki, nodded he went on. "That means you took one for the team, took one for your family. That I can respect a lot."

Ranma sighed. "I don't think I'll ever have that kind of relationship with my own family even if it turns out I have sisters or brothers out there. After all, they'd be nearly complete strangers to me and vice versa. And my Oyaji? I respect him, I even love him, like you said. But like him, trust him with anything outside of the martial arts? Hell no."

Nabiki laughed at that and nodded. Then she looked out over the city again, sighing as she leaned back into Ranma's chest. The two of them had been cuddling like that as they ate, with Nabiki between Ranma's legs and leaning back against him, one of his arms always around her waist, just for safety reasons, of course. Now they fell silent as they finished off their food, and Ranma began to pack up with his free hand, Nabiki still leaning against him. "What are you thinking about?" he asked eventually.

"The future, the game, you and Akitsu," she said with a sigh. "I'm a little jealous of what you've begun to make with her. But she's been hurt so bad, I can't think of getting between you. But," she said wickedly, turning his head down to face her as she twisted her upper body, "I would like some of what she gets, you know? And there is a traditional way of ending a..."

With that obvious cue Ranma leaned in, kissing her, his hands around her waist moving down to squeeze her thighs and holding her still.

If kissing Akitsu always made his lips kind of cool and she tasted like mint and evergreen, Nabiki was far more heated. Her lips gave a little more, and she tasted almost like bubblegum along with some hints of the food they'd been eating. She was also twitching and moving in interesting ways, her body reacting to the kiss. And where Akitsu was almost docile at first, Nabiki instantly responded, pressing against him, and was the first to open her mouth, letting her tongue flick out against his lips. Kissing either girl was a treat, Ranma reflected, but a very different one.

For her part Nabiki was just lost in the kiss. She'd been kissed before but never romanced quite like this, this whole date having proven a major high-mark in her romantic history. And Ranma seemed to almost read her like a book, his hands moving this way and that on her thighs and hips, his mouth and then his tongue attacking her in just the right way. *Yes! This is how you end the day!*

But just as Nabiki was wondering if maybe she should hint that she was up for some over the clothes petting, Ranma's arms tightened around her and he threw himself backwards, rolling with her. *What the hell!?* Just as she was about to voice that angry thought along with several dozen curses, she heard a heavy thwack and looked at where the two of them had been sitting. There a spear had sunk deep into the metal of the rooftop and was currently quivering.

Ranma, on the other hand, wasn't looking at the spear but at the spear-thrower and her companions. All around them were five Sekirei, four of them currently standing on the roof, the fifth still in the process of pulling herself up over the lip of the curved rooftop of the tower.

He recognized three of them from previous run-ins, including the woman who had just attempted to spear them. She was the same one who had been leading the attempt to capture Tsukiumi, a green-haired woman with a belly top and a bikini kind of exercise thing underneath. That told him that this group was from Higa, and he scowled angrily. *Higa! Man, I thought I was pissed before, but you just upped the ante to a level I didn't even know existed!*

But it was one of the newcomers, a girl with a buzz-cut, black hair, and a tan, who spoke up, cracking her fists together. "Heh, so this is the asshole who's been making so much trouble for us? I don't see it."

At that Ranma's scowl turned into a smirk, and he kicked off the rooftop, crossing the distance between the speaker and his starting position within an eye-blink. It was all the fist-type Sekirei could do to get her hands up to block the punch, but the impact still threw her backwards several steps. Before any of the others could respond, Ranma was back standing in front of Nabiki and pushing her behind him. "Look closer," he quipped.

"Kill the fucker!" the speaker shouted, wringing out her arms, her forearms throbbing slightly from the punch they'd blocked even as she charged forward.

Internally grimacing, Ranma only let a small, confident smirk appear on his face as he took a stance. "Oh no, the Bishole of the East set his enforcers on me. Whatever should I do?" Even so, Ranma knew he was in a bad place right now. Sekirei were routinely pretty tough in comparison to most humans, and fighting this many of them while protecting Nabiki was not going to be easy.

He was proven correct an instant later when the Sekirei spread out and attacked from all sides almost automatically. Pushing Nabiki down, Ranma flung himself backwards into a kick. The Sekirei he was aiming at was another fist type, but one which dressed almost like Musubi save for the two large blades that were thrust out of her long sleeves. She blocked the kick with the side of one of her blades, using it like a thin shield, but Ranma used that to bounce back over Nabiki's head for a second time.

A second punch was blocked by the side of the spear that had been thrown at them earlier. Surprisingly, it didn't break, but Ranma once more used the momentum of that to get in the way of and catch a thrown chakram that would have hit Nabiki, hurling it towards another of the attackers.

Landing lightly, he thrust out with a palm, catching the end of the green-haired girl's staff and allowing it to press him back. Twisting around the staff to one side, he grabbed the end of it with that same hand, pulling the green-haired girl into the way of an attack from the tan girl, kicking out at the same time at another of the attackers, the one with the twin swords. He didn't aim at her body, though, but the wrist of the hand she was using to try to bring around one of her swords in a crosswise cut. This deadened her grip, and Ranma rolled forward, grabbing the blade and hammering an elbow into her head. This hurled her backward, the first to be put out of the fight, unconscious.

Just then, Nabiki screamed and Ranma twisted around in a blur of motion. The girl with the tan had taken advantage of the brief moment Ranma wasn't guarding her to kick Nabiki in the side almost absentmindedly. Nabiki screamed as she tried to roll with the blow, but couldn't. The full impetus of the blow sent her careening away, almost off of the rooftop.

Lunging forward, Ranma grabbed her by the arm, halting her progress and further twisting her away, tossing her back towards the center of the roof before leaping up over to land right in front of where she would've landed, kicking out hard against one of the other Sekirei, the one who had been the last to get onto the roof and one who apparently used daggers, both for throwing and stabbing, given the bandoleer across her chest. Not that this mattered, since Ranma's kick caught her in the face, shattering her nose and sending her backwards with a cry.

In return, Ranma wasn't able to both protect Nabiki and dodge a blow from the tan fist fighter, who caught him in the side of the head, ringing his bell slightly. But despite that pain he grabbed her arm, pulled her close, and hammered a blow into her sternum, which caused the breath to explode out of her. Then the spear-users spear cut at his head again, sending him dodging backwards, bringing up his purloined sword to block. *Fuck, these two are faster than the run of the mill Sekirei!*

For a few seconds Ranma danced there, taking to the air only occasionally, given the need to defend Nabiki, all four of the Sekirei in close and attacking. The dagger and chakram wielder tried occasionally to toss their weapons at near pointblank range, unwilling to attempt to get in under his reach, but it didn't work. The chakram user lost one of her weapons, slashed in two by Ranma's sword, and the daggers were simply dodged, disappearing out into the night

sky past the tower's rooftop.

But the spear wielder actually seemed to be better at facing Ranma with a sword than she had been fighting him weaponless. Ranma wondered if that was how she had trained, but, regardless, that and the fact that he was still defending Nabiki meant he couldn't quite get up the concentration needed to use a ki attack or even attack again.

Then Ranma made a mistake. Intending to break this stalemate, he hopped into the air and lashed out to both sides. His sword thrust out to one side nearly taking the chakram wielder in the chest while a punch sent the spear wielder skidding backwards. But she dodged under his assault rather than ducking to the side as Ranma had expected. And then she lunged toward Nabiki, using her chakram like it was a knife.

Nabiki quickly brought her own hands up and hit the woman's arm away at the wrist, redirecting the chakram, but couldn't dodge the punch that caught her in the chest or the spinning staff from the other woman, which caught her in the side and hurled her backwards again towards the edge of the rooftop. And this time Ranma couldn't get to her in time because the staff and fist-wielders moved on him in tandem, lashing out with attacks even faster than they had been moving previously. Even with his purloined sword in hand Ranma couldn't get through them in time.

"AHHHH!" Nabiki screamed as the punch flung her off the edge of the roof.

"Nabiki!" Ranma roared, enraged. His eyes flared and, still in the air, Ranma pushed his ki out into his sword before lashing out with a tight twisting slash. The attack cut through the staff wielder's staff, and then the ki attack lashed out in turn, bisecting the green-haired woman in a blast of ki energy.

As the others faltered in shock and horror, he continued the spin, lashing out with another crescent shaped ki blast, which caused them to duck away. This let him drop the sword, and he raced towards the edge, hurling himself off it and down. As Nabiki screamed and continued to fall, Ranma used all of his knowledge of mid-air combat to speed himself up and caught her halfway down the tower.

"Hold on to me!" Ranma shouted, not that it was needed, considering Nabiki had immediately latched onto his arms and then his neck and waist as if they were her only lifelines. Which they actually were at this point.

With his arms now freed, Ranma tore the sleeve off one of his arms, Ranma then reached down and, as they flipped through the air, ripped off one of his pants legs as well, tearing it and tossing them both into the air where he quickly tied them together, creating a long sort of sash. With that done, he twisted it to one side, lashing out towards the side of Tokyo Tower.

His aim was good, and it whipped around one of the girders there. The instant he felt it tug on their downward momentum, Ranma funneled some ki into the makeshift sash, hardening it and toughening the fibers, which pulled them to a stop quickly. It nearly wrenched his arm out of its socket even so, but Ranma was then able to use his legs against side of the tower to bounce off for a moment, deadening the impetus of their fall, protecting Nabiki all the while, even using his own head to smack into the side of the tower over her own when they twisted in midair and he couldn't correct in time.

The girl was now currently sobbing into his chest, but Ranma knew the Sekirei were going to be down after them soon enough. "Nabiki, I need you to keep holding on to me, okay!?"

Nabiki shivered convulsively, but her arms tightened around him, and she nodded once into his chest. Ranma let go of his grip on the sash, leaving it there to confuse and bother the Tokyo Tower cleaning crew in the future, kicked out hard, and leaped away. Once in midair, Ranma flung his arms and legs out, slowing their descent slightly until he could land easily on a nearby rooftop, hopping a few times to deaden their momentum. Once he was done, he set Nabiki down, not without some protest from the girl, and turned to face the three Sekirei who remained, as they had followed them down, led by the tan fist fighter, whose eyes looked bloodshot now in the light of the city's lights. "You're going to die for killing Toyotama!"

Ranma growled, then leaped up to meet them in midair. For a second the fist fighter's eyes widened in surprise, but then Ranma was on them, a punch catching her on the side of the face and sending her careening through the air to one side as Ranma twisted around, flipping through the air and lashing out against one of the others. The punch this time caught the dagger wielder in the chest, catching her hard, sending her to slam first into a nearby rooftop and then bouncing off to fall down onto the street.

The spinning disk wielder, however, was just far enough away to be able to dodge away from his kick at her, and she landed on the rooftop before him, sending her last chakram towards him. But Ranma simply flipped through the air, catching the disc by its interior opening and hurling it back towards her. She gasped but wasn't able to dodge, and the

circular blade stabbed deep into her chest, the impact flinging her backwards off the rooftop.

Ranma then landed across from the fist fighter, only to find her coming towards him faster than he had anticipated, punching out hard with a series of combos that looked like something from karate and a few other styles mixed. Ranma, though, simply dodged, glaring back at her all the while, then locked one of her arms at its full extension, bringing up his other hand and, with a grunt of effort, breaking her arm.

The girl grunted in pain, but that was all, and she brought her other fist around in a punch that caught him in the chest, pushing him away and breaking his hold. The next instant, though, Ranma caught her on the kneecap with a kick, shattering that in turn. As she fell forward, another blow caught her in the side of the head, finishing the fight with the sharp crack of bone shattering.

Staring down at the girl as she fell to the rooftop bonelessly, Ranma shook his head. He didn't like killing, but he had felt the woman's skull shatter under that last blow and couldn't find it in himself to be all that sad. The two most skilled attackers, at the very least, were dead, the spinning disk wielder might well have died two and the others were just scattered and unconscious. *They came with violence and death in their eyes, and I had to match them, I suppose. Maybe if I was alone I wouldn't have gone to that extreme, but they nearly killed Nabiki! But I won't go against the others, though, not since they're already down and out. And besides, I think I can hear helicopters coming.* Turning in the direction of the MBI tower, Ranma could see several helicopters coming towards. *Best to get gone, then, I think.*

With that Ranma moved over to where Nabiki sat, staring at the body of the last attacker and then up at Ranma. "Are you all right?" he asked softly, getting down on one knee front of her and reaching out to touch her shoulder.

She shivered but nodded. "I'm physically all right, I suppose, maybe a few bruises here and there. But I.... That was a bit too close to the action for me, Ranma! And the way they tried to target me in order to weaken your defense, that's **really** bad too. Can you just take me home, please?" she said, and it was quite clear to Ranma that Nabiki was about a second away from histrionics here. Nodding, Ranma pulled Nabiki into his arms and then started to leave over the rooftops.

By the time they had reached the Tendo house Nabiki had regained much of her self-control. She stood on somewhat shaky legs when he set her down in the garden, but gripped his shoulders, looking into his face. "Ranma, the date was wonderful. It's not your fault that we were attacked like that." She paused, then smirked somewhat caustically. "Well, I suppose it is a little bit of your fault, considering they were targeting you. But it's not your fault that they in turn tried to target me. Am I right to say that's against the rules of this game?"

Ranma nodded, his teeth clenching a little. "It is, big time. They're not supposed to target Ashikabi or even normal people. I think it speaks well of you and your abilities to deal with as you did."

"Thanks, but again, that was a little too much action for me. I'm not a martial artist, regardless of what I might've been when I was younger. And this made me realize that as long as this game is going on, being with you is going to be very dangerous."

"So does that mean there's not going to be any more dates, or that you're, you're calling things off entirely?" Ranma asked, unsure how he felt about that. On the one hand Nabiki was right, every time she was seen in his company, she became more of a target for people like the Bishole from the East. But he enjoyed Nabiki's company and wanted to see where their relationship could go, though he was also still leery about splitting his attention between her and Akitsu. He hesitated for a second then said, "But this plan or whatever it's called won't go on forever."

"That's true," Nabiki said with a smile "And I like I said, you do clean up very well."

Ranma laughed, letting his hands move from where they had been holding Nabiki's shoulders down her sides to her hips. "I could say the same to you."

Blushing slightly at the touch and at the look in Ranma's eyes, Nabiki went on. "But I need to think about the bottom line, and the bottom line is, we have a lot of time to keep to know one another, and we can do that without going on public dates and stuff like that." Then she smirked, leaning in and kissing him on the cheek, where she whispered, "Think of it as just another reason to get this game over with quickly."

With that Nabiki pulled away, winked at him one last time, and entered the house. Instead of heading to bed though, she first raided her father's drink cabinet for a tot to help her sleep, her hands shaking as she realized how close to death she had just been.

Ranma stood there for a moment, shaking his head as she watched her go, then growled angrily to himself, cracking

his knuckles. This was the second time that fools from the East had attempted to attack him on a date. There would not be a third. It was time to get serious about taking on Bishole. *That pretty boy is going to pay for this!*

OOOOOO

From nearby Tokyo Tower, Karasuba smiled in the bit of shadow that had obscured her entirely from view, lowering the binoculars she had used to follow the action on the tower's rooftop. *Well now, wasn't that something? First it looked almost as if he was playing around, protecting that weak human girl, but damn if he didn't show me something interesting there at the end.*

Racing forward, Karasuba leaped and landed on the side of the tower, racing up it in much the same way Ranma had earlier. Landing on the roof, she looked around, examining the body and ignoring the skittering of the human worms from the helicopter currently parked there. She scowled just a bit at one of the workers around the bisected body of Toyotama, then leaned down over the body to examine it.

This woman had died from the same kind of attack that Karasuba herself could wield, and she thought she had recognized some of the sword stances the boy had used during the fight. *Miya. That's where I've seen that defense. Hah, he might be her student! Oh that's delicious! That makes my orders to take him down even better.*

Karasuba stared out over the city and thought about going after him now, but decided against it. *I know where you live, little man. I know where you go. I know where to ambush you. But I want to fight you at your best, not when you're tired and protecting some weak human girl. And then, then when I cut off your head and mail it to Miya, I'll finally have the real fight I've been wanting for so long.*

OOOOOO

Where Karasuba was happy, Minaka was simply amused and furious in turn. In this game MBI was supposed to arrive and take the loser who had been deactivated during a fight where they could be...retooled. This process added to their powers significantly while having a very negative effect on their mental abilities. But Ranma had killed Higa's two enforcers, two of the toughest Sekirei in the game, and two of many Minaka had hoped to use further.

One of them had been sliced in half! The damage was so bad that two of his retrieval teams had had to turn away and throw up as he watched via camera. The other was simply dead, her skull shattered so hard that some of the splinters of the skull had penetrated her brain to the extent that it would take a surgeon pull them all out, and even then it wasn't altogether possible you would find it all. But her body, at least, was usable.

That discovery allowed Minaka's anger about the first to subside, and he became more amused as he re-watched a recording of the fight from start to finish—he had been in bed when it started. He noticed now that the sword wielding Sekirei had actually escaped, retreating the instant she woke up from being knocked unconscious. She in turn had grabbed the other two wounded and escaped before the helicopters could arrive.

No doubt they will be reporting the disaster even now. That thought actually brought a manic grin to Minaka's face. There was, after all, no love lost between him and Higa. *Higa thinks himself a mover and a shaker while he is simply a bit player, a tool for those who are his better. Still, I wonder what his response to this will be?*

OOOOOO

The Ashikabi of the East's response was fear and fury. In one action he had lost his two best warriors and with them a loss of clout. Not with his enemies, that was obvious. No, what worried Higa was what his ostensible allies, those Ashikabi who he had convinced or, more often, forced to work with him, would think about this. *Is there any way to keep this from going public?* he thought, fingers tapping on his desk and then he shook his head. *No, even if I ordered my Sekirei to keep it a secret, the knowledge of the fight would spread thanks to MBI and their camera system.* That meant it would be impossible to keep it a secret.

No, he'd have to figure out some other means to keep them in line. Higa had several dozen such already prepared, of course. Blackmail, secrets, family members, all of them could be used if need be. Would they be used, was the question, but he would deal with that on a case-by-case basis.

But that in turn made him turn his attention to the biggest issue: Ranma. *The fact that the, the bizarre **freak of nature**, lives means he will lash out again. Lash out at me specifically again.* While normally Higa wasn't a coward in the traditional sense of the word, he did know his limitations. He also had a supremely arrogant view of the universe in that he believed his own personal life was the most important thing. He could rebuild everything else of his empire even if it all came crashing down. *And, in many ways, Ranma is simply a physical threat. There is no chance of him*

being a monetary or business threat. So long as I remain alive, I remain in this game, and I remain master of my own fate.

With that in mind, he began to issue orders, switching out certain tasks his own Sekirei would have seen to with those of his allies, who he knew he could trust as much as he trusted anyone. In this manner, he freed up most of his Sekirei to come and defend him personally. With that done, Higa retreated from the hospital that had become his main center since Ranma's assault on his person. It wasn't very defensible, but it also hadn't been tainted with the fact that its defenses had already been penetrated. The only defenses he had here, though, were the lives of the people within the hospital and the fact that it was supposed to be neutral ground.

But Higa did not trust that to stop Ranma. After all, he wasn't actually one of the players in this game. It was the same reasoning Higa had used to justify sending assassins after him. Ranma might be in a relationship with one of the alien creatures, but that didn't make him an official Ashikabi.

So Higa and most of his Sekirei retreated from the hospital that had been his main center for operations, retreating back to the original position he had been using, the corporate building that Ranma had already attacked successfully. Much of the security had been upgraded since then, and Higa decided that, even though it was somewhat irritating, he would now sleep with at least one of his Sekirei every night. Hopefully they would be enough of a deterrent to at least stop Ranma for a time.

OOOOOO

The next day, Ranma left the Tendo place and headed immediately towards Izumo House. As early as he was to leave the house, however, Akitsu was not the only one who found him. Kasumi was already awake, preparing breakfast.

"You're up early," she said by way of greeting with a faint smile on her face, but that smile fell as she took in Ranma's expression. "Something happened on the date with Nabiki?"

Akitsu, too, had caught that look, and she quickly moved over from where she had been helping Kasumi, actually patting Ranma down from head to toe to make certain he wasn't hurt.

It was kind of distracting, but Ranma put up with it for a time before taking Akitsu's hand in his and holding her still, looking at them both. "Yeah, something happened: we were attacked. I was able to beat them off, and Nabiki's fine except for some bruising and having been put through one hell of a scare. Do you think any of the others would be interested in listening to the story? Because I **really** don't want to go over it more than once. Again." *Seriously, telling people what went wrong or what they didn't see or whatever is getting old!*

Nonetheless, at breakfast Ranma did so once more and put up with Akane glaring at him angrily. In her eyes it was Ranma's fault that her sister had been in danger, after all.

Her response was not Ranma's primary concern, though. Akitsu was furious. Ranma could tell this by the inch thick permafrost that started to slowly spread out from her and the glint in her normally docile, welcoming eyes. Ranma quickly took her hand in his and pulled her into a sideways hug, an arm over her shoulder. "Easy there, Akitsu. I'm fine, Nabs is fine, nothing permanent happened. Don't worry about it."

"Don't call me Nabs. Anyway, we decided after that that Ranma and I should put off dating until this game is finished. After that, maybe we can see where we'll go from there," Nabiki said with a scowl of her own as she took over the tale, seeing that Ranma was busy. "But what are your plans, Ranma? I know you well enough to know that you're not going to take this lying down. Not when both myself and Akitsu were attacked on your dates."

Akitsu just shrugged her shoulders as if it was of no moment, which, to her, it hadn't been. The assassins hadn't been much of a threat, really. Not after that, their first shot hadn't been able to kill Ranma, anyway. If that had happened, well, Akitsu was quite certain that much of Japan would not have survived her response. Ice ages tend to be very ecumenical in who and what they hurt.

"Oh hell, no," Ranma said with a dark smirk that did not in any way take away from the hard gaze in his blue eyes. For some reason, that sight caused Nabiki to flush a little, and she smirked back just as evilly. "No, the East is going to feel my response to this in no uncertain terms."

"That's all very well," Kasumi said, slightly uncomfortable with this talk of violence although approving of the reason for it. "But if you are going to go to the Inn today, which I assume you are, could you take me with you? I wish to meet Miya and speak to Kagari once more."

"So there really is some interest there?" Nabiki teased.

"Some," Kasumi said with a faint smile, not rising further than that to her younger sister's teases. "He is a handsome fellow, at the very least, if rather shallow seeming at times. Still, that can be cured."

"Ouch," Ranma muttered, shaking his head.

So it was that Ranma carried Kasumi on his back, which was not as pleasant as it might have seemed. Yes, carrying Nabiki in his arms had been very distracting the night before, but feeling Kasumi's slightly larger chest pressing into his back was just as bad. He wasn't really interested in Kasumi, per se, but he was a guy, darn it! Whatever his curse was like. So the thought, 'how does she hide those things under her housewife clothing,' kept on going through his head as they moved along.

However, the trip was uneventful, and they arrived at around 10:30 at the inn. Miya opened the door for them, smiling somewhat wanly. "Ranma, I do hope you're not here to make further trouble. We're already having a bit of a crisis here."

"What?" Ranma asked, blinking. "What trouble?"

Miya, however, had looked at the woman on his back and smiled warmly, holding out her hands, her earlier sour mood forgotten for the moment. "This must be Kasumi. Your sister and Ranma both described you quite well. And, dare I ask, are you going to make an honest man out of our Kagari?" she asked somewhat teasingly as Kasumi clasped her arms in turn.

Smiling coquettishly, Kasumi chuckled. "That remains to be seen and at least has half as much to do with Kagari and his actions as my own. I'm not the type to leap into such things, you understand."

"Oh course. The courtship, that is far more important. And can be quite fun, too," Miya said with a laugh. "Young people, they all think it's all about getting that first kiss and then you can get to know them after. Silly."

Ranma smirked, shaking his head as he put an arm around Akitsu's shoulder, pulling her into a sideways hug. "Or you don't rely on anything like that and just forge your connection naturally."

At this Akitsu blushed, though she might have commented that, for all that he thought it might be more 'natural' now, their relationship had been based at first on the fact that she was searching for an Ashikabi so desperately. She didn't say anything, though, simply leaning against his shoulder, a feeling of pure contentment radiating off her.

Miya smiled at them but then shook her head. "If you're here to visit, I'm afraid it's not going to be all of us. Just myself, Kocho and Matsu. Most of my other tenants are about to leave on a rescue mission."

"What?" Ranma asked.

"It turns out that Minato has been having a dream the past two nights of a little girl in trouble."

"Little girl?" Ranma interrupted, causing Miya to thwack him hard over the side of the head and a 'don't interrupt' to leave her lips. "But are there little girl Sekirei?" he muttered, holding the back of his head.

"There are a few; three, I believe; that would qualify as young: thirteen, fourteen, and seven. I don't know them personally," Miya said with a sigh. "But, in any event, the dreams are a certain sign that there is some kind of compatibility based link between Minato and this young girl. What that says about his preferences, I don't know...."

"Hey!" said Kazehana, pushing Miya lightly in the shoulder as she passed by, heading into the sitting area. "That's not funny! Besides, I can tell you all you want about his preferences if you really are interested~~."

"I think not," Miya said, her ladle coming up and thwack in Kazehana upside the head too.

"What was that for?" Kazehana said with a wince.

"Importuning a poor widow woman," Miya said sharply.

"Hmmpf!" Tsukiumi grunted. Though she was there for training, she had allowed herself to be roped into this rescue operation. "It is reprehensible that a child be forced to fight in this game like warriors such as I! We will, perforce, rescue her from those who would use her and then keep her from joining at all."

With a smile at Tsukiumi, Miya turned to look back at Ranma. "But if you're not here to help with that, what are you here for?"

"I'm here for the information I asked the two computer geeks to gather," he said simply. "I want to know how to hurt Higa, and he added yet another reason to do so. He sent an attack team against me and Nabiki last night."

That caught both Kazehana and Miya's attention sharply, and they turned away from where Musubi was volunteering to help Kazehana and Minato, even though her Ashikabi wasn't here. Musubi would join Tsukiumi and would go with Kazehana and Minato to find the young girl caught in a forest, which Minato had seen in his dream. Since there was news of a botanical garden somehow growing out of control that day, they even had a target.

Soon enough Ranma had, once **again**, explained everything, but he noticed that Akitsu had not responded as if this was the second time she'd heard the story. Rather, it had incensed her all over again, and he could once more feel the cold creeping out of her, the permafrost growing with every second.

He took her hand in his and, not even noticing the others around him for a moment, lifted it to his lips and kissed it. "Easy, Akitsu. Remember, nothing happened. I'm still here, right next to ya, okay?"

Then he blushed scarlet as he heard catcalls and whistles from the others around the table as well as Miya's 'Fufufuing' into the back of her hand.

He blushed and looked away but felt the cold receded from around Akitsu. She then moved slightly forward from where she had been sitting behind and to one side of Ranma to right next to him, their knees touching, and she murmured, "Sun-sama," to herself, reaching out with one hand to take his own.

"So you want to hurt Higa even worse?" Miya said after the others had finished teasing Ranma about his response to Akitsu's distress. "But what becomes your priority now, given what Minato told you?" The fact that Miya would not be moving from Izumo House was left unsaid. Though it sometimes galled her, there were few things Higa or anyone else could do to that would be enough to break her agreement with MBI. She would remain on the outside of this game, defending her home and those who took shelter within, but she could do no more without breaking her word.

"You all should go on with your rescue mission," Ranma replied with a shrug. "But I still want the information I was here to get first."

With a nod to one another, the two computer users began to explain what they had all found out about Higa from East. Most of it was monetary and business stuff, which went right over Ranma's head. But the looks on their faces said that they knew how to hurt him in that area, which was enough.

Then they went on about how he had moved his base of operations at first into the hospital that he controlled, causing Uzume to start from where she had been silent, looking pensive and somewhat withdrawn. "Wait!" she interrupted. "Just wait. He's the manager of that hospital!?"

She realized she had everyone's attention and flushed, but Miya made the connection before Uzume could try to wave it off. "Don't tell me," she said angrily. "Your Ashikabi, young Chiho-chan, she's one of the hospital's patients?"

Now caught out, Uzume could only nod. "Yeah." Deciding to go hell for leather, she blurted out, "And I've met with this guy with glasses and slicked back hair, he never gave me his name, just his job description, who said, I mean... he gave me all this information, and it honestly looks legit," she said. "Chiho-baby, she has this rare disease, and..."

"Calm down," Ranma said as Kazehana pulled the other big breasted woman into a hug. "You're among friends here, Uzume. We're not going to judge you or anything. Just spit it out."

Eventually she did so, and Ranma's teeth grit, as Miya's grip on her ladle caused the metal to squeal in protest. "Right!" he said authoritatively. "I think I've got my target: that hospital. After that, I think we can get her away from them. Can it wait?"

"But what about Chiho-baby? Everything, I mean, I need that hospital to care for her, I looked at the prices and the guy was telling the truth there. I can't pay for Chiho-baby's treatment anywhere else."

"We'll talk to Dr. Tofu first," Ranma said. "If modern medicine can't help her, maybe his more old-fashioned stuff can."

Looking over the information, Matsu raised a hand. "I'll go with you when you talk to the doctor. I think we need him to look at this too, and then for him to talk to you, Uzume, in person. I have a few ideas of what Higa's up to here, but we'll have to see."

Ranma nodded and looked over at the others. He looked at Tsukiumi in particular, nodding his head to her. "Good luck on your rescue mission. And if you see any Sekirei who professes to come from the East, don't hold back."

"We're going to wait for nightfall anyway," Minato said with a shrug. "You can join us after you're done talking to the doctor, I think, and, if Higa sends forces in to try to take the green girl, he'll weaken his defenses around the hospital anyway. That means your attack there will be even easier."

"Makes sense," Ranma said with a nod. "Let's go." He looked over at Matsu and asked quizzically, "Can you even roof-hop?"

Matsu huffed, slapping her chest and causing her large (if somewhat baggy, to Ranma's eyes) breasts to bounce. "Of course I can! I'm a Sekirei too, you know."

"Really? I haven't even seen you leave the house, so how would I know?" Ranma said, mocking her.

She huffed again, then stood up resolutely. "Come on! Let's get this over with."

Ranma chuckled and winked at Akitsu, pulling her to her feet and holding her in a light hug for a moment. "You heard the lady." He looked over at Miya and then at Kasumi. "Do you think Kasumi can stay here a bit?"

"Of course," Miya said with a smile. "I really would like to get to know her, after all."

Ranma nodded as Kazehana also tossed an arm around Kasumi, pulling the younger girl into a hug that rubbed her face into Kazehana's giant chest. "That's right," she caroled. "I want to meet the girl who Kagari's reacted to."

Chuckling at that, Ranma nodded towards Kasumi, who was now starting to look a little blue. "You might want to leave her alive, then, I would think."

"Whoops!" Kazehana said comically, letting go of Kasumi who was glaring at her now, breathing in deeply. As Kasumi and Miya both began to remonstrate with Kazehana, Ranma turned away and gestured for Matsu and Uzume to follow him, Akitsu still clasped lightly to his side with one arm. "Come on, it won't take us long."

It actually took them a bit longer than he thought to get back to Nerima because, while Matsu could roofhop, she couldn't do so very quickly. Once they were in Nerima, Ranma directed them towards Dr. Tofu's office. He saw Akane leaving and wondered what that was about, but put it from his mind for a moment as he let the others down to land in front of the doorway. Walking inside, he was surprised to find Dr. Tofu looking a little out of it, eyes staring away before he shook his head and concentrated on the here and now. "Ranma! Hello, what can I do for you?"

He trailed off, looking at the girls who had come in with Ranma. "I'm afraid I haven't found anything about Akitsu and her ki block yet, though I have sent off the information about it to a few people who might be able to help us more."

As Akitsu blinked and somehow felt happy at the idea of someone helping her get through her broken status, Ranma shook his head. "That's nice, Doc, but we're not here for that."

Matsu took over at that point, her step professional, though there was something in her eyes behind her large glasses, a gleam there that told Ranma something was going on inside the girl. "Dr. Tofu, my name is Matsu. I am a Sekirei who specializes in computers," she rattled off quickly. "I would like to see if I could work here for you for a time. I understand you have a few computers and you need to get up to speed on them? But first, we need a doctor's opinion on this," she said, holding out Uzume's Ashikabi's medical records.

"Of course," Dr. Tofu said. "Are you asking me for a second opinion?"

"I'm asking if it's actually accurate at all. We have reason to think that the managers and doctors in that hospital aren't doing their best for, for my Ashikabi," Uzume said, pausing and gulping at the last two words.

Dr. Tofu's grimaced, anger showing in his face for the first time since Ranma had known the man. The idea of someone who had taken the Hippocratic Oath doing that was reprehensible to him. He quickly began to sift through the medical information, then moved over to a few of his reference books, and then over to a computer where he sat down and began to type, one finger at a time as he stared at the keyboard.

"Oh my God," Matsu muttered, looking affronted. "Out of the way!" she said, moving over and pushing him lightly in the side. When he didn't move she huffed, then smirked and pulled the chair back before sitting down on his lap. He gaped at her, a blush suffusing his features, but, before he could say anything, she simply smirked over her shoulder at him before turning back to the computer.

"Tell me what you're trying to type in here. And, oh my God, why are you still running Windows 98!? You need either a new computer or at least a new browsing system!" she said while Ranma was treated to the sight of Dr. Tofu's face as the girl refused to move until he told her what he was doing.

"All right, here we go," Matsu said a few seconds later, the two of them looking at the pages she'd finally begun to pull up from the Internet and a few specific resources from the doctors' net. Matsu couldn't make head or tail of it.

Dr. Tofu, however, could. He sighed, leaning back now and becoming much more serious than he had been for the past few minutes. Looking over at Uzume, he said softly, "This implies that while, yes, the medicine they are giving her will hold back the symptoms, nothing they have can truly cure her sickness. I've never heard of it before, to be frank. I can think of a few shiatsu techniques that could slow or even ameliorate these symptoms, possibly even halting the disease in place, but actually curing it? No, I can't think of anything offhand. Give me time, though, and I might be able to."

Standing up and gently removing the girl from his lap, Tofu went on more sternly, tapping the printout in his hand with his other. "However, this implies that they are truly charging you quite a bit more than they should. Looking at the data here from the rest of the hospitals in Tokyo, it's obvious that someone is trying to control the prices for those specific items."

"Which means that Higa is involved. His pharmaceutical company controls over seventy percent of the intake of the materials to make this drug coming to the country," Matsu said grimly. "He's pulling the strings both ways: making the medicine expensive and then demanding you pay the new price."

"So, we can get her out, and we can possibly cure her, or at least help her more than the hospital is willing to. So, what do you say, Uzume?" Ranma said with a smirk since he already knew the answer. "Are you in on this plan?"

"Bro," said Uzume with a growl as her clothing came alive around her, little knives appearing and disappearing. "Bro, you'd have to kill me to stop me!"

End Chapter

So this wasn't quite the chapter I wanted to write, but I just couldn't make the fight between Karasuba and Ranma come out right, and I decided not only did it need to happen during the day, but the lead up to their meeting just wasn't the best. So instead I decided to go a different way LOL. Anyway, hope you all liked it.

Chapter 10: Chapter 10

Ain't Rumiko, and I know that a normal college age man does indeed think of sex at least once every sixty seconds. I mean, come on canon! Minato, man the bleep up!

For this month's poll, the winner was a Patty on only story first, *Sword, Bow, and Horse*, with 1088. This is a Ranma and Lord Marksman and Vanadis crossover, with this month's update making the third chapter and considering it was only part of the poll over there, that's darn impressive.

Anything Goes Game Changer, my personal choice this month (and from now until I finish it!) brought in 1073, with 198 votes here on fanfic. *FILFy Teacher* had 1069 votes, 470 of which came from here, and it will be the next story updated this month, after which I will work on *Making Waves* for my Patty on fans. I will, however, be posting chapter five of that fic here on fanfic for the Super Bowl. I'm American; it's a thing here, LOL. For those of you from around the world, think World Cup except smaller with more amusing commercials. Actually, that's an idea! If someone wants to give me an international holiday coming up some time, I might think about posting a *Making Waves* chapter for it. Might.

For those who were wondering, *Fate Touched* lost poorly, bringing in only 576, 252 of which came from here on Fanfic. This is getting ridiculous. *Semblance of Hope* brought in a respectable 787, but it still wasn't even a podium finish, with only 115 from here.

I had also hoped to work on *Horse of the Force* this month, which won the large story poll. But given the size, once more, of *FILFy* (can't seem to stop writing those chapters just yet) and of *Making Waves* I won't be able to. However I will vow it or *Magic* will be updated in February!

This chapter has been beta-read by [Michael](#) for small mistakes and by [Hiryo](#) for flow and Ranma issues. Now, on to the story!

Chapter 10: There Goes that Neighborhood

As Ranma made to lead the others out of Dr. Tofu's clinic, Ono surprised Ranma by grabbing his arm. "Wait, if you are going to go to rescue this young lady's paramour, I will be going with you," he said, nodding towards Uzume.

"Are you sure, Doc?" Ranma asked, cocking his head to one side. He knew the doctor had some martial arts skills, though where they would stack against Sekirei level opponents, Ranma had no idea. *Especially with that whole Hippocratic Oath thing of his.*

"Yes, I'm certain. I wish to give these doctors a piece of my mind! I do not care what kind of influence or orders they had from Higa Izumi. To lie to a young woman, to give her false hope and at the same time do nothing to truly help her, which flies in the face of the Hippocratic Oath that all doctors take!" Tofu said, his teeth somewhat bared.

Looking at the others, he saw none of them had any thoughts one way or another about Tofu's inclusion, so Ranma turned back to Tofu and nodded. "All right, and at least I know I won't have to carry you while we roof hop!"

"Oh, that's a pity," Matsu said, smirking as she moved to stand very close to Dr. Tofu, leaning against his side while they followed the others outside. "I was looking forward to an excuse to carry you."

"No thank you, miss," Dr. Tofu said with a smile, trying to move away only to find that his arm had been grabbed and was now in the most soft and giving prison in the universe. He blushed and tried to free his arm from its soft, pillowy prison, but found that the young woman was quite a bit stronger than he had expected. "However, I can't rooftop if you're hanging on to me like this."

She shrugged and moved away very slightly, then leaped up after the others, giving him a view of her rear. After a single glance he flushed, looking away, both astonished and stimulated by the very interesting looking T-back panties that she was wearing.

As she joined them, Uzume moved over to Matsu and asked, "What's up with that? Were you reacting to him?"

"Sort of," Matsu said, pouting a little. "I felt something, anyway."

"HA! Girl, pushing up against him like that, not to mention sitting on his lap, I'd be surprised if you didn't 'feel

something," Uzume said teasingly. "What, was that your way of taking his temperature or something?"

Matsu giggled but shook her head. "Not like that. Though I did feel something, heheheh. No, I meant I felt something from being in his presence. It's too faint, I think, to be a real reaction, but maybe if he already had another Sekirei to boost his Ashikabi signal, as it were, then I'd be feeling it more."

"Well, at least he's fit and somewhat handsome, I suppose. For a guy, anyway," Uzume said. "So I suppose when you do get around to 'feeling it' more, he might even be able to keep up with you."

"Oh, I doubt it," Matsu said, her giggle turning wicked, and her glasses gleaming now as her hands made grasping motions. "I very much doubt it." This in no way reassured Tofu, who had finally joined them, and he tried to put some more distance between him and Matsu, but she was always a few feet away whatever he did.

At the head of their group, Ranma leaned over to Akitsu and said, "Now remember, Akitsu, don't become a pervert like her."

Akitsu nodded, but then asked innocently "Ah, but is it perverted if she only wants to do that kind of thing to Dr. Tofu?"

That, Ranma had to think about. "I suppose it depends on the timing and whether or not you have any self-control. It's like, I wouldn't feel comfortable with the idea of making out in public, but if we found, you know, a rooftop or someplace out of the way where we couldn't be seen, which would be fine. Good point though."

Akitsu smiled at that, then looked around before, feeling greatly daring, she spoke up again. "We are on a rooftop now, and if we move away from the others we will not be seen...."

"Tempting," Ranma said with a laugh, turning quickly and swiftly picking Akitsu up in his arms before turning around and moving on towards the north of the city without breaking stride with her in a princess carry. Akitsu blushed and looked a little mortified at the idea of her master carrying her in such a way, but Ranma leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. "But we've got other things to do right now, okay?" he said, finishing by winking at her from about an inch away.

Akitsu blushed and nodded. "Yes, Sun-sama."

With that Ranma set her down to run alongside him once more, which she did with alacrity, still feeling the warmth he was giving off. In return her small smile in Ranma's direction caused Ranma to blush, but he didn't move away.

As they ran, Ranma turned to look back at Dr. Tofu in an effort to take his mind off the nubile young woman running alongside him. "So, I know you don't have any new info about Akitsu, but do you have any new theories, at least, about how to break the plug or whatever you want to call it on her ki?"

This question worked, and Akitsu's small smile disappeared to be replaced by her normal blank expression. Yet, while she continued to look in the direction they were running, Ranma could tell her attention was now entirely on Tofu, running behind them.

"While I don't like the idea of trying to create solutions when we don't know everything just yet and certainly don't know what might happen if we do break the plug, I have a few ideas in that direction," Tofu said and then looked at both of them. "I understand that this is a tremendous issue for you, Akitsu-san, and a personal one, but I want both of your words that you won't try anything right away. If you try to break the stopper on Akitsu's ki, and it fails, the backlash might just kill her or leave her ki crippled even further."

Ranma shuddered at the very idea, looking at Akitsu with fear and concern before he promised Tofu that he would wait until Tofu could tell them more about the problem in question. Akitsu paused, her inner turmoil showing in her eyes, but then she too nodded.

"Good. At any rate, one of the solutions is simple erosion over time. Once Akitsu learns how to consciously use her ki internally, she might be able to wear away at the blockage slowly, like water against a dam. That, I am not too sure could work if the ki blockage is a naturally occurring event for her species, which would imply that her ki would not be able to solve the issue on its own."

"The second idea, and one which will work almost certainly but which might severely damage her ki pathways even if it succeeds, is to simply bring in enough foreign ki to smash through the blockage for Akitsu-san. But it could, as I said, severely damage her ki pathways unless you can somehow blend your ki together."

Ranma frowned at that, then looked over at Akitsu, who was still taking all this in with her normal stoic air. But Ranma

could tell that she was somewhat sad that no progress had been made to repair her, as it were.

He was about to say something to her, but he was interrupted by Matsu. "Actually, if you think about it, your explanation of that second solution sounds as if it is describing the effect of a Sekirei and Ashikabi kissing. That's what starts the bond in the first place."

Dr. Tofu blinked and turned to her, pushing up his glasses as he did. "Really?"

"Indeed," Matsu said, pushing up her own glasses in reply. "You see, the effect of an Ashikabi and Sekirei joining together is..."

Having heard a lot of this before from Miya, Ranma tuned them out, scanning around to see if there were any threats, while Akitsu listened and also tried to look around them. Nearby, Uzume simply ran on, her face anxious, not taking part in the conversation, so worried was she about Chiho.

"Fascinating," Dr. Tofu said at last. "Utterly fascinating. If that is the case, then it could indeed be possible that an individual with enough ki control could open that pathway without hurting Akitsu."

At that Akitsu's face twisted back to look at them, her eyes like lasers, while Ranma twisted around entirely, walking backwards and even leaping from one rooftop to another as he looked at Tofu. "Explain," he ordered.

Somewhat put off by the suddenly intense looks from both of them, Dr. Tofu slowed his own pace down to put a few more steps between them. "Well, if that mark of Akitsu-san's—the blockage, I mean—is entirely a result of a botched attempt at winging her, then it stands to reason that the winging occurs when the Sekirei takes in a bit of the Ashikabi's ki with the kiss, as Matsu-san was saying. To get rid of the block on Akitsu's ki, she would need to ingest quite a bit more energy than just a kiss, and the giver would also have to, at the same time, control the flow of that energy. So that, instead of simply merging, the Ashikabi's energy would ride along Akitsu's to find the blockage and break through it. That would take a great deal of both energy and concentration, though."

"I've got the energy," Ranma admitted, "but I don't know about the concentration. Akitsu is kind of distracting."

At that inadvertent complement, Akitsu blushed, but she still looked at her Ashikabi, and he felt her eyes on him, turning to lock eyes with her. "Still," he said after a moment's silent communion, "I think I'll try it, though not right away. I'll talk to Miya and we'll wait until those reports you sent out get back. But if they're not back within two weeks or so, then I'll try it."

Akitsu smiled at that, a very small, almost imperceptible uptick of her lips. But the air about her shifted to happy and beaming, almost, although Ranma was the only one who knew her well enough to feel it.

Moments later, they hopped down from the last rooftop onto the street leading to Izumo House. Ranma led the way forward and rang the doorbell. A few moments later it opened, and Dr. Tofu found himself looking at an extremely good-looking young woman of his own age or thereabouts in a long dress and an apron. She had purple hair cascading down her back and a pleasant smile on her face.

And what he saw in her scared Dr. Tofu nearly white. Before this Tofu had been looking at Akitsu, Ranma, Uzume, and Matsu as they had been traveling with his ki sight activated. This was a specialized type of ki ability that he had learned through his years as a doctor, which was part of why Akitsu's situation made him so frustrated. Unlike Ranma who could barely sense it even when kissing Akitsu, Tofu could see the blockage, but he couldn't figure out if it was natural or something that had been placed there by someone else, and he couldn't get at it to do anything.

But Tofu hadn't stopped using ki sight just yet, wanting to see this Miya person as well as any other Sekirei, simply to get more of an idea of their similarities and differences. But this had backfired tremendously.

Matsu had a decently sized ki reserve for a human being. Uzume was more than a bit above that, and Akitsu above that, even with the blockage. Ranma had half again as much ki as Akitsu, although Tofu couldn't say if that would be true with Akitsu's ki block removed. But Miya... Comparing Ranma to her was like comparing a four-story house to a monstrous skyscraper the size of Tokyo Tower. Her ki nearly blazed in his senses, so much that he accidentally canceled the technique, but the memory was enough to send him an involuntary step back. "Holy Lord God," he breathed.

Miya blinked, then looked at the newcomer the look of awe and fear on his face making her realize he must have used some kind of ki-sensing technique. "Ara, what a silly man, looking at a mere widow woman like me with such eyes. Still, I'm sorry," she said, demurely laughing behind one hand. "I don't give out autographs."

Laughing, Ranma picked up Miya by the waist, and almost presented her to Dr. Tofu like a prize at the fair. "Dr. Tofu, meet Miya-nee! She's sort of been my teacher in a lot of ways, and a hell of a lot better one than Oyaji could ever be."

Dr. Tofu's eyes somehow widened further, and he gaped from Miya to Ranma and back again. He looked closely at Ranma, the tightly controlled ki reserves, so much so that their true depth was almost, but not quite, hidden entirely even to Tofu's senses, realizing that he had underestimated Ranma strength. *He is hardly a match for Miya now, yet if he can be rise to the same level as this woman...*

Miya seemed to hear his thoughts. In reply she ruffled Ranma's hair even as she scolded him for picking her up, while looking at Dr. Tofu with a smirk felt despite being hidden behind her free hand. She was also amused by Matsu standing so close to the doctor, a clear sign of interest towards Tofu in her eyes and body language.

"I take it you have discovered something's a little sinister about young Chiho-chan's ongoing care at her current hospital?" she asked them. "But can it wait until after we all eat? We've been busy on dinner since you left and we're nearly ready."

"Oh, heh, this should be good," Ranma said, patting his stomach, while Akitsu, calm and stoic Akitsu, let loose a nod of agreement so quick that it looked as if her head had bobbed. Then Ranma froze, looking to Dr. Tofu, then towards the kitchen, and then back to Matsu.

Uzume noticed and moved towards them, leaning up against Ranma to whisper in his ear. This caused Akitsu to blink and move closer, looking at her intensely. But Uzume waved the other girl off as she whispered, "What's wrong?"

"Well, how to put this?" Ranma murmured. "I think were about to see a bit of a soap opera."

Uzume blinked and then grinned, banishing her concerns over Chiho once more and grabbing Ranma's arm. "We'll be back for dinner, Miya-nee. See you then. Matsu, why don't you show Dr. Tofu your room?" she asked innocently, or as innocently as Uzume could do anything. "I bet you could find the maps of that hospital and come up with a good plan for us, right?"

"That makes a lot of sense!" Matsu beamed and grabbed Dr. Tofu's arm, dragging him away before he could say anything.

While Miya complained about Ranma's method of addressing her having spread, Uzume dragged Ranma and, perforce, Akitsu away. But she didn't follow the other two upstairs. Instead, she led them along the hall to the rooms that had been designated for Kazehana and Minato. Seeing the nameplates, Ranma asked quizzically, "They don't share the same room?"

"Miya's rules, duh," Uzume said with a shrug. "If they want to, they head out to a love hotel to spend time together."

"Harsh," Ranma muttered but shrugged. "Still, her house, inn, whatever, her rules."

"Other people I would've assumed were just terrified of her, but you really believe that, don't you?" Uzume asked.

Ranma nodded, then smirked. "Although I won't say my respect for Miya-nee's rules is **all** just because I believe that to be true."

Uzume laughed and led them into Kazehana's room, where she found her and Minato working on paperwork of some kind with Kocho. Tsukiumi was nowhere to be seen, having headed to a nearby rooftop to practice her techniques for that evening's attack along with Musubi. Sitting down on their bed, Uzume gestured for Akitsu and Ranma to sit down.

"Now, tell us what was going on Ranma," Uzume ordered before sending a smirk over at Kazehana. "He says we might be looking at a soap opera with that doctor he took me to meet. Who, incidentally, Matsu seems to be kind of interested in."

"Ooh, that sounds juicy," Kazehana said with a giggle, turning away from the small desk and dragging the other two with her to also sit down in a loose half-circle facing Ranma and Akitsu.

Ranma groaned, then began to pull at his pigtail and then began. "There's a bit of a love triangle sort of thing going on With Dr. Tofu. Dr. Tofu loves Kasumi, or, well, is obsessed about her, really."

A few weeks ago, Ranma wouldn't have been able to tell obsession from love or even understand that there was a big difference between the two. He glanced at Akitsu, who he had feared at first was obsessed with him, but now

knew that she was really in love with him. It was simply the difference between how their races went about that kind of thing. The speed and depth of the emotions she felt, that had thrown him. Turning back to the others, he went on sheepishly. "The thing is, Kasumi didn't realize it until a few weeks ago when I kind of blurted it out to her."

Kazehana gasped, smacking her cheeks with both hands as she made an exaggerated face of dismay at him. "How dare you! That kind of thing should be..."

"Hold on!" Ranma interrupted, holding up a hand placatingly. "She didn't know, and when I told her, she **really** didn't like it." Kazehana blinked, and Ranma rolled his eyes. "Well, come on, he's in his early thirties and has been her personal physician along with all of her family since she was a middle-schooler. And she's only nineteen."

"When you put it like that, it does seem a little off," Minato said judiciously, nodding his head.

"Love knows no limits!" Kazehana exclaimed.

"Yeah, well, here's the clincher. Kasumi isn't so happy about that, though I don't know if she's said anything about it to Tofu since. And you know she's sort of flirting around with Kagari. But the other side of that is that Akane, Kasumi's youngest sister, is interested in Dr. Tofu."

The others all blinked, and then Kazehana giggled. "Good God, it really is like a soap opera!"

"Does Dr. Tofu know Kasumi is here? Or that she's been flirting with Kagari?"

"Considering that just started, no," Ranma said with a shrug.

"So basically, we'll be getting a meal fit for a king and a floor show," Uzume mused. "This should be fun."

Ranma snorted. "Not my idea of fun."

Kazehana became serious, looking at her drinking buddy, pulling the other busty woman into a hug, which pressed the sides of their chests together and caused Ranma and Minato both to blush and look away. "So, what did you find about my drinking buddy's girlfriend?"

Uzume became serious then, explaining what Tofu had told them about Chiho's illness and the price hiking for what little treatment they could give her as well as the plan they had to attack Higa's hospital complex to get Chiho out that night. "I really want her out of there. If Higa and his people figure out somehow that I really went to another doctor for a second opinion who they couldn't control or that we've discovered what they've been doing to raise the prices and how, they might just take her hostage."

"But it won't do any good to go off half-cocked, hence why we're here rather than already storming the place," Ranma said with a scowl. "That and at night there won't be as many bystanders around the hospital."

The somewhat grim mode brought on by Kazehana's question lasted until the group entered the dining room. When they saw the food that was being laid out on the table, all of their moods improved. It looked magnificent, Miya and Kasumi having outdone themselves: there were foreign foods like pastas and sausages, bread, rice, salmon, and a radish dish of some kind even Ranma hadn't seen the like of before.

As they had been talking, Musubi and Tsukiumi had arrived as well. The two of them had been sparring nearby and working up an appetite. Tsukiumi sat down eagerly next to Akitsu, who was sitting by Ranma, having been informed by Miya that she would be joining the others at the table rather than sitting to one side and behind Ranma.

"This all looks amazing," Dr. Tofu said with a smile, having come in with Matsu, looking a little frazzled. Matsu was smirking and sat down demurely to one side of him, placing Tofu between herself and Ranma.

"My, thank you, Doctor Tofu," said Kasumi as she came out of the kitchen at last, following Miya with the last platters and a pitcher of water. They sat down together near the head of the table, smiling at one another as they did so before Kasumi turned to the other.

But, unlike the others, Dr. Tofu hadn't known Kasumi was here. And, unfortunately for Ranma, the pigtailed martial artist had forgotten about how Nabiki had told him about how Tofu went crazy around Kasumi.

"Ka, Kasumi!" Dr. Tofu nearly shouted as he stared her, his glasses fogging over and his face going goofy. Having just picked up his rice bowl, he nearly cracked it in his grip, something only Miya noticed. "W, What are you doing here?"

"Having quite a bit of fun, actually," Kasumi said with a laugh, though she was inwardly uncertain how to deal with Dr. Tofu after having been told about his crush on her.

But, setting that aside Kasumi had indeed been having fun. Miya was a delight to talk to, and cooking alongside her had been most enjoyable. Together they had been able to try to create several foreign dishes that Kasumi had always wanted to try but had never had the time or a receptive audience for which to do so. Having Kagari come in and out of the kitchen, asking if she needed help had also been rather amusing.

Looking at her, Ranma hopped back to his feet with a laugh, gesturing down at her apron. "Kasumi, I'm going to have to obey your apron for a moment. Especially since all this looks fantastic!"

With that he leaned in and kissed her on the cheek, causing her to blink and then stare down at her own apron before looking over at Miya. Her apron was one of the silly frilly ones, which Miya hadn't worn since her husband had passed away, which read, 'kiss the cook.' "I hadn't even noticed!" she said with a laugh while Miya made a 'fufufufu' sound behind her raised hand.

"Oh my," Kagari said with a smile of his own as he came in from upstairs towards the table. "Does that mean I should obey as well?"

Miya, however, waved for him to sit down on her other side between her and Minato. "Take your time, Kagari," she said with a faint frown on her face. The two of them had already talked about that kind of thing and Miya had told him very bluntly to take it slowly with Kasumi.

Even in his currently fogged state of mind, Tofu was aware of something happening, while Kagari frowned at being unable to follow in Ranma's footsteps there, but he needn't have worried about Ranma and Kasumi flirting or anything like that. Ranma had quickly become Kasumi's best male friend, the best male friend she'd had her entire life, given how most of that life had been devoted to her family, but there was no hint of romantic feeling there given Ranma's attraction to Nabiki.

That didn't mean that Kasumi hadn't enjoyed getting a rise out of him while he had carried her over earlier over the rooftops. *Quite literally getting a rise out of him. My word are Akitsu and Nabiki lucky girls,* Kasumi recalled as she sat down, taking a moment to think in that direction before turning her mind back to more important matters.

On the other hand, Kagari's attention had awakened something inside of her that he been far too long dormant, the natural desire of a young woman to flirt. Still, that too was set aside for now as she looked at Tofu and asked, "I understand that you are going to be helping Uzume-san's girlfriend? Do you have any idea what is wrong with her? And what did you discover from the medical report Uzume gave you?"

"Oh, yes. Me and Betty here," he said, suddenly holding a skeleton that appeared between him and Matsu, startling her into a shriek as she leaped sideways into Tsukiumi's lap, much to both of their dismay. He set the skeleton where Matsu had been sitting, setting it up as if it was going to eat with them all. "...are going to do what we can to help the young lady in question, though Betty needs her strength so she's going to eat a lot! But the hospital has treated her very poorly, using the price of her care to force Uzume to do their bidding!"

His hands flashed out, grabbing an unsuspecting Ranma by his neck and shoulder, and, before Ranma could move, his arm deadened, and he was pulled this way and that, his neck twisted badly, and his arm nearly pulled out of his socket before he could fight back. "Why, I'm actually quite perturbed by the hospital in question, so much so that I want to just grab those doctors and do this, and that, and this again to them!"

"ARGGH!" Ranma shouted out in pain. But he was so bent out of shape now that he couldn't even defend himself.

Most of those around him quickly backed away from the madman suddenly in their midst. Tofu, though, didn't even notice what he had done as he let Ranma collapse to the side. Nor did he notice Akitsu immediately began gathering her power, freezing him from the feet up in an effort to both punish him for harming her Ashikabi and to not break Miya's rule about no fighting at the same time.

For her part, Miya stared for a brief second in astonishment, but then she frowned and her aura of terror started to seep out of her. Everyone now quickly backed away from her too, leaving everyone pressed back against the walls of the dining room. Even Musubi left the food behind, a feat that most would have thought amazing.

Yet it didn't even register now given what they were seeing right in front of them: because Tofu made no sign that Miya's technique at all, instead calmly picking up a plate and biting into it. "But you made all this food, Kasumi? It's lovely. Oh, but it is getting rather cold here all of a sudden, why it almost feels like someone's walking over my grave,

hahah!"

Nor was he the only one to not be affected by Miya's aura. Kasumi too seemed immune to it, but to everyone's horror this wasn't because of any strength inside her or like the madness, but rather because of something far simpler.

"Dr. Tofu, stop that at once!" Kasumi accompanied this command by letting out her own Aura of Terror™ behind her. It was not nearly as focused or as terrifying as Miya's, but it was there, and it was a sharp change from her normal attitude, or even the attitude she had shown since meeting Kagari.

This, added to Miya's own aura, broke Tofu out of his mental fog, and he quickly scooted away from the table, looking at Kasumi as if seeing her for the first time, while to one side Uzume began to mutter, "Holy hell, how did she do that?"

"Who cares how!?" Kazehana squeaked back. "There are two of them now, two of them!"

Kasumi and Miya exchanged a look, and then Kasumi turned back to Tofu as Miya reigned in her aura. "I have long thought that you were simply being silly around me, Doctor. But I have recently found that this is, in some odd fashion, the way you showed your affection towards me? If it is so, it certainly is not something I approve of! Indeed, having no control over yourself like that around someone else is almost more like an allergic reaction than anything else is. That is not love; that is not even infatuation. I am not certain what it is, but it isn't positive."

At the harsh words, Tofu just gaped at her, opening and closing his mouth a few times, and Kasumi went on more softly. "I do not think you are a bad man Dr. Tofu. But, you must understand, I have never once thought of you in a romantic manner. I do not think I would ever be able to return your affections; I'm sorry. And I think the quicker you move on, the better for everyone it will be."

"I," Tofu stammered, slumping a little. Perhaps under other circumstance he might have protested, might have tried to change Kasumi's mind. But feeling the aura behind her and seeing the glare... "I understand. And, for what it's worth, Kasumi, I'm sorry if knowing the reason behind my acting like that around you has made you uncomfortable."

"I forgive you for that, and I hope you do move on quickly, Doctor. You are too good a man to let this keep you down for long. But, for now, perhaps you should help Ranma," Kasumi said, pointing to one side of Tofu.

Blinking, Tofu turned and then looked at Ranma quizzically. "Ranma, whatever happened to you?"

"I lost a match against a Martial Artist chiropractor," Ranma growled. "What do you think happened? You freaking twisted me like a pretzel! Now straighten me out, damn it!" *Crap, this is humiliating! It's like Tofu was somehow made stronger by his obsession with Kasumi!*

Later everyone had returned to the table, but Akitsu was now sitting nearly pressed into Ranma's side between him and Tofu. A lithe, sweet-smiling, and oh so soft wall between them, whose presence, needless to say, was really distracting Ranma even as he started in on the food with everyone else,

Seeing Tofu disconsolately poking at his own food, Matsu, leaning against Dr. Tofu's side, murmured, "She's right, you know. There are other fish in the sea."

Tofu nodded glumly but seemed to perk up a little at the food and possibly the feel of Matsu against him.

Uzume watched this, then leaned over towards Ranma, whispering, "So, how will this Akane react if she finds out Matsu is interested in Tofu?"

"I've got no idea," Ranma said honestly.

Akitsu blinked, looking at him and speaking up for the first time since they had sat down. "Really?" she asked in disbelief. The answer seemed rather obvious to her.

Ranma winked at her. "Oh, I know she'd react violently, love," he said in a louder tone than the two girls had used, unconsciously using that address which caused more than half of the girls at the table to blink and look at him while Akitsu flushed in joy. "It's just what degree of violence it would be. And if she would try to start a fight right away or try to, you know, be formal and challenge Matsu for his hand or whatever."

Still blushing at the use of 'love' that Ranma had just inadvertently made, Akitsu nodded. "That makes sense," she said in an even quieter voice than normal, but her eyes were practically shining.

"So," Ranma went on, looking over at Miya and not noticing the effect of the bombshell he had just dropped. "Let's get to planning. I think we need to figure out who is going to go on what mission tonight, because, as important as getting Chiho out of the hospital is, finding this little girl Minato has been dreaming about is obviously just as important."

"Indeed, though I think it is rather disturbing that he is, in fact, dreaming of such a young girl. But I suppose given this whole Sekirei nonsense it makes some sense?" Kasumi stated, though her tone made it a question as she looked at Miya.

"Oh, no, not at all! Even for Sekirei there is a limit to what should be allowed to such a young girl. Believe me, I will be watching most closely for anything in that area," Miya replied teasingly.

"Hey, stop ganging up on my Ashikabi, you two," Kazehana shot back before smirking. "Teasing him is my job~~!" she caroled.

"Is it just me, or is it kind of scary that Miya and Kasumi get along so well?" Kagari asked.

"It's not just you," Uzume and Ranma replied as one. Ranma went on as Uzume laughed. "What bothers me the most is that Miya-nee taught her that terror mask attack thingy. But she hasn't even let me make notes about it! That's so unfair!"

"Ara, I don't know what you're talking about," Miya said with a chuckle as Kasumi blushed and looked away, whistling innocently.

OOOOOO

Akane sneezed, her arm coming down in an arc empty, having lost her grip on the ki hammer she had been using. She looked around her, frowning before ducking underneath a blow from her sparring partner. "What the heck?"

"Are you catching a cold?" Yashima asked, frowning and backing away. "Or was it some dust?"

"I don't know," Akane said, straightening up and fingering her nose thoughtfully. "Could have been dust, or it could have been someone talking about me. That's old Japanese folklore: someone sneezing is a sign that someone else is talking about them."

"Weird," Yashima said with a shrug. "But you lost your hammer."

Akane looked down at her hands, and frowned. "How? It's made of my ki; how can it leave my body?"

"But it becomes an object of solid form, so it stands to reason that you can lose it." Yashima replied with a shrug.

"Weird," Akane said, echoing her friend's earlier word. "Well, we were nearly done anyway. Come on, let's go see what happened to it."

Outside the dojo they found that her hammer had buried itself in the outer patio and remained visible as they walked up to it, still seeming to be a solid hammer rather than a ki construct. But what was even more surprising was that there was a short, mouse-like looking individual there dressed like a ninja, hidden underneath the patio. He was currently staring to the side at the hammer that had nearly flattened his head, a large sweatdrop on his head and his eyes wide and terrified from the near miss.

"Who the hell are you!?" Akane roared, holding her hand over her head. The hammer disappeared from where it had crashed into the patio to reappear in her hand, solidifying quickly as her friend moved forward with her own hammer raised. "Some pervert, here to spy on the girls who live here!?"

"Wait!" the ninja shouted, backing away rapidly and moving out from under the patio, bowing and scraping. "Wait! I'm no pervert! I'm not here for anything like that! I'm here just to give out an invitation."

"What? Then why the heck were you hiding?" Akane asked flatly, her hammer still raised. "That's way too suspicious."

The ninja looked a little sheepish, scratching at the side of his face. "Um, would you believe force of habit? I was just going to leave the invitation on her desk and disappear."

"Who exactly would you be giving an invitation to?" Nabiki asked, coming out from inside. She had actually been

napping on the sofa, a magazine on some new technology coming out of America open on her stomach. While interesting enough to convince her she should invest in one or two of the companies involved, it made for very boring reading once she got past a certain point. Nabiki knew how to figure out people, but tech was pretty much a closed book to her.

Still, Nabiki recognized the ninja in front of her and asked, "Aren't you Sasuke? The ninja who apparently works for the Kunos?"

"That's right," the man said before standing up, dusting himself off, and formally bowing towards her, thrusting out both hands with an invitation held between them, an odd mix between formal and someone giving their first crush a love letter. "My lady, Kodachi Kuno, has asked that you come by this afternoon to speak to her and a few of her friends about the Sekirei game."

Nabiki blinked, taking the invitation and opening it quickly, seeing that that, indeed, was basically what was written inside. "Well, that's interesting," she murmured, tapping her lips with the invitation thoughtfully. *I don't honestly have much info about Kodachi other than that she's more well-thought of at her school than sword-boy is at Furinkan and has fought in this Sekirei Plan.* "When?"

"I am to escort you now, if that is preferable," Sasuke stated, still bowing.

Nabiki looked over at Akane and Yashima, the only other two in the house at the moment. "Well, do you want to see where Kuno lives?" *They might not be my preferred bodyguards, but they'll do in a pinch.*

"Not really," Akane said with a scowl. "But if his sister is anything like Kuno, I'm not going to let you go and talk to her alone either."

The three of them followed the ninja through the streets of Nerima at first before taking to the rooftops, with Yashima carrying Nabiki over them and Akane following with difficulty. Not only was this not nearly as much fun as being carried by Ranma in either of his forms, but, thanks to Akane, they actually didn't move as quickly as they should have.

But soon they were in the richer areas of Nerima, where they moved to the largest building on the street, a mansion that was about four or five times the size of the Tendo place in terms of area and more like ten times more expensive. There they were not led to the first gate, but around the back to a smaller gate, where Sasuke escorted them in. Looking at them, he said simply, "My mistress had expressed a wish that any discussion that we have today not involve Tatewaki-sama. I will be leading you to her personal greenhouse. That is one area where Tatewaki-sama fears to tread."

Soon they were led into the backyard, which turned out to be a garden full of various roses, trees, and an outdoor pond, leading into a tiny stream that wound its way under a small bridge. Yashima moved towards it, awed by the beauty of the scene, but as she did, a ninja suddenly appeared out of the shadow of a tree.

"My mistress would introduce you to Mr. Turtle if she wishes after you meet. For now, please follow Sasuke-dono," the ninja intoned. Dressed much like Sasuke, this one was taller, rather androgynous, and his entire face was covered, leaving only a thin strip for his eyes.

But Yashima found herself unable to actually see those eyes in the shadow of his mask, and she backed away, rejoining the others. As she did, she saw a large log of some kind float up out from the pond. Then it opened its mouth, and Yashima nearly shrieked, realizing it was a giant alligator. "Wha! What the heck!?"

Nabiki and Akane had also stopped, staring. "That would be Mr. Turtle," Sasuke said proudly. "Kodachi-sama found him when young and has since trained him to obey her commands. He is really rather intelligent for his species, I understand."

Nabiki and Akane looked at one another and sighed, saying as one, "Only in Nerima."

Nearby the pond had a few small tributaries leading into a large greenhouse. Inside there were hundreds of different kinds of plants that Nabiki and Akane had never seen before. It looked almost like a jungle had been somehow transplanted into it, complete with the hooting of some odd animals here and there and the sounds of birds flitting around.

Yet within this near-primordial splendor was a small and very expensive looking silver and porcelain table with soft padded chairs around it. There they found three people already waiting, two of them talking to one another

animatedly as one seemed to be describing a dance or martial art move with her fingers.

The one not taking part in that discussion was a young man, around college-age, Nabiki thought. He was somewhat handsome looking if in a soft manner, with wild blond hair and blue eyes. *Or, she amended, a soft manner in comparison to a martial artist like Ranma, anyway.* Sitting to one side of him was a young woman built along the same lines as Nabiki herself. In other words, much more normal, proportionally speaking, than most of the Sekirei they had seen: a modest bust with long legs shown off by a short dress that she was wearing and light brown hair worn down in a long tail down her back.

To the other side of the young man sat a black haired young woman. She was built pretty much the same as the other woman or Nabiki, except with slightly smaller breasts than Nabiki, if she was any judge. But the woman also had an air of regal hauteur about her, the kind of thing that Kuno seemed to emit when he wasn't acting all crazy.

She stood up as they approached and nodded formally to them. "Nabiki and Akane Tendo, my brother has described both of you, if only you, Akane-san, in glowing terms. You, I am afraid, Nabiki, are only described as that 'mercenary information broker'."

Nabiki shrugged. "I've got a bit of a reputation, but I couldn't care less about what he thinks of me than I already do. I provide a service. It's his problem if he is irritated by having to pay for it."

"True, he is a bit of a buffoon, isn't he just?" Kodachi said with a laugh, the "HOHOHO," making all three of the newcomers and the young man already sitting down at the table shudder. Kodachi didn't notice this, gesturing for them all to sit down before looking at Yashima. "I understand that you too are a Sekirei? Are you bonded to young Akane? That would both displease and arouse my brother, it must be said, hence I am not certain if I would approve of it merely on that score."

There was no censure in her tone, only amusement, but Akane flushed, shaking her head quickly. "No! Yashima's just staying with us as a friend."

"Very well," Kodachi said, looking a little nonplussed at the vehemence of Akane's response. *That wasn't the kind of response where I can say, 'she doth protest too much,' as the ancient bard said. Rather, she was truly affronted. Silly of her, I suppose, but, regardless, I will move on.*

She gestured to her kohai and her lover. "Sitting beside me is Namiji and her Ashikabi, Kouji-kun. As my kohai at St. Hebereke, I have taken Namiji under my wing in many ways, and she in turn is my main connection to the Sekirei game." Once introductions were done and the three new guests had sat down, Kodachi went on. "Now, I have no doubt that you were wondering why I asked you to come here."

"Actually, I'm sort of wondering how the house of Kuno get its money," Nabiki said, looking around. "No offense to you, but since I learned that you were observing Ranma and thinking about offering to ally with him against MBI, I was looking up more about your family's history and everything. You've been here on this land longer than this area was named Nerima. Heck, you were here long before the city of Tokyo grew out to encompass it. There's some hints of where you get your money back in the Restoration period, but not a lot and nothing since."

Kodachi looked at her closely, calmly sipping on her tea as she thought about how to reply. "Realize that, as neither of us are lord and lady of the house just yet—we have not reached the age of majority in our House's terms—we are not privy to all of the House's secrets. However, I have been acting, as my brother has as well, in those capacities for many years now, and I know quite a bit. None of which I can share here, nor is it relevant to our current discussion except peripherally. Suffice to say that there are reasons why we are here which come straight from the First Emperor himself, reasons which tie into why we have the Shadow Legion under our employ along with more physical ninja."

"Um, Shadow Legion?" Yashima asked.

Kodachi waved that off. "You will learn about them in time if we do form an alliance. What we are here to discuss is our issues with the Sekirei game and the company behind it. Tell me, beyond Ranma-san fighting the Sekirei trying to forcefully drag their sisters into bondage and other such nonsense, do you and he have any long-term plans against MBI and its game?"

"No," Nabiki answered bluntly, leaning back and nodding thankfully as a saucer of tea was slid over to her. "We don't. We also really don't know enough about MBI, or the Sekirei and how MBI got control of them in the first place, or what happens to any eliminated from the game but not killed doing it. I've asked questions of a few Sekirei who have been around almost from the beginning of the game, but there are just some things they won't say and others that they can't."

"I see. I don't like that response, but I suppose it is to be expected," Kodachi said thoughtfully. "What have you done to rectify this lack of information issue?"

"Not a lot," Nabiki admitted. "We have a few hackers who are simply incredible, but they can't really target MBI without leaving evidence that they have. And, if they do that, MBI will find some way to strike back at them, even if they can't physically assault them."

At Kodachi's raised eyebrow, Nabiki smiled thinly. "In the north of the city is an old-fashioned inn run by a young lady who is apparently considered an insurmountable obstacle in the game, one even MBI won't move against."

"The Hanya of the North," Namiji said, nodding. "I've heard of her, though if she's working with Ranma in disrupting the game, why isn't she attacking MBI directly?"

"I think it's some agreement she has with MBI. Or something they are hanging over her head." Nabiki shrugged. "That's just my speculation, though. As for my own abilities, I've never had to work on the scale like this, and it's proven to be very daunting. I've tried to concentrate on how the hell the government is going along with this, but I haven't been having much luck even with our hackers helping."

"I as well have never anticipated facing something like MBI or its resources," Kodachi admitted. But then she smiled and looked over as two more servants, large, burly men who wore ninja masks but wore butler's outfits, came in from the side. "But let us set aside this heavy talk for now and have an early dinner. After which, I think we need to talk specifically about the MBI card, what it means, and how we can cut those strings connecting the various Sekirei to MBI, and, further, make Nerima a home for those who have no wish for their fates to be decided by a madman with an overcompensating tower..."

OOOOOO

Once it became dark out, the teams moved out from Izumo House in different directions. Dr. Tofu, Uzume, and Akitsu went with Ranma, and surprisingly, Tsukiumi joined them. When informed of what was going on with Chiho and Uzume, she had become utterly enraged at the idea of someone taking an invalid Ashikabi hostage to force their Sekirei to do dishonorable things. That wasn't the only surprise however.

"I will be going with the team to locate this young girl," Kasumi said simply.

The others instantly protested. After all, she wasn't an Ashikabi yet, and she certainly wasn't a combatant like Ranma. But she held up a hand, looking at Dr. Tofu and Miya in particular, since Tofu's protest had been the loudest, and she knew Miya's word was law here. "Besides Dr. Tofu and me, do any of you have any medical knowledge?"

None of the others could reply to that, and she went on smoothly. "This young girl has been alone for at least twenty-four hours, possibly longer after having been attacked, is that not correct, Minato?" When Minato slowly nodded, Kasumi continued. "She might be in pain, she might be suffering from exhaustion or any number of small scale maladies, or even large scale ones if she somehow harmed her head, if this young girl is truly the mind behind the overabundance of plant life that has taken over that park. You need someone along who has medical knowledge."

In the face of Kasumi's calm analytical tone, none of the others could find room to argue. So it was that Kasumi and Minato found themselves standing on a rooftop, staring down at where Kagari had just begun his attack on the troops surrounding the garden, followed instantly by Musubi. Kazehana hung back, using her powers over winds to protect the other two.

"Tanks, troops with guns, helmets, and...what is that thing that one soldier is using?" Kasumi asked, pointing.

Minato looked in the direction she was pointing and frowned. "It looks like a rocket launcher or, I think they're called bazookas? I was never into soldiers or anything like that."

"Nor was I, obviously," Kasumi said bemusedly, shaking her head as she watched. "But my main point was that this is a very large, serious looking group of soldiers, and I have to wonder how MBI has been able to both recruit them and employ them. Unless I'm very much mistaken, corporations aren't allowed to have what amounts to private armies."

"Maybe, but since when have laws bothered what MBI can or can't do?" Minato replied. "I personally think it's fear that keeps the government from attacking MBI. They might lose, after all, especially if the Sekirei around the city fight for MBI too."

"Perhaps," Kasumi said dubiously. *Or perhaps they are kept at bay by the same means Miya-san is. Even after only a half day of knowing the woman, I know she would have no truck with how the Ashikabi and Sekirei are allowed to run*

wild as MBI exploits the game for their own nefarious purposes. If Minaka has access to something to make her stay largely immobile, if not truly neutral, it stands to reason that the same weapon could be used to keep the government at bay.

Down below, the rocket from a bazooka impacted Musubi and exploded, sending her skating backwards on her feet. But it didn't even seem to singe her, not doing much damage save to her clothing, which was shredded in multiple places and burnt in more.

Kasumi clucked in irritation, shaking her head. "I'm going to have to talk with that young lady about getting some proper support for herself."

"What?" Minato asked.

Kasumi looked at him and then gestured down to Musubi, who now had a bit of her chest exposed to the elements, showing quite obviously that she wasn't wearing a bra under her modified miko outfit. "She is bouncing far too much. Even a Sekirei will hurt herself like that."

"Aheh, um, I don't think she'll notice," Minato said with a chuckle of his own, his eyes locked on Kazehana in self-defense as his own Sekirei joined the fight. Not that this was any better in terms of bounciness given that Kazehana was even larger than Musubi.

With a wave of one arm, Kazehana blew away hundreds of bullets aimed at Musubi and Kagari. Still smiling, almost gently, she waved the same arm back the other way, creating a condensed tornado, which grabbed several dozen troopers and hurled them through the air to slam into various walls. They were still alive, but most of them were unconscious now, while the rest were groaning or just slumping there dazed and unwilling to draw further attention to themselves.

"Seeing them like this," Minato muttered. "Seeing them like this, it makes me wonder more about this game than ever, and where they come from too, that people being able to do this is normal?"

Kasumi shrugged. "In comparison to some of the things I've heard my father mention a time or two and have even seen Ranma accomplish in his spars in our dojo, this just seems rather normal. Although I will admit the element manipulation is on a larger scale than anything I've seen any martial artist accomplish."

"And the way you can so casually mention other people using such powers frightens me," Minato said with a sigh. "What kind world of world have I entered?"

"A very odd one," Kasumi admitted. "Still, quite fun and with lots of lively people."

A second later Kagari jumped up and landed next to them, bowing from the waist grandly. "Minato, milady, the way forward has been cleared. We're good to enter the forest, jungle, whatever you want to call it." He frowned, scratching at the side of his head and looking around nervously.

"What's wrong?" Kasumi asked instantly.

Kagari smiled at that before gesturing at his face. "This is kind of the first time I've been out like this using my powers so much without hiding my face."

"I would suggest you get used to it," Kasumi said with a laugh. "Your time of being a dark vigilante fighting a lonely war against injustice is over now."

"But I liked being a lone vigilante!" Kagari mock-whined. Nonetheless, he gently lifted Kasumi in his arms, hiding a smile at her blush, and leaped down to the ground, while Kazehana leaped up and did the same for Minato, rubbing his head into her breasts very deliberately.

Once on the ground, Kasumi looked thoughtfully at the park and then spoke into the little communicator that she had been given by Matsu. The woman had looked very put out about having to give it to her in the first place, but had handed them out to everyone on the two teams. "Matsu, where exactly is the center of this park? We can't see anything through the jungle."

"A little to the left and then straight forward from the entrance," Matsu said crossly. "You could just ask Minato, you know. He should be able to figure out which direction the young girl is in if they are really bonding."

Kasumi nodded at that and looked over at Minato. "Well?"

"What happened to not liking the idea of me bonding with the young girl?" Minato asked, pouting as he remembered the earlier teasing.

"Don't pout; it's rather unbecoming," Kasumi said with a laugh. "And I'm still not going to let her kiss you on the lips or anything like that or vice versa. But it is true that we need to rely on your connection to this young girl to find her. So let's get a move on."

OOOOOO

While Minato and her group were busy with eliminating the regular troops around the park, Ranma and his group had arrived at the hospital. With Tsukiumi moving with him, Tofu made his way to the front entrance while Ranma and Akitsu waited out of sight on a nearby rooftop with Uzume.

Uzume wore something the others hadn't ever seen her wear before, an outfit made entirely of long white veils. It both covered her identity somewhat, since a portion of the veil covered her face, and was suggestive, since it hugged her upper body tightly and left her stomach bare. Uzume had shown, however, that the look wasn't for decoration. Her special Sekirei ability gave her control of cloth, and she could use her clothing offensively, every bit of the cloth moving under her control.

Putting his practiced 'working with patients' smile on his face, Tofu moved up to the front desk, where he bowed from the waist lightly to the receptionist there. "Excuse me, my name is Tofu Ono. I own a small clinic elsewhere in the city, and I was wondering if I could consult with a Doctor Murokuma today? It has to deal with a certain issue that has cropped up with my latest patient," he said, waving to Tsukiumi.

In contrast to Tofu, Tsukiumi hadn't looked at the receptionist. Instead, her eyes had fastened on two Sekirei lounging in the waiting area to one side. They too were looking back at her but making no move to attack. One of them was a short girl with her hair done to resemble cat ears. The other was a tall, brutish looking woman with wide, heavily muscled shoulders wearing a muscle T-shirt.

The receptionist was about to tell Tofu that he would have to make an appointment, but one of the Sekirei coughed, her eyes twitching to the receptionist. She nodded once, and the receptionist sighed but nodded. "As a fellow doctor, I am certain that Dr. Murokuma will make time for you, sir. One moment please."

With Tofu taking the attention of the defenders remaining in the hospital as well as their local controller, no one noticed two of the security cameras which had been installed specially for the Sekirei game suddenly start to loop for a moment, not finishing their full rotations around one side of the building. As well, a motion sensor on the roof turned off. At the same time that Tofu was ushered onto an elevator with Tsukiumi, Kocho's voice sounded in the communications headset Ranma had been given by Matsu. "You're clear, Ranma, and Tofu is on his way up."

"Cool, we're on our way."

"...Was that a joke, cool because you're with Akitsu?" Kocho asked suspiciously.

"Nope, but hey, that's a pretty good one," Ranma replied, leaping out and up, with Akitsu clinging to his back. Since they had been on a smaller building, Ranma had to scale up the four uppermost stories of the tall hospital, which Akitsu couldn't do. Uzume followed them using her cloth powers

A moment later they were on the roof, and Akitsu moved to the door. Once assured that there was no sensor on the door, she froze the metal of the lock solid before shattering it with a light punch. Ranma reached in over her hands, grabbing at the interior of the lock, and then opened the door slowly, making certain there was no squeak as they entered. "What floor again?"

"Fourteenth, two down from here," Uzume replied tersely, her entire body tense. "Now come on."

But Ranma forced her to halt as they moved on, waiting for Kocho to take control of each floor's cameras and security as they went. The topmost floor had a lot of this security, including numerous motion sensors. Some of them were local control: Kocho could detect, or, rather, infer their presence, but couldn't take control of them. So the group was forced to wend their way through, scaling the sides of the walls or even the ceiling.

"It's like someone knows what kind of things Sekirei can do," Ranma quipped as they descended the stairs. From there, however, the going became much quicker, and they were soon on the same floor where Chiho was being cared for. The three of them broke off, with Akitsu moving to stand facing the elevators and Ranma and Uzume clearing each room as they went. With no cameras here, Kocho couldn't help them.

Uzume found one Sekirei on duty, as it were, in the room next to Chiho's, and recognized her instantly. It was a shorthaired tomboy of a Sekirei named Oshino, who acted like Kakizaki's Sekirei, though whether that was because they had bonded or because she had been assigned to him, she didn't know. Oshino wasn't always around, but she had been the first time they'd met, and the attitude Oshino had given Uzume then still grated, a mix between jealousy and contempt.

It continued now as Oshino looked up, sneering as she saw Uzume. "And what're you doing here, Tits!?" she asked, standing up as Uzume entered the room. "Visiting hours are over, so if you want to see your weak-ass Ashikabi you'll have to urrk!"

The 'urrrk' came from Uzume's lashing out swiftly and tying Oshino up from head to toe in her cloth. The wrap around Oshino's neck quickly tightened, and the whole amount of cloth hurled her sideways, slamming into the wall, which startled Chiho out of a restless sleep. It also startled a female guard that had been posted under the guise of a nurse in Chiho's room.

Ranma blinked at the thump, then shrugged and called down to Akitsu. "That might've torn it if someone below heard Akitsu, so be on your guard, okay?"

With that he opened the door, his hand flashing out and catching the baton of the woman inside, and kicked out hard, flinging her backward to smack into the wall. He then smiled and bowed towards the bed where a young woman had sat up with some difficulty. She was a cute little thing, Ranma thought. Though probably older than him, she was also short, almost as short as his female form, and frail looking to boot in the light of the hallway through the open door.

Chiho blushed yet still nodded, staring at Ranma. "Um, I do have that honor, yes. Does that mean you are acquainted with Uzume-chan, sir? Can I ask what brings you here to see me so late? Please don't tell me there's something wrong with Uzume!"

Blinking in surprise at her ultra-polite tone, Ranma cocked his head, wondering how she and Uzume got along. *Then again, opposites attract sometimes*, he thought, hearing the note of worried love in Chiho's tone as she asked that last question. "Nope, nothing like that. But Uzume and the rest of us have decided to take you away from here. We think ya can get better help elsewhere, and various other stuff's going on at the moment."

"I am sorry, but I don't think that's possible. I need to stay in a hospital for my treatment, and this is the only hospital that will take Uzume's payment. I wish it could be otherwise for too many reasons to really go into, but..." Chiho broke off as Uzume appeared in the doorway, a bright warm smile appearing on her face, causing her to seem far less frail for a moment.

Uzume too seemed to brighten up, her earlier out of character seriousness disappearing into a startling amount of tenderness as she looked at Chiho, so much so that Ranma started to almost feel uncomfortable seeing it. "Hey, baby," Uzume breathed, moving in to sit next to Chiho and pulling her into a hug that was eagerly returned. "What's say I take you away from all this, huh?"

"B, but Uzume-chan, as nice as that is, you know I..." Chiho squeaked as Uzume shut her up with a kiss. Uzume's bond wings flared out in every direction, covering Ranma who blinked at the oddity, while, nearby, Akitsu's eyes narrowed slightly, and she resolutely pushed her jealousy down to glare even harder at the sight.

While Uzume started to explain what was going on, Ranma shook his head and left the two lovers to it, moving to join Akitsu. Putting his arms around Akitsu, he laid his chin on her shoulder with a smirk. "Well, that'll have warned 'em if nothing else, so we should be ready for anything. You good, Akitsu?"

Leaning back slightly, Akitsu closed her eyes, the warmth of Ranma's body against hers dissipating the cold that had started to creep over her heart when she saw Uzume's bond wings. "Hai, Sun-sama."

Down on the third floor, his colleague had greeted Tofu warmly, and the two of them had spent about ten minutes talking shop, comparing working in a hospital to owning your own clinic and such. Then they had gotten down to business as Tofu lied about having winged Tsukiumi, who had not stopped glaring at the two other Sekirei who had followed them in. She did twitch when Tofu lied about that point, but didn't say anything.

"But I am wondering about training, dietary concerns, and such. I am assuming, as she shares much of the physical characteristics of human being that, besides having a simply larger appetite, everything else should be as normal as possible. But I do not know for certain, as I certainly did not receive any kind of information packet when I was told about this Sekirei Game." Tofu sighed, shaking his head. "Yet that is a minor concern given how human Tsukiumi appear. The main question is what to do in terms of training and helping her gain more control over her element, that

of water. I hoped that by coming here I could find more information along those lines and about the game in general, since you and the other major hospitals are supposedly natural territory, tied to MBI."

"While this hospital is one of the ones sanctioned to treat Sekirei, I'm afraid I can't help you on the dietary concerns beyond saying that, yes, Sekirei all need a lot of food. A water user in particular? I am afraid the two of you will have to experiment, as I've never met one before this."

Murokuma looked up as the door to his office opened without a knock and smiled thinly. "In terms of training, however, I think I can help you a lot more there." He stood up from behind his desk, gesturing to the far younger man who had just entered. "May I introduce Kakizaki-sama? He is our...expert in Sekirei."

The newcomer looked to be about Tofu's own age, perhaps a bit younger and with a similar build. He wore a very good, expensive looking suit with a tie, had black hair done in a somewhat untamed sort of cut, and wore black-rimmed glasses on his face. Tofu saw his eyes flash somewhat when they landed on Tsukiumi before he pasted a smile on his face and moved forward with hand outstretched. "Dr. Tofu, I am Kakizaki, and I represent a ...individual who is most displeased with how wild and out of control the Sekirei game is. He believes, and has convinced many others, that it is the fault of the game master himself. To that end, we have been gathering allies to..."

Before he could continue, there were a series of buzzing noises. Kakizaki and the two Sekirei all looked down at their waists where they had cell phones, and Kakizaki flipped his open, waving Tofu away for a moment. Staring at it, he then dropped his hand to his pocket and pulled out a small, unobtrusive Taser, holding it nonchalantly as he stared at Tofu, who was still well within arm's reach. "Kaie, Fukuzuki, make your way up to the special patient's room. We have a security issue. Might I ask if, in the interest of keeping the peace in a hospital, your Sekirei—Tsukiumi, isn't it? Might I ask if she can join them?"

"Certainly. Go on, Tsukiumi. I'm fine here," Tofu said pleasantly.

Without a word, Tsukiumi nodded and followed the other two as they raced out the door. Kakizaki thought, *It seems as if the water Sekirei is perhaps not very happy to have been winged. Interesting.* He smiled pleasantly at Tofu and continued their earlier conversation as if they hadn't been interrupted at all. "As I was saying, we have been gathering allies to try to change the course of events."

"And does that have to do with this special patient you were talking about just now?" Tofu asked archly, moving back slightly at Kakizaki's motion with the Taser. "Perhaps a patient whose Sekirei you are trying to make use of?"

"Perhaps. If you join us you may be told more," Kakizaki said, his eyes narrowing in rising suspicion.

"And you?" Tofu asked, looking over at the doctor he'd been talking to. "You are fine with the idea of a hospital, a place of healing and health, turned into a bastion of this faction this man is a part of?"

Murokuma sighed theatrically, his earlier façade of fellow feeling and comradery dissipating as he nearly sneered at Tofu, making it clear to the young doctor what kind of people he was dealing with here. Both of these men were bullies in a certain fashion, willing to use force or coercion in order to control the people around them however they could. "Ono, you are a small frog at the bottom of a well who's just been shown how the world around you works. A single patient hardly matters in the great scheme of things, but a single Sekirei? One like the one in question? That could matter a lot more. Every doctor here knows it and knows on which side of the plate their rice is on."

While Tofu was talking to the two other men, Tsukiumi and the two other Sekirei had reached the stairs going up, having no need to wait for the elevator, and they began to ascend. Once they were running up the stairs, the butch-looking Sekirei spoke, sneering at Tsukiumi. "I don't know you, but my sisters have talked about you turning our master down every time they see you. I've been dying to ask how it feels to be servicing your new master, but I'll wait for that. Just don't slow us down now, got it!"

Tsukiumi nearly vibrated with fury, and it was with intense relief that she heard Kocho's voice over her earbud. Hidden under her hair, none of the others had even noticed it. "Tsukiumi, we're clear! Go for it!"

"Finally! Thou foolish louts, mouthing off in such an uncouth manner against one such as me! Feel your folly on your bodies!" Tsukiumi exclaimed, stopping and gesturing theatrically. She thrust out forward with both hands, and the entire stairwell behind her filled with water, flashing forward in an overwhelming attack. "Water Eruption!"

The water slammed into the two Sekirei even as they turned and launched themselves down towards her. One of them, Kaie, had the semblance of mind to leap over the edge of the stairwell, landing below Tsukiumi. Her fellow, though, found herself crushed momentarily against the exit to the floor above them before the wall burst and the

water attack carried her on further.

Kaie leaped forward. From within her long sleeves came a long whip-like weapon, but one with multiple whips connected to a single grip.

She flashed those whips forward, but to Tsukiumi, who was used to sparing with Ranma, they moved in slow motion. She leaped and dodged before lashing out with a water attack that smashed Kaie back down the stairs to land in an unconscious pile on the floor far below.

With that she moved forward, stepping over Fukuzuki's unconscious form. With a single blast of water, she opened all three elevators to stare within the shafts. Tsukiumi breathed in, then stretched one hand back toward the stairwell and then thrust out the other one towards the elevator shafts. "Water Eruption times four!"

With that shout, Tsukiumi created four massive flows of water that flashed out and into her targets, beginning to fill them from top to bottom. It took a lot out of her to create that many different streams while also creating so much water in the first place, but, even so, the water quickly filled up the elevator chutes despite water seeping out at every door, startling many of the hospital workers. Eventually the water sped upwards from her position, filling all three shafts, the water being kept in on this level by Tsukiumi's will for a brief moment before another's will took over and the water in front of her froze solid..

At the same time Ranma had been listening for the noise of Tsukiumi's attack, having forced open an elevator door on his level. When he heard the sound of doors being torn open below, he nodded to Akitsu, taking her hand and gesturing down. "You're up, Akitsu!"

Akitsu nodded and knelt next to him, her hands on the lip of the shaft. She gathered her powers and started to create a thin vein of ice heading down into the elevator tube. Once that vein of ice contacted Tsukiumi's water, her ice powers slowly began to freeze the water. Going straight down from the edge, this solidified the outer shell of the water and let Tsukiumi keep throwing more and more water into the tubes and her other attacks, which burst out and started to flood the first floor of the hospital, catching another Sekirei who had been sleeping in one of the rooms there.

Tofu and the other two heard this in the distance, but, before either of the others could react, Tofu was already moving. A hand slapped Kakizaki's hand, numbing it, and another jab caught him in the sternum, folding him over before a leg sweep tumbled him to the floor, where he curled up around his stomach in agony.

Dr. Tofu glared down at the groaning Kakizaki and then looked at the doctor, who was now cowering behind his desk. "How dare you? How dare you propagate this lie, go along with, with, swindling a young woman's lover out of her money!?! Go along with it to such an extent that you are basically holding her hostage and further letting this hospital as a whole be used as a base in this vile game! And you call yourself a doctor?!"

To Tofu's surprise, the older man got in his face and shouted back, "What would you have me do! She is one patient, who can't be saved! There is no medicine in the world that will help her, no therapy or anything else that can do anything but mask her illness's symptoms. If I leave, would anyone else in my place do any better?!"

"Someone with some integrity would have remembered his oath! Not every doctor is as spineless as you!" Tofu shot back, pushing the other doctor in the chest hard enough to send him to his rear.

He glared down at the man who looked up at him in shock. "I will expect you to turn yourself in. I will expect you to give up in your license and resign from this position. If you do not, I will make it known to every doctor in Japan what you have been doing! I will tell them that you allowed your greed to control you instead of saving a young girl's life or, at the very least, making her life as comfortable as you possibly could. I will make you a laughingstock, a disgrace, both you and this institution! Do you understand me?"

As the man nodded frantically, Dr. Tofu turned to the man in glasses, kneeling down in front of him. "And as for you and your employer? Well, I'm going to turn you and your punishment over to Ranma. But first..."

His hands flashed, and the man in glasses gasped as pain lanced down from his stomach and deep into his groin. "What, what did you just do!" he gasped in agony.

"You'll find out the next time you go to the bathroom," Dr. Tofu said coldly. "When you do, do try to keep the screaming down."

That horrified the man in glasses, but before he could speak Ranma and the others were there, having come down

the stairwell, which had been a tricky proposition for him, but Akitsu seemed to have a preternatural ability to stand and walk on ice without any issues. Uzume, on the other hand, hadn't chanced it, hopping out the window and climbing down the face of the hospital with her cloth powers while cradling Chiho in her arms.

After Tofu informed Ranma who Kakizaki was, confirmed by Kocho over the radio, Ranma grabbed him by the back of his neck and started to haul him towards the window, which obviously became a much bigger problem for the man. "Wait, what are you doing! No, you can't, this will be murder!"

"Nope!" Ranma said flip-tossing him into the air and grabbing some rope which he'd commandeered from some washing lines as he followed him out. He grabbed the man out of the air easily, holding him in one hand before tying an arm to one of the building's outward thrusting architectural bits. Ranma had no idea what they were called—they weren't gargoyles; they looked more like the cross that doctors and nurses wore at times. "No murder here, just a lot of humiliation."

With that he began to tie him to the side of the building, stripping him of his clothing as he went.

Outside Uzume blinked, looking to the side, and then she began to cackle aloud, laughing wildly even as she still cradled Chiho gently against her chest. "Damn, bro! That is awesome."

Chiho looked in that direction and then blanched, looking away. "Oh my. That is rather unsightly."

OOOOOO

Back at Izumo House, Matsu giggled. "Damn but Tofu was awesome just then, wasn't he?"

Next to her, Kocho rolled her eyes and pushed Matsu away from the pickup, which Tofu had on his shirt, hidden by a button, along with one hidden just behind his ear. It had been placed there just in case Tofu needed to be walked through anything when he met with the other doctors or Kakizaki, but it hadn't been needed.

But that and the fact that the two of them had hacked into the hospital's security system had given them both audio and video for the confrontation. And watching Tofu in action had been interesting, even to Kocho, who wasn't reacting to him.

With the hospital pretty much wrecked—after all, that water would cause even more damage once it unfroze—and the rescuers away while the other plan went off without a hitch, combat speaking, Kocho allowed herself a small smile. Then she turned to another computer. "Now let's get back to part of the plan 'Screw Higa Over.'"

"Hehe, Ranma might not have a good naming sense, but it does get the idea across, anyway!" Matsu replied, also turning away, her fingers flying.

With the two Brainttype Sekireis working in tandem, the various computers, network security programs and even the living people behind them stood no chance whatsoever. The two of them were in the system within minutes of coming back upstairs after the meal earlier, and, between helping the two teams, they had begun to hit Higa where it would hurt someone like him the most: in his wallet. Before an hour went by they had transferred several million in liquid cash, emptied his emergency funds, his super-secret escape funds, and had changed the name of the owner on a deed for an apartment in Taiwan. Then they got creative.

About ten minutes after turning their attention back to their personal part of the battle against Higa, a beep brought Matsu's attention out of the world of slush funds, computer programs, and blackmail. Looking to the side, she shunted that work off her screen and turned to something else. "That's weird."

"What is?" Kocho asked absentmindedly. *Why in the world did Higa's family buy out this freighter company based in Argentina instead of that one there based out of South Korea? The companies run much the same routes, and everything else seems even. Odd...*

"MBI just upped the security over their satellites and all of the security cameras scattered throughout Shin Teito," Matsu answered absentmindedly. "Hmm..."

OOOOOO

With Uzume carrying Chiho and trying not to jostle her as much as possible, the group's return to Nerima was slowed badly. Still, Tofu had to admit that his excursion into violence had gone well. "That was relatively painless," he said aloud with a smile. "No one was hurt save the Sekirei on guard, the Kakizaki fellow, and, of course, the hospital itself and the pride of the various people there. That and we all are unhurt and have rescued the fair maiden's fair maiden."

Ranma stumbled as he landed on the next roof over, turning and gaping at Tofu, and even Tsukiumi looked at the doctor in shock, while Akitsu moved closer to Ranma in case he stumbled again. Uzume and Chiho, too, turned to him, though Chiho didn't remove her head from where it was nestled in among Uzume's large breasts. "Bro," Uzume said as Ranma joined in in chorus, "why you gotta tempt fate like that?"

Tofu blinked, then sighed and nodded, clapping his hands in prayer and bowing before them an apology. "I'm sorry," he said formally.

"Better," Ranma replied before they moved on.

For a few moments it looked as if Dr. Tofu's inadvertent call out to Fate would pass unnoticed. However, as Ranma leaped forward with Uzume and Chiho next to him and Akitsu on his other side, he sensed something coming towards them out of the air. Reaching out, he grabbed their shoulders and heaved them backward back onto the building that they had just leaped off. "Get back!"

Ranma barely had an instant to set his feet down on the incoming rooftop before a wave of cutting force slammed into it from the side. The rooftop was both sliced and shattered into hundreds of pieces, which went all over the place.

Ranma grunted as several of them hit him, but he smacked a few that would've taken him in the face away. Better, that brief moment of setting his feet down had been enough for him to propel himself towards the side and away from the direction of the attack.

He rolled onto the next rooftop as the attack continued to cut into the building that he had just escaped from, nearly slicing it in half from the top down. At the same time, from the other side of the building he heard a call of, "Well, you dodged that one, at least. Good! As expected of a pupil of that old bitch."

Leaping over the dust and rubble of the ruined building came a tall, silver-haired woman. She was lean and fit, with possibly the second smallest set of breasts Ranma had seen on a Sekirei. She wore a black cloak, black leggings, and a gray undershirt, the same uniform he'd seen on Benitsubasa and Haihane, though not as modified. At her side she had a sword, currently sheathed, but Ranma knew that that was the weapon that had just launched that attack.

Around him the others gathered, with Uzume staring at the woman with both fear and anger in her eyes. She recognized this woman and wanted no part of her, especially with Chiho in her arms. "What the hell! You're supposed to be a disciplinary committee member! Why the heck are you involving civilians?"

"The one called Ranma isn't a civilian. He has been designated a negative element attempting to ruin the game. So says the game master, anyway," the woman said cheerfully, finishing her leap and landing easily.

Ranma backed away slightly, crouching down with one hand extended and the other one pressed hard against his chest. It was one of the very few times that Akitsu it ever seen her master take an actual stance. "And who are you supposed to be?"

"Karasuba, Sekirei number 04 and leader of the Disciplinary Squad. And, right now, your executioner," Karasuba replied, still cheerful.

At those words, Akitsu reacted instantly. She conjured up ice and then launched it forward, shattering each piece as it went, to try to attack the woman facing them from every side. But her eyes could barely even follow the woman's movements as she sliced each piece of ice in two, letting them pass by her without hitting her at all. An attempt to lock Karasuba's legs was foiled when she simply leaped upwards, lashing out with a blast of air pressure that zoomed toward Akitsu, who dodged wildly.

Immediately Tsukiumi joined in, her voice a roar. "Thou dishonorable cur, attacking us when we be simply transporting a wounded lady to seek a new hospital! Water Celebration, Hydra!"

Dozens of water serpents lashed out from her outstretched hands as she put more distance between herself and Karasuba. Yet Karasuba simply danced among them, her sword lashing out and shredding each serpent without any apparent effort from the woman. Then she was facing Tsukiumi, and her sword flashed out again, having covered the intervening distance before Tsukiumi could leap away. Tsukiumi tried to dodge, but still felt her life flashing before her eyes as Karasuba's blade flashed toward her.

Then Ranma was there slamming into Karasuba and pushing her out of the way, his fists against her sword. Coated with ki, he was able to batter Karasuba's sword backwards slightly and raised a leg into a high kick that nearly caught her in the face, but she dodged at the last instant, twisting around and coming around again in another cut. Ranma

dodged that by a whisker, flipping backwards into a twirl and bringing up his other leg to impact her chin, sending her backwards slightly. "Akitsu, everyone, get out of here! It's me this bitch has called out!"

Yet, to his surprise, Karasuba simply took the blow and grinned wildly. "Not bad! You're the first one to ever get an actual hit on me in years! Let's see if you can keep it up!"

With that she attacked in earnest, her sword flashing out in several attacks that Ranma barely dodged. He sped up too, not meeting the blade with his own fists any longer since he could sense the ki in it, giving it a cutting edge, which sliced into the buildings around behind them and the rooftop they were currently on indiscriminately. Instead he matched them with air pressure attacks, short jabs of air pressure against her cutting-edge, blunting and deflecting.

A punch got through the woman to her chest, pushing her back slightly, but she kicked out hard in turn, catching Ranma on the knee before he could back away. He moved with the blow but was pushed off balance and was almost cut into by her sword coming around in a short economical cut that nearly took him in the chest. But Ranma leaped over the blow, getting in another shot of his own that sent Karasuba stumbling backwards.

Rather than running as Ranma had asked her to, Akitsu attempted to help him again, sending another blast of ice along the rooftop. But Karasuba laughed and brought her blade down, slicing into the rooftop with the ease of a bullet going through butter. "You'll have to be stronger than that! Dead Wave Slash!" she roared. The attacks sliced through Akitsu's ice and the building below them once more, from the rooftop down to the street level and continued on towards Akitsu.

She gasped and conjured several feet worth of ice in front of her, leaping backwards while doing it. But, even so, the attack nearly got to her, the attack slicing through her clothing but leaving her body untouched.

Having gotten over her near-death experience, Tsukiumi joined in, launching a series of her own water attacks at Karasuba as she and Ranma continued to exchange blows. "Water Slicer!"

Karasuba turned, annihilating these attacks with two air attacks of her own before another nearly took Tsukiumi's legs off at the knees. She dodged the air cutter for the most part, but the attack still opened a neat slash along the side of her lower leg. This began to bleed profusely, slowing her down.

That moment of attention on Tsukiumi, however, cost Karasuba, and a blow hammered into her side, which nearly cracked a rib. Or rather, several dozen blows struck her side within a second before she could bring the pommel of her sword down, crashing into Ranma's fist and pushing it back, then attacking with another cut towards his chest that he barely dodged, slicing a sliver from his upper chest.

"Akitsu, Tsukiumi, get out of here! Your speed just isn't up to fighting her!" *Hell, my speed is barely up to her level*, Ranma thought worriedly. Other than Miya Ranma had never met someone who was faster than him and this woman was something else in terms of skill and strength, way above anyone else he'd ever fought beyond Miya herself.

At that order from her master, Akitsu snarled, showing more emotion than that she had ever shown outside of the times they were kissing. She knelt down and then brought her hands up and around as she concentrated, pushing out as much of her power as she could. The air around them and up to several blocks in every direction cooled down from a nice summer day to near arctic temperatures within a second. This caused people to gasp, shiver, and start to freeze as they tried to get away from the epicenter of the cold front, though most civilians had already been doing this, thankfully, since the battle wasn't exactly silent.

Then Akitsu clapped her hands down onto the rooftop and shrieked, "Ice Age!" But the moment she tried to finish the attack, the mark on her forehead glowed, and nearly all of her energy disappeared, flashing back into her. The ice grew out about a foot around her in every direction but then stopped, and the temperature rose once more to normal levels as she collapsed to her side, her body spasming as her ki pathways **screamed** at her in agony.

Tsukiumi grabbed her up into her arms and leaped away, leaving a bloody trail behind her just moments before another stray attack from Karasuba hit the spot where Akitsu had been kneeling. Tsukiumi grimaced, feeling her strength slowly fading as her blood continued to flow from the wound to her leg, which, despite being thin, had shown no sign of clotting any time soon.

Even so, she would have joined the fight, but Ranma got in a lucky punch, sending Karasuba backwards to land several yards away. This bought him enough time and breath to shout, "Tsukiumi, take her and go!"

"No, Ashikabi-sama!" Akitsu called out weakly, one hand rising to reach for Ranma, but she was so weakened from her attempt to break through her broken bond to use her Norito that she couldn't fight her way out of the weakened

Tsukiumi's arms.

Tsukiumi, in turn, grimaced and nodded. "Stay alive, Ranma! Thou might be a lout at times, but I wouldst not be the only one to sorely miss thee if you die so!"

As Tsukiumi leaped away, Ranma turned to face Karasuba, cocking his head thoughtfully to one side. "You're going to let them go?"

"The broken icy bitch and the others aren't my targets today," Karasuba replied with a laugh, leaping from where they had been fighting to land across from him on the rooftop he was on, that of a large sports center of some kind. Once there she turned back to him, a wicked smirk on her face. "You are."

She had once more sheathed her blade and almost glared at him now. "You're supposed to be Miya's apprentice or something, right? Don't make me laugh! There's no way she would've just allowed you to keep going with this unarmed skill of yours! You've got to have a weapon, right?"

Scowling, Ranma nodded. "I use a sword sometimes, yes, but I don't have one on me now." In fact, he had stolen the sword he'd taken from the twin sword wielder Higa had sent against him with his enforcers, but he hadn't brought it along today since it didn't quite suit his sword style, and he hadn't thought they would face an opponent on this level.

Which was stupid of me, Ranma admitted internally. *I've been getting sort of cocky these days since no one Sekirei I've fought could match me, and MBI wasn't able to move against me very effectively. Now I'm paying for it.*

"Well that's a damn shame. But I'm certainly not about to let you go and grab one," Karasuba replied with a shrug.

Scowling, Ranma nodded and brought up his hands again in his stance, one foot forward and both hands raised into fists. "I wasn't going to ask."

With that he shot forward faster than he'd moved before, almost fast enough to take Karasuba by surprise. She barely raised a hand to block his blow, grunting at the force of it and twisting lightly to one side as her other hand brought out her blade in a quick iai strike.

But Ranma kicked out, his foot catching that hand and pushing her blade back into its scabbard, twirling around into a kick that caught Karasuba on the side of the face, hurling her backwards. He didn't follow up, instead dodging to one side as Karasuba finished the iai attack, lashing out with cutting blast of ki that continued on its way to slice neatly into an apartment tower to one side. It sliced completely through that tower, and there was a rumbling crash as the top of it slowly slid off the diagonal of the cut to crash into the building next to it, sticking there.

Ranma ignored that. He ignored the screams, cries and shouts of panic of the public: Ranma knew he couldn't take the time to notice them. Instead he attacked quickly, trying to get under Karasuba's guard, but it failed as she twisted away, bringing her sword down in a stab that would've caught Ranma in the back before quickly flipping her sword upwards again and attacking in a series of cuts and jabs. In this manner she pressed Ranma back, forcing him to defend himself again with his own air blasts.

But Ranma could tell that Karasuba was now cutting through those, and he grimaced, covering his hands with ki just as she finished doing so, cutting into his hand. He splashed the blood in her face and tried to grab her elbow to push her sword arm out of the way for a punch, only partially succeeding: the blood got in one eye. And, instead of letting his push on her elbow have its way, she pushed back against his hand on her elbow, tossing him backwards with a show of strength that was well beyond anything he had seen even from Musubi.

But when she kicked out in turn, Ranma grabbed the foot and flipped her backwards and away, leaping up and over the accompanying attack from her sword. A punch caught Karasuba in the face, but she had moved just enough for it to impact her on the chin rather than her currently non-blinded eye. At the same time, her sword nearly stabbed into his side, instead cutting a long groove across it.

Ranma twirled away around her and leaped down to the street below. There he kicked off instantly and came back directly upwards, hoping to hit Karasuba in midair. This worked, but she was prepared too, and it was only Ranma's mastery of air combat that allowed him to dodge the downward attack that cut into the street below him nearly down to the sewer level. The two of them met in midair, exchanging attacks, slashes, cuts, punches, and kicks.

Now it was Karasuba's turn to realize that she was overmatched as a blow broke through her defenses to crash into her jaw, making her taste blood as it broke a tooth. Another took her in the side, and an attack was dodged by of the barest margins as Ranma used her hand on her sword hand to leap a little higher, bringing his foot down on the top of

her head and then flipping away, kicking off the nearby building, and coming back in. *Shit, this punk really is good!*

Off-balance and in midair, Karasuba could barely block two out of three of his attacks, but that didn't mean she was completely helpless. Instead of attacking him directly, she started to attack the buildings all around them, gritting her teeth and moving with each blow that got through to deaden as much of the force as she could. Several seconds later when Ranma once more went to kick off one side of the building to come back and hammer her again in order to keep her in midair, the building's side gave way under his foot just enough to hold him up.

Karasuba's next attack hit him hard, cutting across his stomach in a long gash whose energy flung him backwards into the building he'd been attempting to use as a push off point. The wall crumbled, and he was smashed through it into the interior of the building. As she at last finished her fall towards the ground, Karasuba sent several more cutting attacks into the building, causing it to collapse onto Ranma.

A second later she landed, gasping in pain as one of her legs, which had taken several hits, nearly gave out underneath her. *Damn is he good!* she thought with a laugh, pushing herself upright. *Still, that should've at least buried him alive.*

She blinked though as Ranma pushed out of the rubble, heaving several tons worth of rubble off and gasping as he stared at her. *This bitch nearly killed me!*

Even as that thought registered in his mind, however, Ranma couldn't help himself from grinning. This was what he lived for: an opponent that could push him, an opponent that would demand his all. Looking around, he saw a wakizashi from within an apartment building sticking out from the rubble. Pulling at it, he looked around wildly, hoping to find the accompanying first blade of the two blade honor set of a Samurai. At the same time Ranma checked the blade and found it somewhat decent, but nothing to write home about. *Someone must have bought it for decoration, but it's still a sword.*

He found the larger katana that went with it; the blade had been shattered along with its sheath by the building's collapse. Sighing, Ranma flipped the wakizashi through his fingers a few times, then nodded and turned towards where he knew Karasuba was.

"It's a little short, isn't it?" Karasuba asked with a grin, hopping up into the pile of rubble. Her own blade, a nodachi with a straighter blade than a katana, tapped lightly on one shoulder. Despite the pasting she'd taken a second ago, the wounds scattered around her body, she was the very picture of nonchalance.

Ranma, though, was a master of Anything Goes Psych-out and knew precisely what she was trying to do. He flipped his new sword through his fingers again and then concentrated, pushing his ki out into the blade, which began to glow white. "I think I'll be fine."

Karasuba chuckled, then her eyes turned dangerous and she launched herself forward. Ranma did the same, their blades slamming into one another, creating a concussive force that shattered windows for miles around throughout the city. They grappled there, blade against blade, both of them using two hands for the moment, trying to overpower the other. And it was Ranma who was pushed backwards.

But he kicked out, aiming for the same leg he'd struck so often when they were in midair a moment ago, and the momentary pain stopped Karasuba from taking advantage of his being off-balance. They twisted away from one another and came in again, their blades now ringing against one another in a series of attacks, each of them lethal had they landed. They seemed to dance as they moved save for the violence of their attacks. No words were exchanged now, just deadly intent. The buildings around them cracked and crumbled under their attacks: sliced, diced, almost julienned in some cases.

Seconds later Ranma was forced to fall entirely onto the defense as their fight had brought them into a busy street, and he had to protect several passersby, including a young woman with a tan and the body of a young girl. She gasped, actually able to see the attack coming her way, ducking down fearfully behind a car. But the car was cut in two, and if Ranma hadn't gotten in the way of the attack at the last minute, the little girl would've joined it.

He grunted as he took the attack on his blade, which he could sense was beginning to strain under the pounding despite his ki infusing it. But he twisted to one side and sent Karasuba's attack into the ground, twisting around and bringing his other hand up and around to catch her on the chest, hurling her backwards.

Just then, Ranma heard a voice shouting out, "Where the hell am I... Ranma!?"

Ranma didn't turn around, staring as Karasuba pulled herself out of the wrecked car, a wicked smirk on her features.

"Kind of busy, Ryoga! Unless you want to pile in, get out of here!"

Blinking, Ryoga stared at his old sparring partner/rival/friend, seeing the seriousness in his expression and body language. Then he looked around and towards the direction Ranma had come from and saw the amount of destruction the two of them had created. "Holy hell..."

"Bringing another human into the fight, Ranma? That's just not on!" With that Karasuba charged forward, forcing Ranma to protect the same girl again with a wicked laugh.

"HEY!" Ryoga roared out, moving to the side and lifting up a car with a grunt of effort. He then turned and hurled it at the blade wielding Sekirei. "Leave them alone!"

"Nice try, but not enough!" Though surprised, Karasuba was still able to dodge the attack, lashing out at Ryoga with an air slicer that actually hurt! Ryoga grunted in pain as his immense durability was put to the test and found wanting, cutting him deeply in the shoulder. He grunted and went to one knee, staring in shock at the wound before he quickly began to use his limited knowledge of ki and healing to try to force the wound closed.

He was then surprised as Ranma tossed the little girl his way, barely getting his uninjured arm up in time to catch her. "Catch, Ryoga!" Ranma shouted belatedly. "Get her and the others out of the way!"

"Don't tell me what to do!" Grumbling at being ordered about, Ryoga and the young girl still obeyed, grabbing several other people and getting them out of the way. More than a few of them were astonished when they were tossed around as if they weighed nothing, but for once Ryoga didn't get lost the moment he went around a corner. He could still hear the sounds of combat and followed along, eager to get in close and try to interfere if he could.

Ranma didn't notice. His entire attention was on Karasuba as the two of them once more exchanged blows, pushing him down the street and away. Leaping over one attack, Ranma landed on Karasuba's head for just a heartbeat, stabbing downwards at her, but she wrenched herself backwards, bringing her sword up to block with the side of her blade against the tip of his, then flung him away through the air. But Ranma went with it, flipping himself up and up to land on a rooftop high above, lashing down at her with another, "Air Wave Slash!"

She matched it, and her attack was far sharper and more condensed than his was. It cut straight through his attack and came on towards him, but Ranma was already gone, leaping to another rooftop.

"Oh, so it's a chase now?" Karasuba snarled, leaping up after him. "Goodie! I love being it!"

But when she landed on the roof, Ranma was hiding there and nearly caught her with a jab through the chest. But she dodged at the last minute, taking it on her forearm, which was cut cleanly along its length from wrist to elbow. It shredded her outfit more than anything, and she tore it off even as she twisted around into her own attack.

The two of them continued to exchange attacks, but Ranma was flagging now. He had to use his ki to keep up with Karasuba, whose speed was above his own, though nowhere near as fast as Miya, nor was she as precise, thankfully. She had a lot of wasted movement, which he was able to take advantage of, but she was also more durable than him. The amount of attacks he had landed on her one leg should've crippled that leg, but it hadn't, and that last attack should have cut her to the bone at the least, but it had barely broken her skin.

But one thing that Ranma had going for him was the fact that, even though he had taken up a sword, Ranma continued to use the rest of his body far better than Karasuba. She could kick and even punch, but it wasn't as natural for her as it was for him, and that gave him a bit of an edge when added to his overall style, which was better than hers, if again very slightly. Not enough to overcome Karasuba's unnatural strength and speed advantage, but enough for now.

OOOOOO

"Finally! Damn it, if I had my Norito I would've been able to..." Matsu fell silent, staring in horror at the image on the screen. Kocho too looked at it in shock, and then she twisted around, shouting out the doorway. "Miya-sama! We've got trouble!"

Miya was there in an instant a faint frown on her face as she had been busy helping Kasumi cook a light meal for Kuchan, their newest, albeit temporary, resident. But the frown deepened as she too stared at the screen. "Is, is this live?"

"H, hai!" Matsu said, shuddering. She was utterly terrified of Karasuba, with reason, of course.

For a moment Miya stared, looking almost torn. Then she whirled around and disappeared. There was a crash from downstairs, and then Kocho, who had moved to follow her and ask number 01 what she was going to do, paused, staring out a window. Already on a nearby rooftop, Miya was sprinting off into the distance, her hair loose and wild behind her as she raced away faster than any other Sekirei could have moved.

OOOOOO

The two of them pushed off one another again, skidding backward and glaring at one another as Ranma flipped back to land on the rooftop they had been on previously, stopping to stare at Karasuba across the divide. It was only then that Ranma realized that they were right next to MBI tower. They had somehow crossed about a third of the city, leaving a trail of destruction that any army would've envied.

Across from him, Karasuba smirked, shrugging her shoulders and moving her neck as she twirled her blade in front of her in an almost lazy figure eight. She was bloody, battered, missing several teeth now and had at least a few broken bones, yet was still grinning from ear to ear.

For his part Ranma had begun to conserve his ki instead of healing himself, forcing his body to not respond to the dozens of cuts littering it from head to toe, though the worst of his wounds was a missing pinky and tip of one ear along with at least two broken ribs. He was gasping, having pushed been pushed to the limits of his inhuman endurance.

The end was coming; both of them knew it.

Karasuba sighed, stopping her figure eight with her sword out to one side and low, bringing her other hand up to join her sword hand. "It was fun. But really, you're just the opening act to the main event for me. Sorry, kid, but all good things have to come to an end."

Ranma looked down at his sword, which was in tatters. Chips and even large chunks of it were missing along its length despite the fact that he had reinforced it with his ki as much as he could. He looked at his hands, which were shaking now from the impact of so many attacks from his opponent. Then he grimaced and tightened his grip on the sword, putting both hands on it and bringing it up over his head and down to his side. "Don't think I'm going to make it easy for you."

The two of them stared at one another, ignoring the fact that several nearby buildings had slowly begun to open their garage doors, and troopers like those, which Minato and his team had fought with were forming up there. Ryoga, having followed this fight and feeling very left out, didn't. He charged into them from the side, grabbing one and hurling him into the others.

"Not going to happen boys!" He was almost relieved when they started to shoot at him and the bullets bounced off, having been worried about his endurance a moment ago. But that didn't mean he was going to let them attack Ranma from behind. *Huh, could they have been trying to move against her too? Nah, she wears that outfit that pink-haired harridan was wearing.*

Thinking of the devil seemed to summon her as Benitsubasa and Haihane made an appearance then. Beni moved immediately toward Ryoga, shouting, "You! I want a rematch, you freak!"

Haihane, on the other hand, simply followed, looking at the action about to finish above them. *Damn it, don't know who to root for here.* Loyalty said one thing, friendship another. So she did nothing, just staring.

Karasuba smirked but then paused as something niggled at the edge of her senses, some incoming wave of power and fear. **Power!** Her eyes widened, and she grinned. "The main event's arriving. But I can hardly let her interrupt this fight. I'm going to end this here and now, boy," she said seriously. "Prepare yourself."

Ranma grunted and began to channel his ki back into his sword, which again began to glow a dull, dim white. "Fuck you and the spaceship you rode in on."

The two of them leaped towards one another, disappearing to the senses of the few soldiers who were still looking their way. Ranma brought his blade down and across from his side in a slash towards Karasuba, who brought her own sword up in a perfect cut motion.

The two attacks slammed into one another and Ranma's sword shattered. The blade of it from halfway up its length just snapped off cleanly. Karasuba's attack continued on, slicing deeply into his body from shoulder to thigh. Blood burst and Ranma howled and gasped in agony, in more pain than he'd felt since the Neko-ken.

Ranma gasped and fell backward in the air, his sword blade falling from his nerveless grip. Across from him Karasuba grinned triumphantly, allowing her body to fall, her arms still upraised from her attack.

But to her intense surprise, Ranma revived himself somehow. Be it hidden reserves, the damage not being as bad as it looked, or simple stubbornness, Ranma refused to go down. Flipping through the air, he grabbed the sword blade out of the air, and then he was just inside her reach, the sword edge glowing so white it looked like it was on fire as it cut into the inner part of Karasuba's raised arm, causing her nodachi to fall from her suddenly nerveless grasp.

She tried to grab it with her other hand, but a punch from Ranma sent her flailing backwards, and Ranma grabbed it instead, twisting around to land before she could get her feet under her. Before she could do anything he was stabbing forward deeply into her chest as he let loose a wordless war cry.

Even Karasuba's durability couldn't turn aside her own sword's tip as it rammed into her stomach without giving her time to steel herself for it, and she gasped in agony as she found herself once more off the ground. Ranma hurled them both off the rooftop, with Karasuba under him, impaled on her own blade like a fly on a pin. They landed with a crash, and Ranma kept on pushing. The blade's hilt was jammed against Karasuba's stomach, and the entire blade was through her body and into the road below.

He glared at her for a moment, holding the blade there and watching as she snarled in rage at him as blood dribbled out of her lips. Then the strength in his hands faded, and he collapsed to the side, his body just giving out on him entirely like a broken doll.

Ranma, however, never hit the ground. Miya was suddenly there, having leaped from nearly an entire block away to land beside him, skidding on the ground before taking him in her hands. She quickly sought a pulse and breathed a sigh of relief when she found one. But the damage that had been done to Ranma was significant, and she quickly pulled off her apron—tore it off, really—and pulled it taut around his body in an effort to try and stem the bleeding from the massive gash that Karasuba had caused.

All around them men were collapsing, falling to their knees and throwing up or just shivering, catatonic at the **FEAR** they were feeling. Even though Miya wasn't looking in their direction, even though she was no longer so furious now that she had arrived, it was still like being face to face with a power akin to a god of old. Only Ryoga and the other two members of the Disciplinary Committee were still on their feet, but only by leaning against walls, or, in Ryoga's case, an SUV.

She stared down at Karasuba, who astonishingly was still alive and was trying to pull the sword out from her guts. She laughed wildly, staring up at Miya. "He was good! He was very good! I think we could call this a tie," she said, grinning through bloodied lips.

"You make it sound as if you will live out the day for this," Miya replied, her sword flicking out, down, and back into her sheath faster than an eye blink. "You have always been a fool, Karasuba, never understanding what true strength was, what your own limits were. You crossed them today."

Karasuba was still grinning when Miya's blade cut into her neck very neatly, severing her head from her shoulders without leaving a mark on the ground underneath her. It was so neat that, for a moment, even Karasuba didn't realize she was dead. She continued to grin and opened her mouth to say something, but only blood came out now. The rivulet that had been there became a torrent, and then her head slowly slid off her shoulders, rolling along on the ground.

Cradling Ranma in her arms, Miya stood up. She glared at the soldiers all around her, and every one of them trembled. The fact that she had a sword and they had guns, the fact that several hundred yards lay between them, none of that mattered. Every one of them knew they were staring certain death in the face. "I will give you all of you one warning. Back away. Leave me be, or I will kill all of you."

It was stated, a simple statement. No threat, no promise. It was if she had said the sky was blue or winter was cold. There was that much certainty in her voice. And none of them, already terrified, could do anything but nod their heads and pray the goddess of death in front of them did not decide to put the tiny effort she would need to squish them like bugs.

But then another voice burst out from several nearby loudspeakers. "Now, that's just not on, Miya! You know our agreement. You are not to interfere with the Game!"

"Perhaps you should just be grateful that I am not here for your head," Miya said, moving slowly in the direction of Izumo house. "Interfere with me, and that might change."

High up in his tower, Minaka growled angrily, slamming his fist down on his table even as he thought furiously. Karasuba might've been able to be brought back to full health from the damage that Ranma had done to her, but not from having her head cut off! There were many things that the technology of the fallen gods that were Sekirei could do, but healing someone from being decapitated was not among them.

This day has not gone the way I planned at all. And now Miya was on the field, and there was nothing he could do to stop her. Nothing but my ultimate trump card. "I'll use it," he said seriously. "You know I will use the kill switch."

"I know," Miya said with a sigh. "You are, if nothing else, someone who will strive to gain the upper hand regardless of anything else. I respected that, and you, once. No longer. Yet I still will not attack you or MBI, either now or in the future. But I will be taking Ranma with me now. And he will undoubtedly continue to oppose you."

Miya smiled, a thin, wintry thing, but a smile nonetheless as she looked down at Ranma's unconscious, nigh bloodless face. "A human, an entirely normal human being, driven by his personal desire to be the best, becoming so skilled they can mess with your game of the gods. Isn't that...enthralling?" she asked sardonically.

Minaka growled, but then he glanced at the report he had finally been able to get out of the Japanese government of Ranma and his father, and then from it to the report from the team of specialists that he had sent into China, and smiled sardonically. "Very well, I will allow this. I will no longer try to get in Ranma's way, and I will further continue to enforce the rules as equally as possible, keep the borders and so forth as the game continues. But from now on, be warned that if we detect any move on your part away from the north, I will immediately push the button. I will wipe out your entire race."

Miya sighed but agreed to that, turning away and only now becoming aware of Ryoga and the others. She sent glares at Beni and Haihane, who quailed, though Haihane at least looked at Ranma with worry plain in her eyes. Ryoga, though, actually pushed himself to his feet. "Um, Miya-sama, I, do you remember me? I'm Ryoga. We met once, I think."

"Yes. I recognize you. But now is not the time or place to talk. We must get this one back to Izumo house quickly." She paused then, nodding at him. "Follow me. Ranma is not the only one who has missed you."

Blinking at that, Ryoga did so, leaping up onto the rooftops after Miya, keeping her within sight with difficulty.

OOOOOO

"Get the medical teams moving. Keep the internet blackout up for now: we can't let the world see what has occurred here just yet. And get me a team of specialists, preferably all men, and Haihane," Minaka said coldly into the receiver.

He smiled for a moment as he imagined his ex-girlfriend tearing her hair out and downing her weight in coffee as she tried to oversee the medical teams while also worrying her mind at how a human had just taken their most powerful tool out of the game. *I wonder what she would say if she knew I was going to add some more tools to our side of the board, all of whom might technically be called human too.*

"I think I have a job for them," Minaka said aloud, tapping several images and a note that were arrayed on his desk in a half-circle. One was of a short, elderly-looking man leaping away from a horde of stall owners with a huge pouch of purloined food in his hands. Another was of a strange monstrous creature like a Minotaur except that it had wings. A third was of a young man who looked somewhat like Ranma's male form. And the note was from his troops, explaining how they had indeed retrieved some of the waters of Jusenkyo.

"Hehe, if one cannot contain an object of chaos, one must fight them with more chaos." With that Minaka began to laugh, and, if there was a manic edge to it, who could have told the difference?

End Chapter

Well, that escalated quickly, didn't it? With Karasuba around now and having been sniffing at the edges of Ranma and co. for so long, I couldn't put off a meeting between them. In this fic, I think she can be likened to the mid-level boss in a game. Minaka is the evil, thoughtful villain who always lives to fight another day while tossing out his tools and gathering new ones. Sort of a mix between Lex Luthor and the Joker, but without the charm.

Anyway, remember to check my profile occasionally going forward for February's poll. It will be a little different given how short February is.

Chapter 11: Chapter 11

I understand something about romance and can't draw boobies, although I have been told something else about Sekirei that explains a lot about the series and Minato in particular: apparently the author got started in yaoi doujinshi before making the switch to her own tale, and she based Minato off what is called the 'josei submissive homosexual' archetype. Puts it all in perspective, doesn't it? This disturbing knowledge was passed to me by [KamenheroHEISEI](#).

As you can clearly see, this story won the small story poll. It brought in 1283, pulling ahead by a near whisker from the second place winner, the habitual *FILFy Teacher*, despite bringing in only 140 here. The biggest impact was my own notes on it since it is the story closest to completion – three chapters or so more before I reach where I think the fic can be naturally brought to a conclusion – and my major beta readers also voting for it. *FILFy* brought in a total of 1210 votes, with 437 votes coming in from here on fanfic.

Normally this would mean that *FILFy* would also be updated this month. However, February is short and made shorter thanks to my work on the latest chapter of *Making Waves* up to the Super Bowl. I also wanted to prioritize the winner of my large story poll, which this month was *Horse for the Force*. That chapter has been sent back to me by my small mistakes beta-reader and will be up later today.

That being said, I will use *FILFy* as one of my small story updates in March, since I've already started to work on it – can't get it done even by Saturday, but I should have it sent off to the beta-reader by next Tuesday. So it should be out sometime the week after.

This has been given a once over by [Hiryo](#) and me using Grammarly. No doubt we have both missed mistakes, but hopefully not enough to detract from your enjoyment of the chapter. MillandaAnza has also been of major help getting a certain romantic scene correct, so I thank my favorite harlequin once more for her aid!

Chapter 11: Fighting Fire with Fire is Always Chancy

Miya was about a block away from Izumo House when she felt her skin began to prickle as if a cold front had just begun to move towards her. *Oh no, this is not good.*

With Matsu having done the very smart thing of turning off her computers, before she and Kocho were sent out to Dr. Tofu's by Kasumi, Akitsu, who had broken off from heading to his office in order to go to Izumo house as soon as she could move on her own, Akitsu had been stuck waiting for news. She didn't know what had been going on and luckily for everyone else in the house, Akitsu did not understand anything at all about computers, so could not power them back up. If she had been able to watch the action as it occurred, the inn might well have been a solid block of ice several times over.

So she had waited on the roof, staring out into the city waiting for Miya to return with her Ashikabi. All the while, Sekirei 07 had been stewing, for her inability to help her Sun-sama, for her inability to use her power, in her broken status, and the need to wait for someone else to help save Ranma when she could not. This could be called recursive thinking at its worst, but no one was there to try to break her out of it.

Now she saw Ranma being carried by Miya, and everything within Akitsu started to shut down, leaving behind only ice, only cold. That cold billowed out from her as she leaped off of the roof, landing lightly onto the outer fence, which froze under her. Wood shattered as it froze, the water within its wood freezing and expanding quickly. The concrete of the road developed a thick covering of hoarfrost and behind her, the metal of the rooftop vein also froze, looking as if it had become so brittle that a mere tap would shatter it. Large and small bits of ice appeared as well, one of them shattering a parked car as it appeared directly above the car while to one side Akitsu leaped from the middle of the road onto the next rooftop heading towards Miya.

The cold front even spread inward, covering Akitsu's arms and legs then slowly the rest of her body with a thin veneer of frost. Her breath was visible in the air as she gasped, once she was close enough for Miya to make out details, the pillar of the Sekirei could see her face was visibly red, as if from a fever. Even more worrisome, her expression was just as blank as it was the first time Miya had seen her and her crest was glowing a dull, sickly yellow.

At the sight, Miya scowled then looked down at Ranma in her arms. She couldn't free an arm without jostling him, and she didn't want to do that which made dealing this with her sheathed blade impossible. So instead, she lashed out with a kick. If Ranma had been awake, he would've marveled at this, because it would have been the first time he, or indeed anyone else, would have ever seen Miya perform such a move. Normally, she disdained using kicks or even

punches and of course the fact that she wore long skirts sort of negated any attempt to use kicks in her personal style in the first place.

Yet this did not mean that, when she lashed a leg out in a low kick, it was ineffective. From her leg came a wave of air pressure that blasted through the cold front between her and Akitsu, before slamming into Akitsu and bringing her to a stop her eyes wide. Before she could recover, or rather before her power could fill in the spot this had opened up around her, Miya was in her face, leaning her forehead against Akitsu, right into the center of the mark denoting her broken status.

"Akitsu, he is alive," Miya said, her voice calm but forceful. "Your powers, however, could hurt him, as he is in a very bad way. Please calm down. No one is blaming you for this. No one will think less of you for not helping him. Karasuba is an enemy beyond you, beyond anyone else in the game at this point. Only Ranma himself could've fought her as well as he did, and only **as** he did, alone, able to set the pace and not have to defend anyone else. Do you understand? Right now, we have to get him seen to by Tofu-san, and we need him defended. You might not be able to help with the first, but you can help with the second **if** you are in control. Can you do that for your Ashikabi? For your Sun-sama?"

Akitsu's eyes went wide, and for a moment, Miya feared that her words hadn't gotten through as her eyes flicked down towards Ranma's face and her powers pulsed off her even colder than before when she saw the wide, still bleeding gash that ran across Ranma's front. Then her expression firmed, and Akitsu took a single step back, the frost on her shattering as she did so, before she slowly nodded her head, the pulsing yellow of her broken mark receding as she did. "Ahh...Yes."

At the utter emotionless response, Miya winced, hoping that the girl wouldn't go completely back to the stultifying, broken method of speech that she had used before getting to know Ranma. *The damage to Akitsu and her personality from this incident could well be severe, but it's not something I can deal with right now. Though, I do wonder how this all began? Did Karasuba attack them all? Since Akitsu's clothing was slashed and torn, that seemed likely. In which case, Ranma might have ordered her away... oh dear, that could make her response even worse. I do hope Ranma is able to break through that blockage of hers once he recovers.*

Behind her, Ryoga had stopped a full rooftop distance away to watch this confrontation, shivering. Now he followed after Miya quickly, bowing politely to Akitsu, who looked at him blankly for a moment before recognizing him and nodding her head very slightly in reply. She then looked around at the damage she'd caused before ignoring it as unimportant and moving to follow Ryoga and Miya as they headed towards the end.

Miya noticed this but didn't comment, *I'll just have to send Kagari out to do it. It will give him something to do that any rate.*

Yet Miya's problems didn't stop there. She was still carrying Ranma in her arms when Akitsu opened the inn's front door for her, only for Miya to see Musubi racing towards her. Musubi's eyes were wide, her breath coming in gasps as a fever almost like Akitsu's seemed to have taken her as she raced forward with a cry of, "Ryoga-sama!" on her lips.

Behind her, Ryoga blinked, but that was all he had time to do before Miya reacted to the fact that Musubi was about to barrel into her without even noticing she was there. A swift pivot and a kick to the side of the girl's shoulder sent her to one side, and then a foot held her there, Miya somehow looking demure and ladylike despite this having hiked her long skirt up to an almost indecent level.

At the same time, Miya's Hanya mask went full-bore behind her causing Ryoga to freeze and actually leap backward in sheer terror, while all the blood left Musubi's face, and the younger woman's previously dilated eyes shrank into terrified little holes. "Running into someone when she is carrying an injured person is forbidden in Izumo House!" she growled, having had just about enough of these interruptions while she was trying to save the life of one who had become dear to her.

As Musubi frantically nodded her head, she canceled that technique, and she removed her foot daintily from where it had pinned Musubi against the wall. "Thank you," she said pleasantly and moved past them. "You may take your own discussion outside if you must."

Yet there was no actual discussion, at least at first. Made almost manic by finally being in the presence of the man her body had reacted to, Musubi didn't say anything, just slamming her mouth on a surprised Ryoga, trying to kiss the life out of him. Her wings burst forth, shocking Ryoga, but his male instincts got the better of him, and his arms went around her, fit to crush any normal woman as he squeezed kissing her back. She in return hugged him equally hard and for some reason when he opened his lips a bit, found her own instincts in control, thrusting her tongue down his throat, their bodies just moving on their own.

Only after they started to need air did she pull back and Ryoga realized just what they had been doing. His face instantly flooded with blood, a blush appearing that looked almost like his skin had been painted apple red, as a trickle of blood started to drip from his nose as he stared at Musubi's blushing, near ecstatic face and her heaving chest pressed against him. Luckily for the moment's atmosphere though, more of his blood had been diverted downward rather to his face, letting him retain some dignity before he looked away, breathing heavily.

After a second regaining something of his composure, he asked, "Um, what, what's this about, Musubi-san?"

While Minaka debated on calling this person who had just winged 88 despite his being at Izumo house and Ryoga tried to figure out what had just happened, in the main room the others who had split off from Ranma at the start of Karasuba's assault had gathered once more. Uzume and everyone else had gone the long way so that Dr. Tofu could go to his office. There they had waited while he saw to Tsukiumi's leg, meeting the two computer experts. When they arrived to gather Dr. Tofu and any equipment he might need. To everyone's astonishment, Kasumi of all people had taken charge the instant Miya had left on her fury-fueled charge, ordering both of them out to do that, while Kazehana and Musubi were set to guard the inn along with Akitsu, though that last part had kind of fallen through. Thus they all had a better idea of what had happened at the beginning of the battle than Miya, but none save Miya and Ryoga knew how it had ended.

Now they all stared as Miya laid him down on the table, Chiho, in particular, was staring in horror as her small hand rose to her mouth. "Oh no, oh no! This is, this is all my fault! If you all hadn't tried to rescue me, Ranma-san wouldn't be..."

"Stop that right now Chiho-baby," Uzume said, putting her arms around her lover. "I think I speak for bro there when I say that even had we known we'd run into such opposition we'd still be trying to get you out from under Higai's thumb."

"She's right," Kazehana said moving over to hug the girl too, smooshing her in such a way that the girl's head was now between the massive breasts of the two Sekirei. Chiho blushed hotly, but at least the urge to blame herself for Ranma's injuries left her.

Uzume smirked over at her drinking partner winking at her. But even so, both of them were serious as they looked over at Ranma backing away from the now blushing hotly Chiho. "No, Karasuba is to blame for this and no one else!"

"That blood-drenched crow loved doing shit like this," Kazehana said shaking her head. "She's always been a freaking psychopath as long as I've known her. Though it's funny, I would've thought she would've killed him before you could intervene Miya."

"Actually, I'm surprised by that too," Matsu said from where she was helping set out Dr. Tofu's supplies as he ripped open Ranma the remains of Ranma shirt. She watched as Tofu pressed here and there on his body, causing the blood that had been flowing from his injuries to stop slowly, congealing quickly in the smaller wounds. She stared in utter fascination at it, her eyes gleaming behind her glasses as she looked at Dr. Tofu in awe before looking up at Miya.

"Miya, could you... that is... would you mind if we asked what happened?" Matsu asked turning reluctantly to look at Miya even as her hands continued to work at Dr. Tofu's directions.

Despite spending most of her time staring into a computer, Matsu was a pretty good judge of expression. She could tell that whatever had happened, Miya was blaming herself. Guilt, self-loathing, awe for some reason, a surprising amount of affection and a heap of worry were warring on Miya's expression right now her hands clenched in the front of her blouse as she stared at Ranma, her sword discarded to one side like a useless piece of trash.

All that and hate. *Oh yes*, Matsu thought, as she saw Miya's hands clench, and her eyes hardened for a moment before going back to normal, *quite a bit of hate there*. Matsu had to fight back a shiver at what she could see there.

Miya looked up at her, then around at the others before sighing. "I have no doubt that your computers probably recorded much of the event, and if they did not MBI's would have so you'll be able to get the full details from them. But as to what happened, Karasuba nearly killed Ranma, but he surprised her at the end, and nearly put her down in turn before his body gave out. She would have lived through the turnabout, had I not arrived at that time."

Matsu stilled, her hands stumbling to a halt while they reached for an IV bag for Tofu. Kasumi noticed this, and quickly moved, grabbing the bag and handing it to the doctor, as Matsu turned fully to Miya. "What do you mean, 'would have'?"

"Oh?" Miya asked, one wintry eyebrow rising. "Did I stumble when I spoke? I mean, Karasuba will no longer be a problem. I put that particular mad dog down."

For a moment everyone stared at her, then Matsu shook her head slowly. She had thought long and hard about possible scenarios, how this game would go, though most of those scenarios had gone out the window when Ranma had shown up. But this was going to make Minaka even more unpredictable, to say nothing about the rest of the Sekirei population.

Whatever Ranma and the others might wish, fighting was in the blood of nearly every Sekirei out there. They loved to fight, to challenge one another, and there were more than a few who simply liked causing pain. And at the same time, more than a few Ashikabi had already gone power mad with the idea of controlling a Sekirei. Without the fear of Karasuba added to the Disciplinary Squad, Matsu wasn't certain the two remaining would be able to keep a lid on those.

Everyone fell silent as they thought about that, watching as Tofu worked. No one noticed that Musubi and Ryoga had come in at some point, and Musubi, in particular, had looked shocked at Karasuba's death. She had nearly stumbled back, staring between Miya and Ranma, before frowning and backing away, her face scrunched up as she wrestled with some big thought.

About fifteen minutes later Dr. Tofu leaned back and sighed, wiping at his brow, "All right, Ranma isn't in any danger of dying at the very least. His body is... if far tougher than I had thought even a martial artist could be. I stitched the main wound close along with two of the lesser wounds including the one on his side but I can't do anything about the missing portion of his ear and his pinky. Still, Ranma is a master of ki healing, and he will recover now, indeed far faster than most people will think if we keep him hooked up to the IV tube, keep feeding his body nutrients. Blood and nutrients are what he needs right now.

"Do you need a blood donor Doctor?" Miya asked quickly as Akitsu too blinked stepping forward. "I'm certain you would find..."

Dr. Tofu quickly shook his head. "No, that's not necessary. While he did lose a lot of blood, I had his blood type already on file, thanks to the physical I did a few weeks back and I had a bag of that type of blood on hand that Matsu brought here along with the rest of my tools. More IV bags will be needed routinely though, so I might need more of those. And of course, we will need to keep water away from him. If Ranma changes forms, it will tear my stitches and I'll have to redo them, plus it will open the gash across his chest and stomach at the very least.

He stood up, cracking his neck and shoulders. "I'll help you get him set up in a bed somewhere. I don't think we should carry him over the rooftops back to the Tendo place even now," he said dryly. "After that, if someone could help me take my supplies back to my office, and Chiho, Uzume, if you could come with me, we could get some preliminary work done tonight. I'm afraid I'll need my research materials to see if I can do anything for you and those are too heavy to bring along."

Both of them nodded at that, while Kasumi frowned, standing up as well. She was well-pleased with the doctor at the moment, given how he hadn't reacted to her presence and hoped to see it continue. However, there was something else she was thinking about right now. "I will tell my family and his father, once he returns, about what has occurred if Ranma is not on his feet by then. But I agree Ranma should stay here for now."

"I don't think you'll need to do that," Kocho said, frowning as she stared at her laptop, which she had taken out while Tofu and Kasumi worked. "It looks as if that fight was being recorded by MBI, and a whole lot of other people saw bits and pieces of it too. I doubt any of the news has left the city, MBI is far too good at cutting the city off, but if they're in the city, I'm betting they have seen a recording of it."

Kasumi winced, and next to her, the young child Kusano looked up, having moved to her side the instant Kasumi finished with Ranma. Looking at the two of them, Miya had to smile a little at how Kusano was acting. She had latched onto Kasumi before that portion of the activity yesterday had finished, and she hadn't quite gotten the story yet, since there were no video cameras within the botanical gardens where Kusano's had hidden herself and Kasumi not having told her as they were cooking earlier before Miya had raced off at Matsu's shout. "What will you do with Ku-chan Kasumi-san? And however did you get her to cling to you so?" she asked, looking between Kasumi and Minato.

Minato blushed, scratching the side of his head. "Well, while I might've been the one that Ku-chan was reacting to, we've talked about this, and we think it's better that she not actually be winged by anyone."

"Indeed," Kasumi said primly, reaching down to kneel beside the young girl, hugging her lightly. Kusano hugged back,

though she was still staring in horror at the blood on Ranma and Miya's skirt and blouse, the look in her eyes bringing to Miya's mind the fact that she had yet to change.

"I need to go change," she said aloud. "Kasumi, if you could come with me and tell me what happened in the botanical gardens, I rather think I'd like to hear that."

"Oh hell no!" Kazehana said, with a laugh, gesturing Kasumi back into the kitchen. "I'll tell it, Kasumi would obviously downplay her own role!" *And I think Miya could use a laugh right now anyway.*

Kasumi stammered at that looking embarrassed, while next to her Kusano nodded ferociously. "Kasumi-nee knows Kung Fu!" she shouted, thrusting a small fist into the air.

It turned out that Hayato had sent one of his better fighters to get Kusano, a scythe-wielder named Yomi. She had swiftly attacked Kasumi when Kasumi had moved to talk to Kusano, having spotted the little girl before Minato had since he had turned to ask Kazehana about something. Yomi had attacked Kasumi, who had defended herself with a ladle of all things, then had used a shoulder throw to toss Yomi over towards Musubi and Kazehana.

"Seriously it was bad, I mean the instant Yomi attacked, I was afraid you and Ranma would tear us all to pieces for letting her get hurt, or worse!" Kazehana said shaking her head. "But then this huge cast iron ladle appears in her hands, she uses it as a shield, taking the blow from the scythe. Then she spins into it, grabs the handle and pulls Yomi up and over performing a perfect shoulder throw."

"Ara," Miya said with a laugh, "now that does sound like a most amusing moment."

"I thought so. Of course, before Yomi could get over her shock at being thrown around like that, Kagari was in her face. An angry pretty boy was something to see, let me tell you. But between all of us, we beat her pretty easily at that point, then came back here. All the while little Kusano is clinging like a koala to Kasumi, something which I'm very glad of since it makes certain that I won't have to share Minato's time, if not his affections, for a good long while. Although, I doubt that it will stop the jokes at his expense."

"Indeed not," Miya replied wryly, the story having worked wonders to help her regain her self-control, "wherever would the fun be in that?"

While Kazehana went with Miya to explain what had happened in the mission to retrieve Kusano out of sight of the cameras, Dr. Tofu, Kagari, and Minato had moved Ranma up into a room on the second floor next to Uzume's that was currently empty. Akitsu had followed them, her eyes watching their movements almost as if she didn't trust them with her Ashikabi.

But that really wasn't the case. Rather, as Miya had supposed, Akitsu was in a very bad way at the moment, having been ordered to retreat by Ranma leaving him to face a threat that she could not face for him, and that after having tried to use her powers, only for her broken status to rob her of the ability. It hurt, and she could feel all of the warmth within her that Ranma had sparked receding.

Once she was changed, Miya stepped into the chosen room and found her standing in silent vigil over Ranma. Miya looked at him too, her hands clenching and unclenching once more. *We are here because of mistakes I made, choices I thought good at the time, and things that I thought were true turning false. I never intended for Ranma to join this game, although once he did, I realized immediately how he would act. Still, I am most **displeased** by this. And yet, I am still constrained by my promise, and by the sword of Damocles hanging above mine and every other Sekirei's head. I must still act through Ranma and others rather than by myself, and that infuriates me now more than ever.*

Akitsu had turned slightly to look at her, her entire body radiating a fierce protectiveness for anyone with eyes to see, despite the fact that her face was still its impassive mask. Miya simply nodded at her, taking no offense. "I will get you a chair and I will talk to Matsu about setting up some kind of warning system around the inn just in case."

Akitsu nodded fractionally, and said quietly, "Ahh... thank you."

Miya moved forward, enveloping the other girl in a hug, causing her to stiffen slightly. That lasted only a second though before Akitsu almost collapsed against Miya her body heaving as she let loose small, pitiful whimpers. Akitsu couldn't quite cry, she lacked the ability to show her emotions to that degree. But her body was reacting to her distress and she clung to Miya wordlessly for several minutes.

After Akitsu's shudders started to recede, Miya gently pushed her down to sit on the bed disappearing out the door for

a moment returning with a large fluffy chair which she set next to the bed and helped a still jittery Akitsu into, before going back downstairs and grabbing some dinner, bringing it up to Akitsu. She knew whatever else, Akitsu was not going to be leaving Ranma's side until he opened his eyes. "You will need to bathe yourself," she said quietly, "I'll get a basin for you to use, but I expect you to do so understood?"

Akitsu frowned a little but nodded. As long as she didn't have to leave Ranma's presence that was fine.

Moving back downstairs, Miya found Kusano sitting with Minato, and Kazehana at the table. Uzume and Chiho had already left with Dr. Tofu.

She smiled at the scene, then over to Kasumi and Kagari, who were standing in the doorway of the kitchen. Kasumi smiled at her and nodded her head. "I've left you some food for yourself Miya-san. Even someone as strong as you are needs to eat."

Miya smiled at her and thought with some amusement, *And this is yet another thing Ranma has done for me: brought me this girl, who could well become a protege of sorts.* "Thank you my dear," she said warmly, squeezing the other girl's hand lightly, "but you never told me what you will do with young Kusano? Will she stay here? While I can certainly guarantee her safety, I'm not certain I could stop her from attempting to wing herself on Minato."

Indeed, Miya thought I would rather enjoy dealing with anyone who tried to take her at this point. I find that killing Karasuba was just not enough to get over my own anger at what occurred. But the threat of Kusano joining the game and the battles within is rather high if she stays here.

Kasumi smiled over at Kusano, moving over to ruffle the girl's hair. "I'll be taking Ku-chan with me," she said simply. "If anyone tries anything against her in Nerima, they're going to think that the sky fell on them."

When Kagari made to object, or perhaps, offer to move in and help guard Kusano in that manner, Tsukiumi nodded firmly. "I'm not certain that you understand how popular Kasumi-san is in Nerima. All of the shop owners know her, all of the people smile at her when she goes down the streets. She is treated as something of a minor celebrity. Her father is also well-respected, although..." Tsukiumi paused, looking at Kasumi apologetically, "I'm sorry to say I'm not certain why."

"There was a time when he was a powerful martial artist," Kasumi said calmly. She knew all too well how her father had collapsed after the death of her mother, no one better in point of fact. But before that, he had truly been a respected pillar of the community in many ways, and since then he had at least been able to keep up that act outside the home and the dojo. *Perhaps Genma will bring that part of him out again?*

"But what you all might not know, is that practically everyone in Nerima practices some form of martial art. For example, the regular person who goes to Furinkan would be at least a brown belt in some form of martial arts. And as I proved myself earlier, demure I may be," she said with a wink to Kusano. "But I do indeed know Kung Fu. As do my family and our guests."

Kusano giggled while Minato smirked and Kazehana laughed aloud. Miya smiled again, happy that Kasumi had made so many friends and was breaking out of the shell Miya had sensed around her at first meeting at speed. She sensed the young girl really needed friends, although the full story of why that was she didn't quite yet know. *But I will learn the reason for her shell soon enough, she thought, certainly there does seem to be more to that bit about her father once being a martial artist than what her words imply.*

"Good," she said aloud, her voice crisp and decisive. "In that case, Tsukiumi, Kagari, I believe it is time for Kasumi to take young Kusano to her new home. You will no doubt wish to tell Nabiki about what has occurred to Ranma as well," she said more grimly. "I would rather that occur through you rather than through watching a video."

OOOOOO

Unfortunately, as Kocho had warned, it was indeed already too late for that.

Nabiki and the others with her in Kodachi's garden stared at the screen of the TV that a few of the ninjas had rolled out, after Sasuke had reported seeing news about the fight. "Holy shit! Just... holy shit!" Nabiki said, rocking a little in place as she stared at the scene. A part of her was, to her own astonishment, turned on by the site of Ranma fighting all out like that. A larger part of her was terrified, from watching the same thing.

Next to her Akane also watched in stark astonishment, while Yashima simply rocked in place, her face drawn and wan, as did Namiji. They had explained who Karasuba was once they started watching the news, and none of them

looked down on either for that reaction after hearing of the reputation Karasuba had among the other Sekirei.

But for Akane, it wasn't so scary as it was utterly galling. *He's only a few months older than me, if that and he's so much better than me! Damn it, if dad had been training me all this time, I could do that kind of thing too! But as it is, how the heck am I supposed to catch up to him, to be a true heir to the Anything Goes Tendo Branch, if he keeps on getting better!? Darn Ranma anyway.*

Even Kouji was looking a little horrified, though he was looking at it more from the perspective of a bystander. "How the hell are they going to get away with this?! That fight just basically threw out all the rules that MBI's Disciplinary Squad is supposed to enforce! No getting bystanders involved, keep the damage to personal property to a minimum. I know that the whole rule about keeping the game under wraps went out the window a while ago, when MBI cordoned off the city and everything, but come on!"

"I don't think they give a crap about the rules. They'll keep them so long as they don't apply to MBI itself," Nabiki said, still staring at the images of her, okay fine, she had to admit it, her prospective husband or lover, love interest for certain, battling it out with a woman who seemed to revel in cutting off chunks of him. She winced in particular when a bit of his ear was cut off as he dodged a cut that should've caved in his head by the barest skin of his teeth. *This fight is not doing anything for my blood pressure.*

"MBI put those rules in place, so they could seem to be at least a little benevolent and to get the common people who weren't involved in the game on their side. It's why the cost of utilities, Internet access, electricity, water etc. have gone down all across the city are except for Nerima these days," Nabiki finished.

"Yeah, I remember that my parents were certainly happy about it, and about a few other things too, which began after MBI started to cordon off the city. You're saying it was just another kind of carrot to go along with the stick?" Kouji asked.

Nabiki nodded but didn't say anything, and the young man fell silent also watching the TV as the battle played out.

In contrast to Nabiki who was slightly turned on and quite a lot terrified, Kodachi was simply turned on immensely. The power and skill Ranma was displaying was an immense fascination to her, and Kodachi found her body reacting to it as she moved her head this way and that, trying to anticipate how the battle would go. But then the feed cut off, as the two combatants neared the MBI tower. From there on, only MBI had footage, so no one could tell how the battle ended, including Kodachi and the local news anchor who had been covering the battle, interview witnesses and talking to the dozens of quick response medical teams Takami had led there.

That is as if someone abruptly stopped having sex right as they were getting close to a climax, Kodachi thought morbidly, leaning back and trying to concentrate on regulating her heartbeat and her body's reaction. "That was... simply **fascinating!** *Ahem*, um I do not suppose you could tell me that this Akitsu would be willing to share would she? I thought Ranma fascinating before, but now, seeing his full abilities on display, that is something entirely different."

"No," Nabiki said bluntly. "She isn't the kind to share, and she's already kind of had to bend on that that to let my family pursue the honor agreement with Ranma's as it is." *More importantly, I'm not the kind to share either.*

Kodachi was not Akane and could read between the lines when she tried. She did so now and realized that Nabiki had taken that a bit more personally. "Ah, I see you have decided to be the one to honor that pact? I'll apologize then." She then smirked, "I'll instead ask, does he have any brothers?" *That pretty one, Mutsu, was interesting, but I rather expect he would come with a bit more baggage, specifically a piece of luggage called Hayato, than I want to deal with.*

All the girls at the table, even Akane, laughed at that one, but after she got over her reaction to that, Nabiki went on, "We don't know how that fight ended, but I bet that I'll find out soon, so let's start to bring this conversation to a close. We know our enemies, we have a broad idea of how to act against other players in this game, but we still need to think about how to deal with MBI."

"Indeed. Further, we need to think about what happens after Minaka is removed," Kodachi said, now fully serious herself.

Between them, Nabiki, Kouji, and Kodachi had made plans to basically create an alliance of interest based upon the fact that there were already thirty or more Sekirei/Ashikabi pairs living in Nerima. Getting in touch with them and having them hand over their cards would be easy enough to start. Of course, more than a few of those pairs wouldn't be able to sustain themselves, (every Sekirei, even ones like Yashima, ate as much as Genma did,) without access to

MBI money. But Kodachi was willing to open up her family's funds for that and could sustain it for at least a month.

Indeed, doing so would enable her to put many of those pairs into her debt, which could help with a certain problem that could rear its head if more of the Shadow Legion died before they could restore themselves. *From Sasuke's reports, the Catacombs have been rather silent of late, but we can never be certain with such things. And it would take only one outbreak of violence from one of the more powerful groups to make our life a living hell without enough Shadow Legion ninja on hand to deal with them.*

But Kodachi kept those thoughts to herself. That was a secret she could not share willingly, not without approval from the Emperor at any rate. There was a reason why Nerima was the way it was and why her family was the way it was.

"What about the other power players?" Akane asked, more because she wanted to show that she had been following along than anything else. "Won't um... Mikogami I think his name was, and that western guy at the very least start acting more openly, now that the rules have been shown to be so much crap? And Ranma's already made an enemy of Higa right? He might strike at us openly if Ranma lost that fight."

Nabiki actually glared at her for that one, and Akane said, "Hey, it could happen! You saw it, that Karasuba woman was carving him into pieces!"

While Nabiki kept on glaring for a moment, Kodachi nodded judiciously. "Perhaps, but if they are in the same boat as we, they don't know what happened. They won't act precipitously I think. Certainly not young Hayato. As for Izumibaka, would I take it alright that Ranma and your other northern allies were going to instigate a long-term assault on him?" she asked looking over at Nabiki.

"Yes we were, although the physical side of things was still up in the air the last time I saw Ranma, I know he wanted to sic the two computer geeks on him, hitting him where it hurts, in his wallet," Akane rolled her eyes at Nabiki of all people saying that, but Nabiki postponed further righteous punishment of her sister in favor of continuing to speak to someone actually intelligent. "The western Ashikabi's response is still up in the air. I don't have much information on Sanada, even Matsu couldn't find much. My own contacts have passed on that he's a wanderer who moves from place to place on his bike, doing little jobs for people to get by, rarely staying in any one place. I don't think he sounds like the type to really act against us as a group anyway."

"In that case, I say again I think we have done all we can for now. We will see to the defense of Nerima first, and then wait for more data on what occurred with this Karasuba and Ranma. But once our defense is secure it will be open season on MBI, Hayato, and Higa at the very least," Kodachi said with a thin smile.

The two Sekirei nodded, as did Akane a second later, though she still found it somewhat bizarre to think that she was being friendly with someone who was related to Tatewaki Kuno. "In that case," Kodachi said, standing up abruptly and clapping her hands. Several ninja appeared from underneath a few bushes, moving to flank her, including Sasuke, though he didn't move nearly as fluidly as the others did. "Sasuke will show you the way out, while I make certain that my brother is being occupied elsewhere. This has been a most fruitful day, and I would not wish to sully it with how he would react to knowing that you were in my house Akane. Feeding him to Mr. Turtle would be so bothersome."

Yep, she's a Kuno alright, Akane thought, following the others toward the door.

OOOOOO

Kodachi had been correct, practically every Sekirei and Ashikabi in the city was watching the fight and reactions were very, very varied.

In his mansion Hayato leaped about gaily, shouting and gesticulating as he watched the fight, "Holy crap! This kind of thing should have been a final boss battle if I've ever seen one, fucking awesome!" But then he sobered, "But why's it happening now and with that Ranma guy too as the main character? Does that mean I'm a bit player!?! No way in hell, I'm not a mob character damn it!"

Around the young boy his Sekirei looked on, their gazes going the full gamut of horrified to simply shocked and respectful. Mutsu in particular was watching worriedly until the cameras cut out, which caused his Ashikabi to literally scream and start throwing things at the screen. *I couldn't beat that blood-soaked crow,* he thought to himself, *I thought I was getting better, while she was stagnating, unable to join the game fully thanks to Natsuo being gay. But Karasuba could've taken me apart like nothing even with my norito! Damn it. And all that against a human too? What the fuck is wrong with this game?* For just a moment, just a moment, mind you, he honestly felt sorry for Takami and her analytical, scientific mind and what it had to process.

OOOOOO

For his part, Higa was rather horrified, at least at first. Unlike the others however, he saw the end of it, having repeatedly hacked into MBI security cameras with a dedicated team of hackers before this point. He saw Ranma's attempt to turn it around at the last, he saw it fail, Karasuba still alive despite the sword through her guts. He saw the northern demon arrive, and the execution after. He saw, understood and worried badly.

With that, he didn't really know what to do about Ranma and his growing... *Call it a faction I suppose?* He thought morbidly. *It isn't as if this Ranma fellow really leads them, he's more like a banner of some kind, others rally to him for their own reasons, but they don't move in lockstep, at least not all of them. I, I just don't know what to do.*

The Demon of the North was an absolute defense, nothing could get past her. So any attempt to finish Ranma off, when he was weak, was doomed at the start. Higa had lost too many Sekirei, he was down to a bare seven of his own Sekirei, to control even his own subordinates at this point. Only the fact that he had yakuza connections allowed him to control the other Ashikabi who looked to him for leadership. *If Ranma is down, I could try to move against Nerima,* he thought, having no idea what would happen if he did but knowing that a lot of single Sekirei Ashikabi pairs had moved into that section.

That is an idea at present, but one that I am uncertain would work to my benefit given it would leave me open and away from my own base of operations. Or I could move decisively against MBI. Yet if I do that, I would have to be ready to take over the running of the game instantly and I'm not certain I could do that either? The failed attempts to take Ranma out, coupled with the attack on the hospital, left Higa in a very precarious position in terms of the Sekirei game and Higa did not like it. He didn't like it one bit.

Worse in a way was that his normal decisiveness had deserted him for the first time in his life. All of his attempts to take Ranma out of the equation had backfired, and he knew that his own actions had put him in this position, no one else's.

However, Higa's issues weren't solely connected to the game. No, he didn't know who was behind it, but large portions of his personal holdings were in complete disarray. A cyber-attack of immense proportions had drained some of his personal bank accounts, made it as if he had sold off several choice bits of property and even attacked his personal computer networks! It was only his backups and the fact he employed more than fifty programming experts that was allowing him to rebuild it. Yet he was fully aware that if this was in response to his attacks on Ranma, then the attacks might only be just beginning.

OOOOOO

In contrast, the reaction of Nishi Sanada, Ashikabi of the West, was easily the simplest. Sitting in a dingy biker bar he raised the glass toward the TV showing the news and shouting "Oh hell yes! That was awesome! Holy shit, girls, it looks like it's time to start taking this game to a whole new level!"

Then the door banged open and one of his Sekirei came in. She was a young woman with short blonde hair and dark skin with light blue eyes who routinely wore a bikini or sports bra, and a pair of really short shorts, with a belt that hooked into it but wound a bit higher up her stomach than the rest of her pants did. Currently, she was looking a little worse the wear, with multiple scratches, and a series of cuts on her toned stomach and shoulder.

"What happened to you Kujika-chan!" Nishi shouted, leaping to his feet and moving towards her, pulling her into a hug and a kiss, his hands moving around her body, causing her to tremble and moan a little while ostensibly looking for injuries.

"MMMmmm, master, wait no, now's not the time for that!" Kujika moaned, pushing him away. "You will not believe what happened to me while I was out..." She paused, seeing the TV screen. "Oh, well, maybe you will. See, it happened like this..."

Of course, Nishi wasn't the only one listening, all of his other Sekirei were also listening from nearby tables. Three of them in particular smiled at what they were hearing. Rumors were one thing, but hearing it from one of their fellow Sekirei, that was something else entirely. If they had a means of getting some really freaking good fights in this Nerima place, they were so there. A nod passed through them, and they faded back into the background to talk quietly about this new information less their Ashikabi overhear. It wasn't as if he was really worth that title to them anyway.

OOOOOO

Be they powerful or not, the Ashikabi were not the only ones to see the news about the fight between Ranma and Karasuba.

It might have astonished anyone who knew him, but Genma honestly did love his son, so it was with some amount of horror that he watched the fight progress. Whatever else anyone, even his worst detractors, said about Genma, they all had to acknowledge that when it came to martial arts he truly was on a level few could ever match. And it was that skill and ability that allowed him to see how the fight was going, to see that no matter how even it seemed to be to normal people he could tell that his legacy, his son was slowly being cut to pieces.

A second later, the video cut out once more, going to the spokesperson of MBI. He was a very pretty young man, who decried the violence, saying that Ranma had been identified as the instigator of an attack MBI Tower, but that Karasuba's reaction had been beyond the pale as well. Both had been dealt with appropriately and that MBI continued to provide medical assistance free of charge to any injured. From there he poured on the charm even further, but Genma tuned him out.

He pushed himself to his feet, the very movement causing everyone around him to gulp and back away for some reason that they didn't understand then moved around the bar. Not even trying to get out of paying for once, something that might have given Ranma a heart attack if he saw it, Genma slammed down some money on the bar then grabbed Soun by the shoulder. "We're cutting our trip short my friend."

Soun might have complained, saying that they had been supposed to stop in a few more places before heading back home. Indeed, being back in Shin-Teito at all was because both of them had missed the home cooking than that their trip had actually accomplished much. But he too had seen the video footage and he simply nodded, heading out the door after his friend.

Later that night after checking in at home and then on his son in Izumo House, Genma talked to Miya as they sat on the inn's outer deck, staring up at the sky. "So you really have no idea how this Minaka will react now that he's lost his strongest enforcer?"

"I can only hope that he will simply stay the course and start to enforce the rules of the game as they are supposed to be, and moreover stop this nonsense about having only one survive because he now has to know that whatever happens, the survivor won't be someone he can control. If he runs the game as an outlet, shall we say, for my Feather's violent tendencies that will be more than enough."

Miya sipped at her tea before going on. "Ironically, Minaka has always done his duty as outlined in the deal between us: to protect my feathers from any government or human organization that would take advantage of our skills. Then he turns around and creates this game. I do not know why he is obsessed with the idea of pitting Sekirei against one another until only one is left, but he must have some long-term plan. But whatever that is, I have no idea, and so no idea how he will now attempt to strengthen his position."

Genma scowled, "Bah, shows what you know." Miya turned to raise a wintry eyebrow on him and Genma went on hurriedly, "Erm, I mean, I think you're letting your hope get the better of you." When Miya nodded slightly at that he took it as a sign to continue, "If this Minaka is a real man, he might up the ante more, though I don't know how. Regardless, when the boy is up again, we'll need to step up his training."

"Ohoho?" Miya chuckled, holding one hand in front of her mouth as she did. "Step up Ranma's training? I was not aware that you had anything more to teach him. Or indeed, that if he really tried you could fight him at all."

That dig went home, since Genma knew that in many ways, especially in speed, and weapon's use, Ranma had surpassed him. Yet there was more to Anything Goes than Miya knew, especially the Saotome branch, and he nodded firmly, "Oh yes, I've got quite a few things I can still teach him, including my sealed techniques."

"Sealed techniques?" Miya asked, now with actual interest in her tone rather than amusement and a bit of disdain. She didn't like Genma after all.

"Techniques that are so dangerous, so destructive, that I sealed them for the betterment of the boy and myself, as well as the world at large," Genma said, nodding his head in a rather pompous manner in Miya's opinion. "Whatever comes, my boy will be handling it."

Miya stared at him for a moment, but saw nothing but sincerity and truth there so simply nodded, seeing Genma in a slightly new light. She didn't like him, and she doubted she ever would, but there was an honest concern and even affection towards Ranma in his voice when he mentioned the young man. That was most definitely a step in the right direction in her opinion. *And these techniques sound somewhat interesting anyway. I am most interested to see if he*

has come up with something even I would take notice of.

OOOOOOO

At the same time that those two were talking, Nabiki was staring at Kasumi, as she slowly slid down into the sofa. "It was that close?" she asked, her voice almost mechanical, but her face obviously showing her distress.

Kasumi nodded grimly, "It was," she replied, not stopping her work in holding up a few of their oldest pieces of clothing in front of Kusano. She was determined to get the girl into something beyond the little white rag dress that she had found her in, but that would take a bit of needlework it seemed.

Leaning back, Nabiki held her hands over her head, and when she spoke, her voice was muffled, "The first guy that I am interested in, and he nearly gets himself cut in freaking two by a madwoman!"

"Such is the life of a martial artist," Akane said, before holding up a hand in front of her as Nabiki glared at her, not for the first time that day. "I mean it! I might not like Ranma, I think he's arrogant and a bit of a donkey's rear end, but I know that he takes his duty as a martial artist seriously. As long as he's fighting to defend Sekirei and their ability to find their own Ashikabi, which is still going on I understand, then he'll keep on getting into fights like this against people who resent him or who believe, like Karasuba, that he overstepped his bounds. If you can't handle that, understanding that he'll get injured, maybe..." she shrugged apologetically as Nabiki's glare became even colder, "maybe you should stop trying to be in a relationship with them at all."

Still glaring at Akane, Nabiki shook her head with a scowl, "No, I can handle it. It's just the suddenness of his being so injured so quickly, without any hint that it was going to happen tonight. I can handle him coming back bloody like this, so long as he comes back... and gives me some time to prepare myself mentally."

"It's good that you know this!" Soun from where he was sitting nearby, a little confused about the little girl Kasumi had brought home and why she was going to live with them from now on. But Kasumi had smiled that smile of hers and all his arguments had just disappeared. "A martial artist's life is fraught with peril Nabiki... although this was a bit more peril than I would've liked to see."

Soun then steeled himself moving to stand in front of Akane and Yashima who were sitting next to Nabiki on the sofa. "However, it has brought to my attention how serious this game could be, as well as the stakes in the long term. As such...as such, my daughter, I have agreed that you need training. I, I am not quite emotionally ready to do so myself, but...but... Genma has volunteered to train you."

Just then, the door to the outside opened, letting in some rain from the backyard and a wet panda. Kusano squeaked in surprised delight, looking at the bear in awe before blinking as it held up a sign that read, "Both you, Soun and Yashima." The panda ignored the little girl, who raced around Kasumi and started to pat his side, then tug on his fur as if she was trying to climb up him to pull out another sign from somewhere. "It'll be tough girl, and I predict that you have no idea what you're getting into, but it needs to be done."

Akane gulped at the look in the panda's eyes, whimpering a little at the thought of what was to come. She had heard tales from Ranma a time or two about his training under Genma, and wanted no part of it. Still, she nodded. "Anything to get some training," she said aloud. Needless to say, she would come to regret those words.

OOOOOOO

The very next day found a team of specialists moving through a mountainous area near Kyushu, looking for clues as to where a creature, or person, they weren't certain which, named Happosai could have been 'sealed' for the past sixteen years. Most of the men thought this was a hoax, but their boss didn't, and it had to be said that a couple of the locals did look at them more worriedly than skeptically when they mentioned being in the area to find Happosai's cave. Indeed, they'd had to deal with a few locals actually lying about where it was, and that it even existed in the first place.

Yet these men were still men of science and education, much like the five specialists sent into China. So many of their thoughts ran in the same manner as those men before they had talked to a certain Amazon Elder. "I still say we're on a wild goose chase," one said to the others.

"I'd say the same thing, but the boss, he's got a way of well, finding shit you know? And you have to admit, compared to the Sekirei is this really all that out there?"

The others grumbled at that, none of them really willing to admit that the team leader did have a point. They were in a

job where Sekirei and their odd magic, durability and everything else was commonplace, so was it really out there that an ancient Grand Master of some esoteric martial art had been sealed in a cave somewhere and could still possibly be alive?

"I'm still wondering why the hell I was put on this team last minute," groused a young woman named Rebecca, pushing her way around with the other teams. She was ex-CIA, so she had the skills to be on a team of this nature, but she wasn't one of its regular members. In fact, she was the only woman on the special reaction teams that MBI employed.

For one thing, the pool of available people was very small, and among women even smaller than men. For another, what woman wanted to be around the Sekirei for any length of time? All you had to do back when Samantha started work at MBI, was walk through a few corridors in the tower or the island and any woman with any sense began to feel inadequate.

She personally didn't care about that. All she cared about was the paycheck, and MBI paid far better than the CIA had for her services. *Another few years, and I can retire when I'm still young and pretty enough to grab any man who hasn't personally seen a fucking sex god alien, which leaves me with ninety percent of the population to choose from,* she thought with amusement.

"Don't ask us," said more than one voice, all of them shrugging their shoulders. More than half of them had attempted to talk Rebecca up at one point or another over the past few hours or before this around the tower, but they hadn't gotten anywhere with her. In fact, most of them were of the opinion that she was a bit of a standoffish bitch, but perhaps that was simply because most of them hadn't really had much action of that sort in a while, since they had all hoped to bond with a Sekirei only to fail.

In actuality, Minaka had second thoughts about how to get Happosai to agree to work with him if he existed at all. Samantha was Minaka's equivalent of staking out a virgin to appease the volcano. The only one who knew that though was the team leader, who would, while Happosai was having fun, give him Minaka's offer.

A few moments later, the point man shouted back, "I think I see something!"

The group quickly joined him, standing at the edge of a small copse of trees leading up into a mountain. He pointed ahead, and they could make a vague outline of an area of the mountain that looked like a small avalanche had occurred. Nothing unusual there, but what was odd about it was the fact that there was a small sign outside of it. The group trooped up to it, standing around it as one of them knelt down and read aloud from the battered, age-lightened sign. "'Here lies the Dread Master. He will not be missed, mourned or in any way remembered for being something beyond a scourge to all humanity. He was evil, and he died an evil death. Let this avalanche stand for all time, ceiling him away from those he wronged.' A bit over the top isn't it?"

"Just a little," another one of the ex-special forces soldiers said with a chuckle. "Still, this must be what we were here to find. And maybe there is something behind it."

"I don't know," Samantha said slowly, looking at the sign. "The way this is written, it's kind of obvious that this guy wasn't exactly a saint."

"Do those even exist in our line of work?" asked the team leader, shaking his head. "And even if they did, the boss wouldn't be interested in this guy if he was a saint." He alone had been told about what to say to the old man if he actually was still alive under there, but he wasn't about to share it with the rest of his team. It was just too bizarre, even with everything else they had seen the past three years, let alone the role Samantha was going to play. "Let's get this done!"

For the next twenty minutes, the group moved around, surveying the area of the avalanche, and deciding where to place their explosives in order to blow the rubble-covered area out from the cave that it had blocked off. Then with all of them under cover several yards above the cave, they set off the explosives.

There was a loud "Crack!" and then the largest boulder fell away taking a lot of the smaller bits with it. The dust slowly cleared, and then revealed what looked like the entrance to a small cave underneath. Seeing it, Samantha snorted. "Whoever is in there must be a short ass! That, or so stooped you would make Quasimodo look good. That entrance only comes up to my thigh, if that."

Before anyone else could say anything, a small blur shot out from the entrance of the cave, bouncing off the remaining half of the boulder as it had been about to tumble down the mountain, flipping back up towards them. "WOMAN!" it shrieked.

More than one of them tried to raise their guns, but before they could do anything, the blur stopped having slammed right into Samantha's chest. She blinked, then gasped and stared down at the little creature grabbing onto her chest. "Sweeto, oh glorious, glorious softness, ahh, a fine meal after so long without!"

"GAHHHHHH!" Samantha started to shriek, pounding her fists into the sides of whatever the thing was. "Get it off me! Get it off me, what is it!?"

"Holy hell, it really exists," the team leader muttered, staring, his eyes wide as he momentarily forgot his mission to get this little creature on their side.

"...Is it human?" said one of the others, staring at the thing.

The thing leaped off of Samantha, and before the speaker, a German, could even move, he found himself hurled more than twenty feet into the air and away. Where he had been standing now stood a diminutive, wrinkled and simply ancient looking old man. He wore a martial artist's gi that was possibly more dirt than anything else was, he was mostly bald except for a fringe and a bit of a goatee and mustache, although even that looked very wavy. Large eyes, dominated a face that only a shrew or raisin could love, and his lips were currently twisted into a sneer. "That was rude! Whatever else I might be, I'm certainly human, boys! Now, why don't you all go away..."

With that, he disappeared once more, and Samantha screamed again as he latched onto her chest for a second time despite the fact she had been covering herself with her arms! "While I and this young lady's silky darlings get to know one another!"

Desperately Samantha pulled out a handgun, and pushed it against his head, but found her hand grabbed before she could pull the trigger. A second later she found herself in the air and hurled into several of the others, including the team leader who had been getting over his shock in order to speak. "Bah if you're going to be that way, I can head elsewhere for my fun! Youth these days and their guns, so sad."

"Besides," the old man said, pulling out a black cloth of some kind and rubbing his face into it, "mmm, that was enough to revive me for a bit. And I have two ungrateful disciples to hunt down. And of course, more silky darlings to liberate." With that, he turned and leaped away, cackling.

"'Silky darlings to liberate', what's that mean?" asked one of the men incredulously pushing his fellows off him. They looked at Samantha, who was practically steaming, as she pulled her rifle up from where she'd left it on the ground before they used the explosives. She set the butt of her rifle against her shoulder and began to fire at the back of the retreating old man. "Get back here you little freak!"

But to her astonishment the old man kept going, dodging the bullets without even looking back at her.

It was as the rifle's impact was translated into her body that all of them realized that the black cloth that he had been swinging over his head was Samantha's bra. More than one man stared as her chest bounced from the rifle shots, and with a growl, Samantha turned a rifle on them. "Anyone got something to say!?"

"Nope," they all said as one.

"After him!" the team lead said, pushing himself to his feet. "The boss wants us to at least try to get that guy on board."

"Oh, I'll get him on board all right," Samantha growled. "I'll shove a board straight up his ass, that'll 'put him on board!'"

"That made absolutely no...never mind," the team lead finished, holding up his hands as Samantha rounded on him. Moments later, they were after the old man, shaking their heads.

"You know that line that the observation guys have started to use?" one man, a Swede, said to his fellows they ran.

"The one that goes, 'what the hell has gone wrong with my life that this is normal'? Or something like that? I think they stole it from Dr. Sahashi."

"Yeah, that's the one. I think I might have to steal it after this mission."

"I prefer the other one. The one that the tech guys have been saying. They use it kinda like a mantra, trying to psyche themselves up for the day."

"What is it?"

"You don't have to be crazy to work with crazy, but it helps. 'Cause let's face it, this is crazy, both that little thing being alive, and us chasing after him." That caused some groans, but they all still continued on their way.

OOOOOO

In the days following Ranma's fight with Karasuba, it looked as if the game had calmed down, the Ashikabi of all stripes horrified by the amount of damage that fight had done: forty civilians hospitalized and ten more dead, with billions of yen in damages, with several streets utterly decimated. But that was on the surface, a falsehood propagated by MBI, who had gone into damage control before the fight had even finished. Not a single recording of the fight had actually gotten out of the city, and MBI had released a statement to all the Sekirei and even the entire city that said that Karasuba had gone rogue when sent to bring Ranma in for questioning, who in turn had been interfering with the game managers. Minaka trotted out the Disciplinary Squad's Ashikabi Natsuo for it, and he won over the public with his looks and easygoing manner.

That lie didn't really hold much water for most. Especially for the faction Ranma had, however accidentally started to put together. Nabiki, Kodachi, Akane, and Yashima talked to the other Sekirei in Nerima during this time. Most were convinced of the danger of the MBI card rather easily, and agreed to both not use it, and store it well away from their Sekirei. Others, however, balked at being part of an alliance with any of the others, seemingly convinced by the game's hype that only one pair could stay together at the end of some allotted time frame. That frustrated Nabiki and Kodachi both, but they had nothing to do about it. Akane at least could take her frustrations out on Kuno and the training Genma started to put her and Yashima through alongside Soun.

Elsewhere, Kocho and Matsu continued their cyber-attacks on Higa, who was rapidly starting to lose ground to them, as he had to Ranma in terms of the Sekirei game. He retreated entirely from any further offensive actions save for a team of three Sekirei who were kept moving around the East to keep his subordinates in line, and to look out for any other non-winged Sekirei. But despite that, it was clear to everyone that Higa had suddenly gone from the strongest Ashikabi, to barely being among the top three. Indeed, Kocho and Matsu firmly believed it was only a matter of time before Hayato moved against him and finished him off for them.

But MBI's lie was just enough to keep a lid on things from getting too wild right away. That didn't mean that incidents didn't happen though. A few, in particular, were enough to cause Takami to long for the days of just having to deal with her ex's madness and the Sekirei Game, as well as to wonder if she should start taking medicine for blood pressure. One such incident most certainly took the cake, causing even **Minaka** conniptions:

Taking over the job Ranma had been doing, Ryoga had instantly started to patrol the city with Musubi. However, he and Miya were both fully aware of his displacement curse, Miya refused to let him wander off once more and cowed Ryoga enough to go along with her solution.

So basically he patrolled the city, while tied like a young child to Musubi with a rubber rope. Ryoga was deeply embarrassed by this, yet his morose mood couldn't last for more than a few rooftops around Musubi, who was almost gleeful about being reunited with her Ashikabi. Even now as she led him around, Ryoga was a little bemused by it all. Not the whole 'we're aliens and we need to mate with humans thing', that he'd seen in a few hentai anime, but the fact that a woman who was as gorgeous as Musubi would have waited for him for so many weeks, that threw the lost boy something fierce. That and her general innocence, which made it almost but not quite dirty to think about her as his wife, girlfriend or whatever Sekirei translated to in this instance. *If you ask Musubi, it simply translates to Destined One, which isn't nearly as helpful as she seems to think it should be.*

Even so, underneath her joy at being around him, Ryoga could tell something was off with Musubi. Something had been bothering her under the surface ever since Miya had said that she had killed Karasuba, which Ryoga had no issue with whatsoever. That woman had looked all kinds of crazy to him, and that was before she had tried to cut him in half and actually succeeded in wounding him despite his family's durability. Still, it seemed the Ashikabi/boyfriend thing to ask. "Musubi, is there something wrong with you? Are you sad that someone had to die?"

Musubi sighed, "Kind of. It's hard to explain."

"Try me," Ryoga said with a smile. "I think that besides Ranma, I am possibly the best person to deal with strange stuff given my issues with knowing where I am at any given moment."

At that Musubi giggled, "Ah, hai! Ranma tried to explain your family's curse to us. You should have seen Kagari's face! But then again, I think he reacted badly to Ranma's curse, which I thought was kind of cool."

Ryoga shuddered a little shaking his head. "Gha, just don't go there. I'm still getting to grips with that curse myself and it kind of freaks me out. Still, tell me what's bothering you."

Musubi sighed once more and then stopped on a rooftop, moving over to look out over the city. Once they were both leaning against the protective wall of the roof, she explained how she and Karasuba had become rivals in lieu of number eight, Yume. How she had taken up the task of proving to Karasuba that love and fighting for your loved ones, could beat someone fighting just for the heck of it, out of hate or a desire to cause pain. How the two of them, Yume and Karasuba, had saved Musubi and another Sekirei named Kaho after they had been captured by some military.

She did not mention having the Tama, or the soul of Yume, the Sekirei of Destiny, within her. That she **really** wasn't certain how to explain. Not to a human anyway.

"And now she's dead, after being kind of beaten by Ranma, although I know Miya finished her off. But neither of them were fighting for love or anything like that, he was just fighting for his own sense of honor. It kind of... well, it makes the question between which is stronger love or hate seem unfinished, or even silly, and I don't like it," Musubi finished, pouting, which was rather adorable in Ryoga's opinion.

Ryoga frowned, scratching his chin as Musubi turned back to lead them off again, tugging lightly at the lead between them to get him moving. "I suppose that makes some sense. But I think you're looking at it the wrong way. You say Ranma wasn't fighting for love, and I agree," Ryoga said, after stumbling over the word love.

Unlike Ranma, he hadn't really had any kind of normalization indoctrination from Miya, and he was still very much getting used to the idea that Musubi apparently loved him and wanted to spend the rest of her life with him. That wasn't something he was going to get used to anytime soon. "Not um, that for a person anyway. Maybe if he'd been defending Akitsu you could say that but there are different types of, of well that..." he said, unwilling to say the word love again.

Musubi turned and looked at him quizzically.

"There's that between people, and then there's *gulp* love of, you know, the Art. Ranma was fighting for his personal honor, which is tied into his love of the Art as well as defending Akitsu and the others at the beginning. There is friendship there too, which was why Miya was there to defend him. So maybe the power of friendship and the power of honor beats out hate," he stumbled to a halt there, knowing how lame this all sounded. *But then again*, he reflected, *Musubi thinks that love is the most powerful emotion in the world, so maybe it makes more sense to her than it does to me?*

Thankfully for the slightly tongue-tied Ryoga that seemed to be the case, as Musubi was nodding rapidly now, smiling happily at him. "That makes a lot of sense! You're so smart Ryoga-sama!" she said, hopping backward and hugging him tightly.

This caused the very innocent Ryoga to blush bright red as her absolutely monstrously sized breasts pressed into his chest. He could feel his face starting to blush and was trying to think of a way to push out of her grip when he suddenly grabbed her around the waist and hopped away, just as someone else landed right where they had been standing, her leg smashing into the rooftop to create a small crater.

The woman was tall, as tall as Ryoga, with short black hair, a portion of which passed to either side of her face, large breasts (though nowhere near Musubi's) practically on display in a bikini top, tight jeans which had seams down the inner edges, and long black gloves over which she wore claw knives. Her skin was also darkly tanned.

Growling, Ryoga lightly pushed Musubi to one side and cracked his knuckles. "What the hell was that about, you gyaro wannabe!?"

Before the girl could respond, if she was going to at all, another girly landed nearby. She too had black hair, and wore a similar outfit, the same kind of bikini top and leggings, though instead of having a seam on the inside of her pants, this girl had a portion of one leg's thigh uncovered. There the resemblance ended, because this girl was about as white-skinned as a vampire, in comparison her pale eyes and was so thin she had no breasts to speak of, indeed she looked almost like she had some kind of eating disorder. For all that though, she wielded a large scythe that she should have trouble lifting, let alone wielding.

"That's #88 for certain," she said to the one who first showed up, pointing at Musubi. "She's one of the ones that go around with that Ranma guy, right? But that's not Ranma."

"Maybe not, but he leaped away like he could handle himself. We might've found a fight even if it isn't with the guy we were after," replied the other.

"If you wish to fight, give us your names and issue a proper challenge, don't just attack us out of the blue like that!" Musubi said crossly.

"What rock have you been living under? You think that honor shit matters?" scoffed the taller woman. "Still, I'm Hatae, and this is Chiyo. If you ain't Ranma, I hope you can fight as good as he can, because otherwise, we'll just cut you."

"Ah, thanks for clarifying the stakes like that," Ryoga said grimly, cracking his knuckles and gently disengaging the rope that tied him and Musubi together, loosening it so that he had room to fight. *Let them think that that will inconvenience me. They'll be in for a big surprise.* "But if you want to throw down, fine by me, this whole patrol thing was kind of boring anyway!"

With that, the two sides raced together. Chiyo was the first one to come within striking distance thanks to her scythe, which she swung swiftly at Ryoga's head. While not quite being used to sparring with Ranma, Ryoga had dealt with fast opponents before and his hand came up blocking the attack with a hard thrust that caught the scythe right behind the blade mid-swing. He then twisted into the scythe's reach lashing out with a punch. Chiyo dodged that by the skin of her teeth, bringing up the blunt end of the blade into Ryoga's chest, but doing no damage.

Musubi though didn't have Ryoga's durability, but she had been training with Ranma and Miya both. She too dodged the claws of her enemy, ducking and dodging to one side, stumbling as Hatae's claws cut the rubber rope that connected her to Ryoga, but spinning into a kick the force of which caused Hatae to leave her own feet even though she blocked it. Hatae rolled with the blow, then pushed herself into a lunge low to the ground, her claws slashing, a response that surprised Musubi, used to people taking to the air or fighting on their feet. This allowed Hatae to close, her claws flashing out into another cut the sliced into Musubi's skirt and her thigh very lightly. She was nearly brained by a punch that flew by a desperate dodge to the side, lashing out with a kick at the same thigh it connected and Musubi winced in pain, feeling the limb go dead a bit.

This, however, brought her crashing into her ally, and both Musubi and Ryoga took advantage. A blow from Musubi caught Hatae in the chest, flinging her backward over Chiyo's head while Ryoga took a blow from Chiyo's scythe, his hand wrapped up in a bandanna he'd pulled off of his head, though oddly enough underneath that he'd had another bandanna somehow. The cloth of the bandanna blocked the scythe easily, and Ryoga crushed it, shattering the blade before a punch caught Chiyo before she could dodge, having stared in astonishment at the shattering of her scythe blade.

Ryoga caught Musubi before her leg could give out, scowling and shaking his head toward the two unconscious combatants. "Bah, all bark and no bite those two, that pink-haired harridan I fought before could have taken them both pretty easily. Still, that was a bit of excitement at least. But, um, are you ok, Musubi?"

"I think that my leg is hurt quite a bit, but other than that, that was great fun! We should probably do it again." Musubi replied, complete with throwing her arms up in the air and smiling happily.

"You're not going to erase their Sekirei marker or whatever like you're supposed to?" Ryoga asked, blushing once more at the feel of her body against his, his face turning the same alarming shade of red as before, blood dripping from his nose. *Damn it, what is Musubi doing to me!?*

"No," she said with a shake of her head, her smile disappearing. "There'd be no point. Besides, Landlady-sama has explained to me why removing them from the game might be a bad idea anyway. And on top of that, it's better to keep them around so we can challenge them again later!"

"Now you're thinking like a martial artist," Ryoga said with a smile, which disappeared into a rictus as Musubi leaned against him, his earlier blush redoubling in color. Then she twisted to take more pressure off her wounded leg and showed him a lot of her cleavage.

That did it. The blood which had rushed to Ryoga's head burst out from his nose in a fountain that sent him flying backward.

"Ryoga-sama!" Musubi shouted, wincing as she hobbled after him.

Her leaning over him, however, did not help, and it was with the desperation of the suddenly anemic that he quickly waved her away, rolling and pushing himself to his feet. "Er, it's nothing Musubi, just a, um, a medical condition that sometimes comes up." With that he moved gingerly over to her put an arm around her shoulders and helping her

along, moving to take a set of emergency stairs down to the road below. "Um, let's get you back home though so we can look at that leg."

Musubi nodded not realizing they weren't going in the direction they should have been until the scenery around them changed. Ryoga realized it a few random, woozily-made turns later, during which the scenery changed twice more. Looking around he paled still further, though at least this time it had nothing to do with losing more precious vitae. "Oh crap! Where the heck are we now!?"

OOOOOOO

That was a question Takami was asking herself too, along with Minaka. "How did the signal for Musubi just disappear?"

Of course, MBI had been monitoring the fight, and there was already a helicopter on the way to the sight of the battle. The fact that the two losers hadn't had their marks removed was a bit of an issue, but not a big one, and for once, that fight had been precisely the kind the game should have: two on two, without any bystanders involved, and very little in the way of damage to public property.

Takami had just been thinking about to how to use that as propaganda and a how-to tutorial sort of video for the rest of the Ashikabi when Ryoga had picked up Musubi and leaped away. That was fine, they'd known he was superstrong and dangerous like Ranma was before this fight even began. It still bothered the hell out of Takami that there were humans that could fight on an even level with most Sekirei, but that was small potatoes to everything else she was dealing with these days, up to and including her ex-husband slowly pushing her out of any authority over MBI and his own activities.

But to have Musubi transponder signal disappear from within Shin Tokyo? That was big, that was game breaking big!

"Remember that this is the one that has that odd curse on his family line that we discovered," Minaka said calmly, his voice and image coming from a small intercom set to one side of Takami's desk in the observation room. "We might need to look farther afield."

The short-haired woman scowled, but nodded and ordered the technicians around her. "Expand the search parameters, find that signal!"

OOOOOOO

Soon enough Ryoga spotted something he thought he recognized and he groaned. "Oh, crud."

"What's wrong?" Musubi asked him instantly, leaning against him for support as they look walked down the road. Her beauty drew a lot of stairs, and more than a few people pulled out cameras and took pictures of her, her outfit being explanation enough without her beauty added to it.

But Ryoga ignored them. He was used to that kind of reaction at times as well to his own appearance and suddenly showing up. At least soldiers aren't chasing us yet. Still, given where we are, that's only a matter of time, damn it.

"See that statue down there?" he asked aloud, gesturing with his head down the street. When Musubi nodded, he went on. "That's why I'm groaning. That is a statue of this old idiot named Lenin, and that probably means we're in Russia. I seriously hope I don't have to deal with those KGB wannabes again! Just because you slap a new paint job on a tiger doesn't mean it changes into a housecat... Ugh."

OOOOOOO

Even Minaka looked shocked in the small screen as Takami whispered, "Where did you say the signal was coming from?"

"I, I, um....*gulp*, S, Seattle Washington miss," the tech who had found the signal said, backing away out of clipboard range just in case.

"Oh no," Minaka said, slapping his forehead while Takami simply slumped in her chair shaking her head. For once, his general good humor and mad, manic energy was in stark abeyance, something that had only ever happened before when his plans went truly wrong, like with Karasuba and Ranma. This though had the potential to be far worse than that. "Oh no."

OOOOOOO

"How! How could one of those **things** enter the USA without us being aware of it!?" shouted a man sitting behind a large, very expensive looking desk elsewhere, slamming his hand down on his the desk as he glared at a technician in front of them. "Especially since all ships coming out of Shin-Teito are searched for contraband!"

"Well, that brings us to this guy sir," the man said, circling the image on the computer screen of Ryoga and Musubi to one side of him. The screen took up an entire room.

"Who is he?"

"We call him Young Anomaly sir. We don't even know his real name, but he has shown up in multiple areas where to be frank, no one should have been able to, as have two other people, both of whom bear a familial resemblance to him, hence the Young portion of our name for him. And I'm not talking about him breaking and entering or just wandering around randomly, I'm talking about him suddenly showing up in secret facility here, or walking around the corner there and disappearing. No one's been able to do anything about it, but we've got reams about all three of them doing that kind of thing. We've tried to chase all three of them down at one point or another, but as soon as any of them turn a corner or is out of sight, they're gone."

"Some kind of teleportation then?" the man behind the desk said, before shrugging as the younger man in front of him gave him a look, "I'm a Trekkie, sue me." As his subordinate chuckled he leaned back frowning, "Why haven't I heard of this before?"

"Would you have believed it if we weren't already talking about one of the Sekirei being in America without our knowing Sir?" his man asked bluntly.

"Point," the man behind the desk said with a nod, "but you say he's done this to us, is there any indication..."

"Sir, we have confirmed evidence of him showing up like that out of the blue seemingly at random around the entire world. From Siberia down to the Falkland Islands and then across to Australia."

"Is there any evidence he can control it? I mean is he doing it on purpose?"

"We have no idea. No one's been able to talk to him."

"Has anyone tried?" the older man asked. The silence was telling, and he groaned. Right! See if we can get a few teams down there. One team of diplomats, and two teams to capture both the Sekirei and this young man if he resists."

Luckily for all concerned, by the time the federal government had gotten those teams moving, Ryoga had once again gotten lost. Although admittedly, this time he had gotten lost with a bit more style than normal.

"But don't worry, I have this phone that Matsu gave me yesterday just in case," Ryoga stated, pulling he out triumphantly. He looked down at it and began to tap it in the controls for the GPS on the phone to help find their current location.

But he kept on walking too and Musubi looked around in amusement and amazement as they turned the corner, and the area around them changed. Now they were in another city, the architecture and the people different, with, oddly to her, these things on their heads that looked like sheets wrapped up.

He stopped then, staring down at his phone as it's showed the calculating sign that read: Calculating. Calculating. Recalculating, recalculating," Ryoga waited and waited, and waited some more, and then the phone began to hiss. "What the heck..." then it exploded in his hand and he sighed.

"Of course. Nothing in my life can ever be simple." *And is it just me, or did that thing say, 'fuck this I'm out,' before it exploded?*

Turning his gaze upward he roared, "Because of you, curse, I have seen hell!" Then he looked around sheepishly, "Sorry," he said to the passersby, who were all looking at him like he was crazy now, "I just felt like saying it for some reason."

Looking at Musubi, he blushed, "Um, so, since there's no chance of me getting us back to Tokyo anytime soon, shall we just, um, see what there is to see around here?"

OOOOOO

Beyond that headache inducing moment though, MBI was also dealing with several issues.

Minaka had, of course, to talk almost continuously to several governments the world over who knew about the Sekirei and were displeased, to put it mildly, about aliens and much of their technology not being in their own 'capable' hands. Russia, America and China were the most stubborn of these. And of course, every time something went wrong in the game, like with Karasuba's death or Ryoga and Musubi going on their impromptu world tour, they began to make noises about trying to take over. Because of those two points, the discussions should have become worse which he had prepared for.

Yet contrary to his expectations, China backed off, ending their discussion with him after Minaka had assured them that no further over-the-top destruction like what had occurred between Ranma and Karasuba would be allowed. They didn't even seem concerned about Ryoga, calling 'that family a very odd force of nature', like random earthquakes, can be ready for them, cannot predict them. The Chinese simply wanted assurances that the Sekirei would not break his control or be controlled by anyone else who might turn against them. This was a marked improvement, and Minaka was grateful if rather suspicious of this change.

Minaka didn't have much time to ponder that point though as he also had to deal with Russia and the USA. Eventually, with Russia, he decided to go the blunt route and simply threatened them with the Sekirei ship's weapons if they dared moved against him or attempted to do anything to bother MBI's businesses, or invaded Japan to gain control of the Sekirei, as their ambassador to him had threatened. Minaka might not believe himself beholden to the Japanese government, but he would certainly act to defend the island's sovereignty since in so doing he'd defend his own position.

Honestly, those aren't even weapons, he thought to himself with a chuckle that he very carefully hid as the Russian ambassador glared at him. The lasers on the colony ship that the Sekirei had come to earth in weren't made to fight. They were instead made to protect the prow of the ship from space detritus before it could hit the ship since the ship was traveling so fast that relativistic impacts from even a penny would have hit like a massive nuke. *But it is a particular genius of man to make a weapon from anything, and simply shifting a few things around within the laser emitters, heightening the power, and focusing two emitter arcs into one was more than enough to create a weapon that could disintegrate a city.*

America was a little more difficult. They didn't threaten unilateral action like Russia, but they were more than willing to take to cyber warfare and public relations than Russia. Their hackers weren't quite as good as China's but they had far more of them, and in many ways America was more important in terms of MBI's legitimate business than the other two as well, giving them economic leverage. After all, even with the game having started, expenses had to be met, in particular, Sekirei food and repair expenses.

But Minaka could fight fire with fire here as well. When they began to push, he pushed back, threatening to release footage of the original Disciplinary Squad's battle against a US Task Force from when they tried to take command of the island when it had first resurfaced. Threatening that, and to go public with the Sekirei in their entirety, was enough to make the American's back off. They had essentially been lying to people for years now about that task force, covering it up, and then releasing news about ships lost or people dead in small lots so that no one back home could realize that America had lost a full naval task force in a single battle. That, after all, would have been something the American public would never forgive either the current ruling party or the enemy.

Because of this, Minaka had actually been helping them in their cover-up before this. Simply pulling that help out would make the job inordinately harder, especially in the UN and in front of other countries not yet in the know about the Sekirei. And like democracies the world over, threaten their public image and they fell over their own feet to save themselves.

Finally, after rehashing those points again, after Ryoga and Musubi's jaunt into Seattle, Minaka had some time to turn his attention to something far more interesting to him: the team he had sent to China had finally returned the day before. He's allowed them a full day's rest before meeting with them as a group, having previously ordered them to keep themselves to themselves and not talk to anyone, including Takami, about what they had done. He'd even gone so far as to meet them in a specially prepared room, which had a faraday cage around it just in case. After all, the samples they had said they brought back would become part of his means to regain control of the game, and he didn't want to mess it up.

He smiled happily at the men before him, leaning forward in his chair as he looked at them then down at the large bag they had brought along, the kind of heavy, well-padded bags used to carry glass or other breakable objects. "So, I suppose before telling me everything that happened to you, I need to know kind of samples did you get?" he asked eagerly, almost like a child waiting for a promised Christmas present.

"We've got several dozen sir," the team leader replied, standing at parade attention but making no move to salute his employer or anything else. Indeed even standing as he was showed more respect than he currently felt for the man who had sent them to Jusenkyo. "But there's a problem there..."

Minaka's eyes narrowed, "Show me." They did so, and something sprang to Minaka's mind immediately as he looked at the small sample jars. "Why are the labels all so mussed? Surely you can't tell one from another like this!"

"That's part of the story we have to tell you, sir. It happened almost as we were leaving Jusenkyo. It was raining and Tarquin fell, the pack somehow opened, and all the supplies poured out. They couldn't have been subjected to the rain for more than a few seconds, but all of the labels became smears almost instantly. That despite our using a permanent marker and having waited until it dried before putting them in the pack in the first place!" the man finished, nearly shouting the word, his self-control obviously frayed even by the memory of that on top of everything else that had happened to his team.

"Hmm, truly odd. But you sound almost more resigned than bothered by that," Minaka stated shrewdly. "Care to explain why?"

"We, well, we all fell into the pools sir," said the team lead resignedly. "And, that, that kind of ties into the real story of Jusenkyo..."

The tale evolved from there. First, how they had had to go off the beaten path so far to find the place, then the meeting with one of the locals, this Cologne woman, and how that had gone. The idea of women who were able to move like that and indeed an Amazon culture in this day and age was a bit strange, but Minaka didn't argue with the facts. *Although, I wonder if they are descendants of one of the other Sekirei ships? I know one of them crashed in Greece, another in Norway. But that leaves two unaccounted for.*

The idea that the whole area of Jusenkyo was cursed, that anyone who went there would almost always fall into a pool, was fascinating though. *But what in the world could have caused that I wonder? Ahh, but more importantly if that is the case...* "I see I see, so that's why you were all cursed. Show me your curse forms."

All of them blanched at that, two of the men, the Ukrainian and South Korean in particular. But Minaka simply glared at them. "Show me," he ordered again.

Reluctantly the team did so, and Minaka began to laugh. One of them, a rather ugly man, turning into a svelte beauty was amusing enough. Another man turning into a cow caused him to break down in laughter. A small black pig had him blinking and almost trembling as he thought about the amount of weight that had just disappeared, causing him to blink. One of them turning into an odd-looking half-bird man was interesting and might have made him wonder idly about how it would feel like to fly. But the last man turning chimpanzee was the icing on the cake and he howled out, "Well, I suppose that's not much of a change now is it? All that means is you won't have to shave! Just, just think about it as getting in touch with humanities roots!"

Smacking his hands down, he laughed and laughed as the five men in front of him began to get angry at Minaka's humor at their expense. "Oh, this is rich! What this will add to the game, ahahahah!"

Gone was Minaka's concerns about his long-term plans for a moment, gone was his anger at how Ranma had basically challenged him, forced the game down a particular path, of equality rather than the constant combat and one-upmanship as he had hoped. Thinking about how using these samples and how they would add just so much sheer randomness to the Game just made him laugh.

Unfortunately, one of the transformed individuals in front of him, the little black piglet who had been the Ukrainian, had had enough by this point. Dealing with the curse was one thing, having their boss laugh at them after he had ordered them to Jusenkyo in the first place, was another.

"It's not funny!" he shouted in pig. "Do you know how often I've had to run away from people who wanted to add me to the soup pot?! I hate being helpless like this!"

Of course, Minaka didn't understand him, and he just kept laughing. Angrily, the pig looked around, then spotted the samples, still standing on the table in front of Minaka.

Growling the black pig nudged the cow, who was actually the South Korean, jerking its tiny head toward the bottles on the desk. The cow looked at them, then nodded in turn and backed away a few steps then smacked into the table. Having been angrily hooting at Minaka from directly in front of him, the chimpanzee reacted quickly, grabbing several of the samples with his hands and feet both. *Huh, okay, so maybe this form has some good going for it.* But that still

let one sample fly into the air over Minaka smashing down onto him, the glass shattering and the water covering his head.

The team lead, who had been the one to fall into the same spring of Drowned Girl Ranma had, had been leaning against the wall glaring at Minaka. According to Cologne, gender changes like that changed the person falling in into the version of themselves they would have been had they been born in that shape, not affecting their age, just their gender. The idea that he would have been such a hottie if he had been born of woman was just fuel to the fire.

She did nothing as the animals plotted, and then shook her head as, unfortunately for everyone, Minaka was splashed with something actually useful.

Having raced around the desk to watch the events from an unobstructed point of view, the piglet could only scowl and shake his head as he oinked out, "Now that's just not freaking fair." A next second a hand came down towards him, and his life ended. The next second the cow joined him, unable to back away before Minaka had leaped across the table.

"I trust," Minaka said in his new form as he stretched his arms, looking down at his new body in some interest, "that you won't say anything to anyone about this?" The three survivors all shook their heads rapidly, and he nodded, looking down at the other samples thoughtfully as the chimp set them down and backed away quickly.

"How very interesting," Minaka said once more, stretching again and looking at his hands. "Yes! Yes, this serves I think, both for fun and for defense."

In the courtyard, one of the three survivors turned to his fellows, having taken the time to change their bodies back to normal. He spoke in French, a language he knew the others could speak, if not very well, but it was better than worry about being overheard. "We didn't tell him about telling the Amazons about the Sekirei you know."

"And we're not going to. He didn't ask, we don't tell," the team lead said firmly. "Our lives have been wrecked at this point, but we still have them, and I'd like to keep it that way. We just keep our heads down for now and get out when we can."

OOOOOO

Three days after Ranma had been injured, Kazehana was out and about, patrolling the north of the city from on high. With Ryoga and Musubi gone, and the talk with the Sekirei in Nerima ongoing, Kazehana and the others had been forced to split up into one-person patrols and pull back into the north of the city rather than trying to patrol the entire thing. Thankfully with Higa scrambling to keep his stocks and everything else safe from Kocho and Matsu's ongoing attacks and trying to keep his 'allied' Ashikabi from dethroning him, that had removed one group of troublemaker, and Hayato and his flock were on the opposite side of the city.

Of course, that leaves Sanada, who apparently can't control his Sekirei, or is way more combative than we expected. Ugh, if I get attacked by that vampire girl again I'm going to scream. She hefted her breasts up in her hands, pouting, "It's not my fault her tits are nonexistent, why the heck does she need to try and take it out on mine? Her and that pinkie too." She then giggled, "At least I know that Minato likes them."

"Oh shut up you, you big-breasted harlot!" came said pink-haired Sekirei's voice from one side, startling Kazehana to look that way, nearly over balancing, which in turn caused her breasts to sway as she regained her balance on the girder she had been perched on. Across from her Benitsubasa scowled and readied herself, but Kazehana held up a hand, frowning, "Did you hear that?"

"You're not going to get out of this beating you bitch, I owe you for the last time I saw you! You messed up my date with Natsuo-sama!" Benitsubasa barked, making to move forward, but the sound of another lightning blast caused her to pause and turn to look down and to the left where the sound had come from. "Is that one of those Thunder Fools?"

"Hehehe, yeah, I think that's as good a name as any for those two, jumping into bed with that loafer Seo so quickly rather than waiting to see if they could react to someone else," Kazehana said kneeling down and looking in that direction. "I can see both of them... but what is that little thing they are chasing?"

Forgetting her hate for the other Sekirei for the moment, Benitsubasa also looked in that direction, frowning. "Short, whatever it is. And fast!"

As the two of them watched the thing hopped higher and higher up into the roofs of the city towards their current perch, with the twins Hikari and Hibiki following on its heels. As it came closer, the two Sekirei could make out more

details, and the thing turned into a small person, rather elderly, with a bag twice as large as he was on his back. "What the heck?"

"Erm, I'd say Santa, but Santa's big, fat and jolly. That guy just looks creepy," Kazehana replied.

"Hotcha!" the elderly person shouted. "What a haul, what a haul! Yes, that army boy was right, these Sekirei really do have magnificent cha-chas. Although their taste in bras could use some work, really what is with all the black silk, give me variety in type not just size!"

Hearing that the two Sekirei above the chase looked at one another and shook their heads. "What the heck?" Kazehana verbalized their shared thoughts.

Before Benitsubasa could reply the chase reached them with Hibiki shouting, "Windy tit, Pinkie, that guy stole our bras! Help us give him a beat down would ya!?"

"He's fast and somehow able to steal them from right under your clothing, so watch out!" Hikari said even as she shot a blast of lightning at the little guy.

"Ooh wee, that's almost as hot as you are baby!" the old man shouted, dodging to one side, bouncing off a gargoyle, smashing it to pieces sticking out of a building. The pieces fell down, slowing his pursuers, while the old man leaped up flipping himself up to land between the two watchers. Even as they tried to move aside, he leaped, landing in Kazehana's chest. "OH yes, oh bliss, oh joy! This, this is the best, these breasts, the most magnificent I've ever felt, the biggest, the softness, oh my I have died and gone to heaven."

Kazehana laughed, but there was a dangerous glint to her eyes as air began to move around her under her mental command. "Aw, that's nice, my Ashikabi says the same thing. But I'm sorry, that's his personal property you're fondling, so I'll have to demand you compare my breasts to heaven in person!"

The old man launched himself away from Kazehana a second before a blast of air, which would have shredded him, passed through the area right in front of her chest. He leaped across, dodging a punch from Benitsubasa, and all Kazehana could think was, *Where did his bag go, and why do I feel a little breezy around the chest area now?*

Benitsubasa backed up, throwing punches left and right and center, lashing out with kicks too, but all of them were used to keep the old man in the air and simply didn't hit, which pissed her off too. "GRAA, damn it freaking stay still, you little, freaky gnome!" A few moments later she had flipped off the girder into the rest of the incomplete building, but she completely started to lose control at that point, her style disappearing as she tried to just tag the little pervert.

She failed, and a second after losing a roundhouse kick found the old man on her chest. But unlike with Kazehana, he only stayed there for a second. A moment later, he was away and Hikari and Hibiki were there, landing next to the Disciplinary Squad member.

The old man perched on a rebar nearby, shaking his head sadly. "No hips, no chest, I'm so sorry for you my dear." He then disappeared and then Benitsubasa screamed as she felt little hands feeling her up from behind. "Oh-ho, but you have an amazing rear though! Hehehe, I'm so glad to be alive, yes, I think I'll put off finding my two disciples for a bit longer, having fun with you Sekirei is just too amazing, a veritable smorgasbord!"

"GRaHhhh!" Hikari shouted, kicking out to the side only to watch the old man dodge, her blow nearly knocking Benitsubasa off the girder. "Oh crap, sorry!"

"Ne, never, never mind!" the pink haired woman snarled, her face suffused with rage and embarrassment in equal measure. "Let's just get that bastard, he just fucking stole my panties!"

"And my bra!" Kazehana shouted.

Their differences cast aside for a moment, all four of them gave chase as the old man leaped away, cackling, his newest acquisitions held aloft proudly.

OOOOOO

Worse for the enemies of MBI, while the trip to find Happy had failed, and resulted in even more chaos, the attempts to find the other two he wanted to bring in to help and corral Ranma had gone well.

"Let me get this straight," he said leaning back as he looked at the two young men across from his desk, meeting with these two in his office in the uppermost floor of the tower. "I want to be clear of course, one should always be clear in

business correct?" Both men nodded, and Minaka took a moment to look at them.

One was a dark haired young man, his messy hair held back by a white headband with camouflage colored pants a black tank top and black gloves. He was as tall as Ranma, and had something of the same features to his face, though his mouth showed hard lines and his eyes were cold and flinty. His name was Ryu Kumon.

The other young man was equally well-built and brown hair and his clothing reflected his origins in China, being silk pants and silk shirt in green with Chinese cut. He had a yellow sash around his waist, and silk shoes on as well. Where the other man just looked hard, this one visibly sneered, a cruel light in his eyes almost, along with a contempt for those around him. His name was Taro, no other name given, though Minaka knew his first name, and a bit of the origins of it.

"You want a wife and money, is that it?" Minaka asked, looking at Ryu.

"A wife who is strong and can stand up alongside me in a fight, that's right. That and killing both Genma and Ranma Saotome, which is the whole reason you found me in the first place." Ryu shrugged, "I didn't think I had to actually outright state that bit. Anyone else practicing the Anything Goes School I'll just beat down, but those two have to die for what they did to my father."

According to what Minaka had learned that really hadn't amounted to much. *Indeed, even I would think that if a person knocks his house down on top of himself after learning a new 'technique', whatever that is, is the one at fault, rather than the man who taught it to him.*

But Minaka wasn't about to mess with his new pawn's motivations by pointing that out. "Very well, we can certainly accommodate you with that. There are a few Sekirei who have yet to be released, and I can have someone introduce you to them. If one of them reacts to you, you'll have found a wife that is far stronger than any human woman could ever be. Beyond that, well, you can always try to steal a Sekirei from someone else if she catches your eye."

Of course, Minaka did not believe in the whole Destined One concept being so set in stone, as most Sekirei believed. *This is a game of the gods after all and betrayal is a part of any tale with gods in it.* By the smile on his face, Ryu also seemed to find the idea interesting, if only because it gave him more women to choose from.

"And you?" he asked turning to the other one.

The other young man, who answered to Taro, growled angrily. "Money is fine, but you promised me you could deliver the one who I search for, the one who baptized me in the pools of Jusenkyo."

"Indeed, I have already begun researching martial arts masters who could have been in the area at the time, and wouldn't know about the cursed pools," Minaka frowned. "Does that mean however that you dislike your other form? I did not get that impression when my agents looked into your background."

Taro scoffed. "Of course I don't. My other form makes me powerful, strong and durable. Who would dislike that? No, my issues with the one who baptized me are my own. Leave off."

"Ah, of course," Minaka said with a laugh, though he did know what that issue was. *I suppose I wouldn't want to be stuck with a label like Pantyhose Minaka either, but then again, I would simply go to another country and change it. Stupid fool, clinging to his clan's traditions, when they so obviously hurt him, are all these martial artists so foolish?* "But until we find more information about him, you are willing to work for me? To join Ryu and my Disciplinary Squad to make certain that MBI stays in control?"

"So long as you don't ask me to kill anyone else, that's fine. My sense of honor is a bit more flexible than most martial artists," Ryu said with a shrug.

"I couldn't care less about that," said Taro with a growl, shaking his head. "So long as you helped me in my search I am fine with anything."

"Excellent. IN that case gentlemen, if you could read these contracts for me and sign where it is indicated..." Minaka said, turning on his lawyer mode. The next few minutes confused both young martial artists greatly, and if asked later they would not have been able to explain everything they had just signed, but then again neither would care either. As far as either of them were concerned putting their names on something wasn't worth the paper it was put on. Once they gave their word that was it.

As they finished, Minaka smiled and turned towards the door. "You can come in now." A second later, Haihane and Benitsubasa along with their Ashikabi came in, and looked their new teammates over. "Ohohoh, some new

bishounen, only a different type than our Ashikabi," Haihane said with a grunt.

"Ahh, I'm hurt," Natsuo said with a smile, moving around the two women to hold out his hand to the two newcomers. "I'm the captain of the Disciplinary Squad, Natsuo Ichinomi. Welcome aboard."

Ryu shook his hand while Taro sneered, an expression that Ryu agreed with after feeling Natsuo's hand. *Soft, powdery almost, a bit of strength but no calluses. He's no fighter.* "Huh, so you lead us in a fight then?"

"Ahh, no," Natsuo said with a chuckle, his smile slightly more brittle than it would have been a few weeks ago, though no one there knew him well enough to notice that. "I am more of a manager and paper pusher I'm afraid. I can use a rapier a bit, but that's nothing worth commenting on in this game of superhumans. Indeed, I almost envy the two of you for the fact you can fight on your own."

Taro scoffed and made for the door, and Benitsubasa shouted, "Hey you, don't just ignore Natsuo-sama like that! He was actually being friendly to you too!"

"Oh, what you gonna do about it girl?" Taro asked, sneering then glancing at Benitsubasa's chest. "If you're really a girl at all, that is."

As Haihane began laughing aloud at that and Benitsubasa hurled herself toward Taro with a shriek of fury, Minaka thought, *Hmm, perhaps putting them all on the same squad was a mistake? Meh, I suppose given the strength of my other form, I can afford to let the Squad be another source of amusement rather than my strong arm. Why, in that form, I might even be able to fight number zero-one!*

That thought lasted right up until Takami barged in moving between the charging Benitsubasa and Taro fearlessly, her face enraged. "You!" she shouted at Minaka, before her clipboard flicked out, smashing Taro to the ground and flooring Benitsubasa on the backswing, "out of my way!"

While those two were recovering and Taro was wondering how the hell that had just happened, Takami nodded once at Ryu who had quickly gotten out of her way before she slammed her clipboard down on Minaka's desk. "You, why do I think we have you to thank for these!?"

Takami was obviously referring to a series of images, which spilled out from her clipboard as it smacked into the desk. Minaka took a look at them, his eyebrows rising with each one.

The first was a picture of a young man, obviously foreign and rather pretty, almost like Natsuo. But the next image showed his mouth had just grown to the size of the hippos as he tried to kiss a Sekirei, one who Takami recognized as being one from Hayato's flock. The next image was of a woman, who Minaka knew was not a Sekirei leaping over the rooftops carrying what looked like a box of takeout as several Sekirei pursued her for some reason. The third image was of Happosai leaping away from the two Thunder Twins. In his hands he held two bras, and Benitsubasa's eyes widened as she looked over the doctor's shoulder. "That's him, Ashikabi-sama, that's the old man who stole my bra the other day!"

"Wait, you use a bra? Didn't think they made them for men," Taro said snarkily only to be sent down to the floor by another whack from Takami, causing him to glare at her and look around for a glass of water.

"Hmm," Minaka mused. "Perhaps I was wrong to release the fact that Genma Saotome and his son were in the city..." then he shrugged. "No. This is just adding more fun to the game, that's all."

"FUN!? You call all this, this madness, this chaos fun!?" Takami shrieked. "Why you, you madman! Do you have any idea what this is doing to my blood pressure?!"

This caused everyone else there to start making for the door with Natsuo in the lead. "So," Ryu asked conversationally, "Where're our rooms? And do we have to wear those semi-uniforms you two are wearing?"

OOOOOO

While Minaka had done his best to attract many of the marital artists, and others currently showing up in his city, there was one group that he most definitely had not invited, which arrived three days after Ranma and Karasuba's fight.

In the dead of night, a small figure moved out from underneath a parked plane, followed by several others. Before the baggage carrier could arrive and flood the area with its lights, they were gone. Once on the other side of the wall separating the airport from the area around it, the smallest figure halted, lighting up a pipe. The light of her match revealed this image to be that of Cologne, who smiled at the three girls around her, including her granddaughter.

"Remember, we are not here to cause trouble, we are here to simply observe these Sekirei, and discover if they too are daughters of Artemis. Keep under control, don't make waves for now until we have that information."

"No husband hunting, got it!" said one of the girls cheekily, her hair a mess of green and blond curls.

"Oh, I never said that," Cologne said with a cackle, causing Shampoo to breathe a sigh of relief.

She had a target for that already, a certain tall young man named Ranma, whose blue eyes and dreamy physique had haunted her dreams a time or two. *Now, how to go about finding him?*

A second later though, she had other things to worry about as Cologne stared toward the north of the city proper and promptly fainted. "Grandmother!?"

OOOOOO

But that wasn't the only thing going on that day. Because after three days of unconsciousness, that day Ranma finally opened his eyes once more.

As everything else had been going on away from Izumo House, Akitsu did not leave Ranma's side, not even once. She had occasionally shifted away from her chair next to the bed to bathe herself in the tub Miya had supplied when Miya in turn would bring up hot water. But mostly she simply sat there watching, waiting, feeling the ice within her growing with every hour that Ranma stayed unresponsive. The others stopped in occasionally, but with Chiho starting a new round of examinations with Tofu, Uzume wasn't often around, and none of the others could get any response from the ice-user. Miya could, occasionally, and joined her for several hours every night and morning, but she didn't intrude into Akitsu's self-imposed solitude. Only Nabiki tried, but she found herself rebuffed, Akitsu not doing anything, just not replying to her. And Nabiki, for all her feelings for Ranma, simply couldn't just sit there and wait.

Akitsu could feel herself slowly shutting down as the man she had hoped to become her Ashikabi in truth and who she had come to love even without that connection slept on, the warmth he had ignited within her simply slowly being snuffed out. It was only the fact that she could see his chest moving up and down, breathing easily, and the fact she could actually watch his wounds close that gave her any hope. When he didn't wake up instantly after the process completed and Dr. Tofu removed the IV tubes, she started to lose even that, despite Tofu and Miya's assurances.

But later that day Ranma woke up, stretching lightly and cracking his neck as he opened his eyes. It was the most wonderful thing Akitsu had ever seen. "Huh, she didn't finish me off? Wonder what happened there?"

He blinked and looked up at Akitsu, who was looking down at him with wide, almost sparkling eyes, and he smiled, a rather shy and shocked smile. "Akitsu? Um, you, you were waiting for me to wake up?" Ranma had been injured before. Hell, he'd been knocked out with a few concussions and simply been out of it for long periods of time. Never, not once, had anyone, not his father, not the other masters he trained with, never had someone been there when he woke up. That, that felt astonishingly nice.

Akitsu nodded once before swooping down, kissing him and hugging him so tightly it was like she thought he was a balloon that would fly out of reach the moment she loosened her grip. Ranma held her tenderly as he thought, *Shit you must have had a hard time didn't you?*

How long they kissed Ranma didn't know, but he also didn't care. It was obvious Akitsu needed this reassurance, that he was still here and wasn't going to leave her alone again. *How long was I out anyway?*

Within Akitsu the tiny embers of the connection Ranma had sparked before become the blaze it had been before his coma. The ice that had been filling her quickly thawed, disappearing, never to return. The cold was still there, but it no longer threatened to crush Akitsu.

She slowly pulled back, her eyes half-lidded before she looked at him, her normal unemotional mask nearly gone. Then her eyes widened and she scooted back, pushing upright with her hands to either side of his body as she quickly began to poke and prod him, her eyes wide and needing reassurance now that he was alright rather than just awake.

"Akitsu I'm fine, really," Ranma said with a smile, grabbing at her hand when it tried to probe the heavy scar running across his body. It was an inch wide, a nasty gash of red skin against his normal lightly tanned color. Still, it looked more like a scar from a wound over a year old or so rather than one he'd been given four days ago. *Let's hear it for ki healing!* Ranma's other wounds were similarly healed, though of course he was still missing his pinkie and the chunk of his ear.

Akitsu stopped prodding, leaving her hand on his chiseled chest, idly running her fingers over his muscles now. But her attention was on Ranma's eyes, falling into them as she smiled, a tender, loving smile so beautiful it took Ranma's breath away. "I am glad. You have been missed, Sun-sama," she said simply, before going on, a slight hesitation in her voice, but as much emotion as she, in her broken state, could convey. "I've missed you, my Ranma."

"Heh, um, I kinda got that impression yeah," Ranma nodded, raising one hand to stroke the side of her face tenderly. A part of him was still somewhat bemused by how fast he had gotten used to being so touchy-feely with Akitsu, how quickly his own emotions had deepened to match hers. A few months ago Ranma would never have thought he'd be so comfortable with a girl, let alone one as gorgeous as Akitsu. Now it was almost second nature.

And beyond even that, was the same thought he had before seeing her sitting there next to him. "And um, thanks for, you know, watching over me. I, I've never been in a relationship before of course, never had the time or the privacy for that. But um, I've also never had anyone stay beside me while I heal. My old man never did, even if he was the one to put me down in the first place. None of the masters I spent time with ever had the time. Maybe Miya-nee would've, but it never came up with her. So, um, seeing you there, waiting, um, that, that means a lot to me."

A small part of Ranma wondered where Nabiki was, if she had stopped in to check on him. But the rest of Ranma was concentrated on the woman currently sitting on his legs too much to wonder much about the other girl in his life.

"Of course I care." Akitsu said, before changing what she had been about to say. "You are my Ranma. I am broken, I cannot bind myself to you yet. But... but even if I am never able to, I would still wish to be by your side, Ashikabi or no."

Ranma's eyes widened in surprise at that, and Akitsu smiled again, that same small, infinitely loving, beautiful smile. then she leaned down and kissed him again. And while it started out simply loving, it quickly became passionate. Ranma's eyes widened, and his arms went around her, thinking almost to push her away, but Akitsu pressed herself down onto his body, her breasts flattening against his chest as she whimpered a bit. The fire within her that Ranma had created needed to be stoked, needed fuel, and while Akitsu's mind didn't really understand what that fuel had to be, her body certainly had some ideas.

She moaned into the kiss, and when she opened her mouth to let her tongue out to look at his lips, he didn't argue instead opening his mouth in turn, pulling her down even tighter against him while

"Ashikabi-sama, Sun-sama...Ranmaaa..." she moaned, trying to put all the emotions she was feeling into words as small, happy tears came to her eyes.

The tone of voice, and her moaning his name, nearly caused Ranma to lose it, but even beyond his hormonal response, Ranma could somehow tell Akitsu needed this, needed even more confirmation that he was alive and awake again, needed **him**. With that in mind he turned twisting so that he was above her, pinning Akitsu to the bed underneath him. He pulled back, breathing deeply and took in the view below him for a second, noticing Akitsu's dilated eyes, her heavy breathing her rosy cheeks and messed up hair. "God you're so beautiful," he whispered, then leaned down, kissing her again and again, as her arms and legs went around him, clenching around his waist, her own humping slowly up against Ranma's.

Where this make out session would've gone as Ranma began to gently rock his waist against hers, no one would ever know. Because just as Ranma did so, his stomach also began to growl. "God damn it."

Then he looked down at Akitsu, and, for the first time in his life, did not succumb to his stomach. Instead he leaned in and found Akitsu leaning up just as eagerly. They kissed for another few moments, but they were interrupted once more, though not by Ranma's stomach this time. Instead it was Akitsu's and Ranma pulled back to give a wry look. "You too huh?"

Akitsu giggled aloud, which was possibly the most amazing sound Ranma had ever heard, before nodding. "Food sounds good." she paused, looking confused. "Ahh... I cannot remember when I last ate."

"Heh, now that's a travesty if I ever heard one." with that he pulled away, flipping himself up and out of the bed, standing on weak legs, but still standing. Then Ranma turned, and reached back for her, a smile on his face and in his eyes.

Akitsu smiled and took his hand, not releasing it as they went out into the corridor where he began to lean on her. Akitsu in turn simply leaned back, reveling in the sheer amazing warmth of being loved, and wanted. Whatever else happened, whatever changes to the world around them had been made, the two of them were still together and they would face it that way, together.

End Chapter

Chaos has suddenly started to spiral to ever higher levels, but will that really make Ranma and his group easier to control? Hint: Use common sense, it will show you the answer LOL. As always hope you all enjoyed the chapter, and please leave a review.

For those interested, regarding ATP: I hoped to initially start writing up the chapter in March, however I am dealing with severe battle-scene drain, and the VAST majority of both of the next to chapters of ATP are combat scenes. So I have decided to push it back until April in the interest of keeping my sanity and my motivation high.

Yet planning is ongoing! I will start to share outlines with my beta-readers this weekend, and start talking to a few people who have offered their advice on a few combat-related questions, mostly on the infantry side of things. If you have Navy or Chair Force service give me a PM because you might be able to help with a few questions and make the next chapter all the better. I also know I was PMing with a former British Air force pilot about *Magic of the Force*, but I can't find those PM's any longer! Fanfiction really needs to come up with a way to organize PMs better, because unless you started out organized and deleting as you went, you just can't find anything after a time.

Chapter 12: Chapter 12

Can't draw pigtails, nor am I a yaoi artist trying to go straight.

So, this chapter was one I have been wanting to post for a while. I had it partially written for months, and since then it hasn't won the polls. I finally just decided to say screw it and use it as my second small story this month, thinking that it would give me more time to work on the Large Story, and the other small story just in case.

Unfortunately, this last week RL played its usual spoiler role and screwed that plan over. So, if you are waiting for ATP, which won the small story poll by a landslide (yes it will be a small chapter for the first time in...ever maybe) I'm afraid that didn't happen. Family, house and moving shit issues abounded this past week, eating into the time I would normally have used to finish that chapter. I have most of it done anyway – two allnighters – but the combat scenes are not up to my standard, and beyond the first scene the dialogue feels wooden. I also don't feel like posting another ATP chapter without Michael going over it for small mistakes (Yes, I know I haven't updated the last chapter with his version, he hasn't gotten it back to me yet). That stories sort of my magnum opus at this point and it needs more care than that. Still, it will be updated next month, and shouldn't take too much time away from July's stories.

On the other hand for Potter fans, FILFy won the large story poll, so it's going to be updated tomorrow – just waiting to get it back from my beta reader. And it will, indeed be quite large.

July's poll will be up sometime tomorrow.

This is honestly about half the chapter I wanted to put out when I initially created the chapter outline, but literally every scene bar the lemon fought me in this, becoming larger all the time. Then again, thinking about it, this cut of point works better than the one I had initially planned, so it's all good.

This has been beta-read by *Hiryō* and edited by *Michael Duggan*. Please thank them for their work, as without them I doubt this chapter would be as readable as it is now.

Chapter 12: Finally Whole

It'd taken Shampoo several hours to wake her grandmother up, and, even after that, she was a gibbering wreck. It took Shampoo and the youngsters finally figuring out how to unlock her puzzle-box -piece of luggage and getting out some of the clan's special medicinal alcohol to fix the situation. A few shots of that in her tea, and Cologne was finally coherent again.

After grabbing the bottle out of Shampoo's hands, she took a long draught from it, tossed it back into her puzzle box, relocked it with a certain amount of ceremony, and then hopped up onto her staff. "Thank you for that, granddaughter. Now, lead the rest of these youngsters to find a spot to create our headquarters for our hunt here. But I want this understood," she warned, her staff cracking into the ground and leaving a large dent there. "There is to be **no** husband hunting! There is to be **no** standing out! You will all act like, like young tourists, unthreatening in the extreme."

"Ugh, like those strange Americans we see occasionally with the brightly colored shirts and the magnifying glasses and cameras?" complained one of the younger (not that that was saying much, they were all younger than Cologne) Amazons, her face twisted at the very idea.

"Not quite that bad," Cologne said, calming down slightly. "I simply do not want us to be noticed by the powers that be here."

"Grandmother, what did you sense?" At that Cologne looked at Shampoo and she shrugged. "It was kind of obvious that you sensed something. Yu were sending out that radar pulse ki trick of yours and then you collapsed."

"I'm not certain what I felt, child," Cologne said, smiling and nodding at the youngster for her perspicacity. "But, it, it is as if Artemis has been reborn, the sheer power of the ki source I felt. Godly, that is the only word for it."

Shampoo blinked at that, and Cologne shrugged her shoulders. "It was that simple, child: Artemis reborn. No human could have that power. A human could not contain such power if somehow taken from others, nor could they build their own ki up to that level. But I will handle that myself as soon as we have a base of operations up and running."

"And how will you handle that, Grandmother?" Shampoo asked. "I don't mean to be rude, but if this ki source is as

powerful as you say..."

"Ah, I will simply introduce myself, child, and tell whoever it is our purpose here. With someone like that, it is better to be upfront and polite. **Very** polite," Cologne replied with a wan chuckle.

OOOOOO

Although he actually didn't seem to need it, Akitsu insisted on helping Ranma down the stairs, both of their stomachs now sounding like a pair of warring beasts. Hearing them enter the kitchen, Miya turned from where she had been putting the finishing touches on lunch and smiled happily. "I see that our sleeper has awakened," she teased.

At his blank look, Miya rolled her eyes good-naturedly. "Really, Ranma, you need to start reading at least some classic science-fiction if you are going to be hanging around 'aliens' as much as you have been."

"I'll look into it when I have discovered free time that I wouldn't rather use doing something more physical," Ranma said, his tone implying that the very idea of having any time that he wasn't going to put into doing something other than reading was an impossibility.

Miya rolled her eyes again but gestured for the two of them to sit down. "How are you feeling?" she asked more seriously. "I was most put out when that, that vile woman abused you so."

"'Put out,' she says. Hah! Only Miya being put out like that makes other people lose their heads," Homura muttered, shaking his head and then flinching as Miya looked in his direction.

"Really?" Ranma asked with some surprise.

Huffing, Miya nodded. "Well, of course! I have mentioned it before, Ranma, but I am most fond of you. The idea of that, that woman finishing you off after you fought so hard infuriated me. So I decided that my enforced truce with MBI could be rescinded for a brief moment."

"Huh. That's, that's honestly nice to hear. Um, that you, y'know, care for me to that extent, not that ya were forced to kill someone, I mean," Ranma said smiling yet also looking at her seriously.

"Yes, well, don't make a habit of needing my help, Ranma, and we will be even. And, speaking of which, be prepared for our training to be taken to a whole new level," Miya warned. Her tone was still warm, however, and Ranma grinned, letting out a whoop, causing her to shake her head at his joy for learning the Art. Then she repeated the question she had asked before Homura had interrupted them. "How are you feeling?"

"A little sore, a lot weak, but nothing that will bother me in the long run, Miya," Ranma said, sounding a little embarrassed at his weakness. "Don't worry; I'll be good to restart training by tomorrow at worst."

Laughing behind one hand, Miya simply shook her head again. "Only you would be embarrassed about feeling weak after being bedridden from a mere mortal wound, Ranma. Still, sit down and eat."

While eating even more than most Sekirei would have, Ranma asked how things been going since he had been knocked out, since Akitsu hadn't known the answer to that one, and whether Tofu had received any more information on how to break her ki blockage, something that caught Akitsu's attention from her own meal. Miya filled him in about everything that had been going on with the Sekirei plan. There hadn't been much of anything happening except on the small scale, although Ryoga and Musubi seemed to have disappeared together, which didn't surprise Ranma at all for various reasons. "Heh, I'd bet Minaka and the MBI folks are pulling their hair out, though."

"You have no idea," Matsu drawled, sharing a look with Kocho, who smirked. The number of governments trying to capture the wandering Musubi and Ryoga had hid the double digits a bare hour ago, and the number of witnesses to one or the other performing acts of super strength was now going viral over the internet despite what anyone tried to do to stop it. Thus, Minaka's vaunted cordon around the city was irrevocably broken.

For her part, Matsu had actually practically moved in with Tofu over the past few days only sleeping in Izumo House, getting out of the inn for the first time in more than a year thanks to Nerima being a no-go zone for MBI (and the remnants of Izumi Higa's forces) and Karasuba being dead. This was partly because she was helping him modernize his filing, but mostly it was because she was reacting to the doctor and wasn't about to let him out of her sight for very long, or herself out of his mind, either. But on the Akitsu front, she had nothing good to report yet that Ranma hadn't heard before this: that he might be able to use his own ki to fix the damage done to Akitsu.

Beyond that, she and Kocho had, working together, found out that MBI had brought in a few martial artist types to

bolster the Disciplinary Squad. No more information was forthcoming about them, though, since MBI was now actively ready for anything the two colluding brain types could do to get into their computer systems. Still, Ranma was about to ask if they had at least a picture of the newcomers when their discussion was interrupted as someone knocked on the door. He turned and was about to get up when Miya waved him back down. "Kocho, you're closest."

The silver-haired brain type Sekirei groaned, slid to her feet, and moved out to the door. "Yes, who is it?" she drawled as she opened the door.

"Oh ho, Miya's added a new hotty, I see!" said a male voice that Ranma hadn't heard before, but Miya had, if her sudden stiffness was any indication. In walked an man, in his later twenties, maybe, with a scruffy appearance to him and the eyes of either a drifter or gambler, Ranma wasn't certain which, paired with a smirk that told Ranma that here was someone who didn't take anything seriously unless he was forced to. Either way, he didn't like the look that guy was giving all the seated girls—Akitsu, Kocho, and Matsu—especially the way his hands rubbed together as he looked at Miya.

"Wow, Miya! You've got a full house today. And who are these pretty ones?" he asked, pointing at Kocho and Akitsu, taking especial care to stare at Akitsu from top to bottom. "Huh, a broken one. Well, don't worry, babe; I bet I'd still have more than enough love to go around if you wanted to join me." He then leered at Kocho as she sat back down. "Or you: they say brainy girls are the best, after all. I'd love to see if that's true."

Although Akitsu ignored the man to the point that his entire presence hadn't seemed to register, Ranma's eyes narrowed, and he looked at Miya. "Can I hurt him?"

"Ara, a part of me rather wishes I could let you," Miya said with a sigh. "But I'm afraid that the rules still apply, Ranma: violence is forbidden in Izumo house."

"Except at the end of your ladle," the man said drolly, earning him a whack over the head with said weapon of mass destruction.

"Even I'm not that much of a glutton for punishment, dude," Ranma said, some of his earlier anger at the way Seo looked at Akitsu going away. Of course, not **all** of his anger had gone away, hence his next words. "But if you ever look at Akitsu like that again I'm going to poke out your eyes, okay?"

The man looked at him then smirked, not seeming to take the threat seriously, which, more than one person at the table felt, was a very negative sign of his intelligence. Ranma might not be as overt about it, but he was just as protective of Akitsu as she was him. "You'd be Ranma, right? The guy who's almost single-handedly thrown the entire Sekirei plan out the window?"

"Say it with a smile, man!" Ranma said with a laugh. "But who are you, anyway? Miya doesn't usually hate complete strangers like she does you."

The man laughed, shaking his head. "Damn, you really are a bit of an asshole sometimes."

Ranma shrugged. "I tend to rub other people the wrong way, yeah. So, what's your name?" he asked again.

"Oh, forgive my manners," Miya said, still smiling thinly. "This is Seo, although I normally just call him trash, because that is what he is. He is always coming by here to beg food from me. He lives off the work of his two Sekirei, and he's never held a job for more than a month and a half."

"It's up to two months now," Seo replied with a grin, evidently not taking her words to heart.

Just then the doorbell rang, and Miya's smile shifted into something a tad bit more natural as she left the room. "Ah, that would be your minders, then. Come in, dears."

The two Sekirei who came in looking a little shame-faced were currently wearing maid café outfits – short skirts coupled with tight blouses with low cut necklines and frills, all in black and white -and looked rather hangdog, more so than their current outfits would explain. "We're sorry about this Miya-sama, really we are, it's just we can't stop him sometimes."

Ranma recognized them as the dominatrix twins, the ones who threw lightning around and liked to gang up on their enemies, but for all that, they seemed to have some honor, not involving bystanders and not going against any Sekirei already winged or who didn't want to fight in the game. He nodded at them, and after a moment of recognition they looked surprised at his being there before nodding back, the quiet one (Ranma couldn't remember who was who) even waving a little at Akitsu while her louder twin grabbed her Ashikabi's ear and shook him, shouting about

how he should be ashamed of himself for always mooching off food.

Miya, however, didn't care about that at the moment. Rather, she was looking at Seo strangely. "You aren't here just to beg for more food again. Why are you here, Seo?" she asked firmly.

In reply, Seo shook off Hikari and pointed at Ranma. "I was here to meet that guy more than anything else. Get a feel for the guy who's been nearly singlehandedly screwing up the Sekirei Plan, at least from that asshole Minaka's perspective."

"It's a talent. And what do ya think, now that you've met me?" Ranma asked, his voice going from sounding almost modest to serious.

"Don't know, really." Seo's face was also unusually serious as he replied, looking from Ranma to a now silent Miya. "I'd say as a piece in the game you're damn important, but does that mean you can take over the board? Replace Minaka and do all the little things in the background he's been doing? He's as mad as the freaking Mad Hatter and designed this game for his own sick amusement more than anything else as far as I can tell. But, as much as I hate to admit it, his business and tech acumen kept the Sekirei from being government projects years back. These days he doesn't have to do much personally, but MBI is such a big deal worldwide, and especially here in Japan, that the other governments can't act against him. Not openly, anyway. But if Minaka's gone, I don't know what will happen."

Ranma was silent for a moment, then he shrugged. "I don't know. All I know is that I'm going to continue doing what I feel is right: shutting down any uneven fights I see, making sure the Sekirei don't fight to the death or deactivation or whatever, and removing Minaka's ability to screw with 'em like they are his personal toys he's shared out with all the other boys in the lot. Beyond that, after he's removed we can figure out what else we need to do to keep the Sekirei safe from the government assholes who would use them." He smirked. "If nothing else, I'd have shown the world by that point that humans can be trained to fight 'em, so maybe a lot of the attention on them will have faded."

"And, of course, I will still be around," Miya interjected, a thin, dangerous smile on her face. "While I might be happy to be a poor widow woman, I would be most displeased at anyone attempting to take advantage of my little Feathers. And while I have an agreement with Minaka, that agreement to not interfere in the Game does not extend to any governmental interference with it or my Feathers."

Seo winced while his two Sekirei flinched, knowing precisely who and what Miya was, while Ranma flashed a toothy smile. "So yeah, I think we'll be fine."

While Seo frowned, knowing the two had a point but still not happy about the fact they didn't have a plan going forward. He kept silent. *After all, I ain't exactly all that good at planning ahead either.*

"Ano, we actually wanted to ask you about something and pass on a bit of a warning," said Hibiki, breaking the slightly uncomfortable moment of silence. "We ran into this, this odd little gnome creature," she said, her hands moving as if to strangle someone or conjure words out of whole cloth, Ranma wasn't certain which.

"What does that even mean?" Ranma asked, while the others looked confused.

"You... What I was going to say was that you'd need to actually see the creature to believe it, but with your curse, you probably won't," the louder twin replied, taking over from her sister smoothly. "We ran into this little creature—he only stands about this tall, looks like an old man, but moves like greased lightning! He seemed as at home in midair as on the ground too," she added, her eyes narrowing, glaring at Ranma. "You wouldn't happen to know anything about that, would you?"

Ranma shook his head. "Nope. I know a lot of martial arts masters, but none of them are that short. And no one but my old man and me would be as at home in the air as you say this guy was. You could ask my old man, though? He and Soun might know. I can give you the address if you want. And you could even ask for more training. Your teamwork's good, but you need some more individualized training, especially if someone can close to hand to hand."

"Heh, I'd agree that Hibiki and Hikari could do with some more training. So long as this one," Homura said, flicking a finger towards Seo, "doesn't think about hitting on Kasumi, that would be fine."

"Does that mean that you found someone, Homura?" Seo said with a grin, almost sounding congratulatory, though he ruined it a moment later by adding, "Still, I don't know. Maybe she'd like to see what a real man..."

The hand that had previously been pointing at Seo suddenly lit up, while at the same instant the ladle smashed into the back of his head. "Dead man, say what now?" Ranma quipped, his own eyes hard and unyielding for just a

moment before he turned to the two now thoroughly embarrassed S&M twins. "But what's so wrong about this small martial artist?"

"He was a fucking pervert!" said Hikari, throwing her hands up in the air, making her chest bounce in a way that most men would have reacted to in some fashion.

Ranma didn't, his own eyes having narrowed dangerously at the pervert comment. "What did he do?"

"He somehow got close to us, then felt us up," said the other twin, her voice more abashed than her brash sister, her fingers poking together. "In fact, that's probably why Kazehana isn't here."

"What?" Miya asked quickly "What do you mean?"

"He did the same to her too, and that fist user from the Disciplinary Squad, the one with the chest complex. He stole all of our underwear right out from under our clothing, without any of us the wiser," Hibiki growled, "and then felt us up before and after for good measure! Ugh, I feel dirty just remembering it!"

Miya thought for a moment, putting her head to one side. "Oh my, that would explain why Kazehana dragged Minato out of here last night while talking about how she had been defiled and that he needed to reclaim his territory."

Ranma blinked at that and then slowly shook his head. "You know what, I am not gonna touch that one." Then he turned back to the bondage twins, "Are you saying that you, Kazehana, and Benitsubasa joined forces and still couldn't catch this little gnome?"

"That's exactly what we're saying," Hikari said. "Luckily, if you want to look at it like that, once he had our 'silky darlings,' he didn't seem actually all that interested in molesting us further. Although he might have gotten a last fondle of Kazehana-san."

"That is a very tiny silver lining," Kocho said, speaking up for the first time since Seo had come in and resolving that she would be staying inside Izumo House for the foreseeable future. *Only a lunatic would try that crap with Miya around.*

Matsu, too, pouted, knowing that she should stay inside too but determined to see her doctor toy as often as possible. *Some things are worth humiliation like that, and besides, I bet I could convince him to wing me after being so traumatized, and after that we could...* Everyone studiously avoided the suddenly giggling and drooling Matsu.

"I don't know," Seo said with a grin. "I thought it was an obvious clue to a solution to this little issue." The other looks looked at him, and the scruffy man quickly began to feel up the two girls to either side of him as he said, "Just don't let the girls wear underwear. It's what I've done since then."

The mask appeared on cue behind Miya as she turned to him like the very embodiment of death, and Ranma sighed, clapped his hands together in mocking prayer, then turned back to his meal.

Later, after Seo had been chased off and his Sekirei had followed him out, Miya returned and sat down next to Ranma, patting him lightly on the arm. "By the way, Nabiki has also been by every day to see you while you were ill. Homura and Uzume took turns escorting her. I don't want you to think she didn't care just because she couldn't stay by your side all the time." As Ranma nodded, she frowned, looking around. "Actually, she should be here by now. She would normally stop by after dinner. I wonder what has happened..."

OOOOOO

At the same time Ranma was waking up, in the Tendo household Nabiki was smirking, which wasn't exactly an unusual thing. But what was unusual was the person who she was currently smirking at. "Half a week later and still the little one is following you around like a lost duckling. It's so cute I need a dentist's appointment," Nabiki teased, winking at the little girl who Kasumi and Minato had found in the botanical garden.

Kasumi smiled, ruffling the child's hair. "Oh, Kusano-chan's such a darling. I rather like having a young girl around the place like this."

Under her hand Kusano blushed, leaning happily against Kasumi's dress-clad legs while carrying a few empty plates. Gone was her small shift, replaced by a very pretty flower-patterned dress of her own. On the table was a tiny potted plant, a small piece of some kind of crawling vine or something she had picked out when Kasumi had taken her shopping and rarely put down since, unless she was carrying something else. She then moved over to the table, carefully placing a few empty plates down for the others and then sat down at her place beside Kasumi as she did the

same.

Genma grunted, looking at the girl speculatively, while Akane wondered if Kasumi had ever read the manga Fruit Basket because she and Kusano acted much like Tohru and the young tiger girl in that story. "I'm wondering whether or not anyone will be stupid enough to try anything with her here?" the older Saotome said.

"If they do," Kasumi said, smiling serenely, "then I am certain that you, my father, and everyone else in the area will do their best to stop them." Both men stiffened at that, straightening their shoulders and looking a little prouder than they had a moment ago, while Nabiki sipped at her coffee to hide the grin caused by how well her older sister had played the morons just then.

Later, as the meal was nearly over, the front doorbell rang. "I'll get it," Kasumi said, smiling as Kusano hopped to her own feet, heading after her.

She opened the front door and was confronted with a young man about her own age, with a thin body, thin shoulders, and a face handsome enough to give her boyfriend Homura a run for his money. He wore a very nice black suit, complete with bowtie, and had a smiling if somewhat haughty face. When he spoke, it was with a noticeably foreign accent, one that took her a moment to recognize as French. "Excuse me, madam, but would this be the Tendo household?"

"It is. And you are, sir?" Kasumi said, smiling at the young man's manners.

"Ah, excellent. And do I have the honor of speaking to one of the daughters of the household?" the man asked, smiling as he reached forward to take her hand, which she had not, in fact, held out.

"The oldest daughter, actually. My name is Kasumi. Now, can you please tell me your business with my family?" she requested, stepping back slightly as her tone became firmer. Behind her, Kusano growled a little, then remembered she had left her small plant behind, and was powerless at the moment.

"Ah, I do apologize," the young man said. "It is just that your beauty, why, coupled with my reason for being here, I was quite overcome. My name is Picolet Chardin. I am here to discuss with you and your sisters a matter of honor between our families, an agreement that your father entered into with my family."

Those words sent danger signals in Kasumi's mind to jangling, and she took several more steps backwards before reluctantly stepping to one side and waving Picolet in. "In that case, you should probably come in and speak to my father first."

The man entered after her, and it was only now that Kasumi noticed an elderly woman behind him. She looked very much like a stern governess sort, with long brown hair done up in a tight bun and small glasses paired with a maid outfit. A maid outfit that that looked more like someone had designed a real maid outfit rather than made a fetish outfit, the skirt falling to her ankles, and the blouse not nearly as tight as the previous examples Kasumi had seen from made cafes.

"Father, you have a guest," Kasumi said, her voice somewhat brittle as she all too easily could see where this was going. *It would appear as if Genma is not the only one to make foolish agreements for his progeny, she thought morosely. Now, where is Homura when I need him?*

Both men at the table looked up and then paled. Instantly Genma grabbed up his cup of water and doused his head, changing into his bear form almost faster than Kasumi could track, while her father simply turned to stone, his face wide and horrified as his long hair sprang up. *Mah, that makes him look like one of those little glowing troll toys. If this was anything but what I fear it is, that would be almost amusing.*

But it wasn't the face of the young man that had caused that reaction. No, both older men recognized the woman behind him. Despite that and her own age, it was still Picolet who continued to be the speaker of the foreign twosome. "Ah, there you are, Mr. Tendo. My word, Madame St. Paul, your description of him was quite spot on. Although, I could swear I just saw an image of what I assumed would be Mr. Saotome as well."

"Indeed," said the old woman, pushing her glasses up her face. "It appears as if that information we bought from that odious merchant class fellow was correct. Fascinating!"

At those words Genma twitched but otherwise continued his charade, despite it patently no longer working. Hey, it had to work sometime, right?

"Hmm... Well, perhaps, although the idea that magic exists is rather far-fetched to my mind. Still, I was told that Soun

Tendo had but three daughters, yet I see five beautiful flowers here, even if one is far too young to be plucked. Perhaps two of these beauties are the daughters of Genma Saotome?" Picolet asked, smiling as if he meant his words to be a compliment.

"No, I'm not! I'm a Sekirei! No way am I related to that man!" Yashima said, nearly shouting the words, a rarity for the morose, almost eternally quiet Sekirei. But she was obviously incensed at the very notion that she might be related to Genma. She respected him as a martial artist, certainly, but not much more than that, and certainly wanted no part in any trouble he could be bringing down on their heads. Indeed, Akane clicked her fingers irritably, thinking much the same thing, though unlike Kasumi she wasn't certain what kind of trouble this might be.

For her part, Kusano didn't care about that bit at all, not knowing Genma well enough to have an opinion on him one way or the other. But she had not liked the whole thing about plucking flowers, which the nature based Sekirei had always felt was rather cruel. Kasumi just began to twitch very slightly at the implications of that very same line.

Hearing Yashima's response, Picolet shivered a little, holding his jaw gingerly as if from a recent injury. "Yes, *ahem*, yes, well. I have met some of the Sekirei since I came here to Shin Teito. They are most beautiful yet also most strong, exactly the kind of woman I would like to have as my bride. Alas, your fellows do not react very well to what is merely common courtesy. Why, I was attacked for bowing over one's hand and kissing it, can you believe that?"

"Indeed, they are truly barbaric, even more so than most Japanese. No elegance in any of them!" Madame St. Paul supplied.

"All too true, madame. Still, we were never here for them. But you, my dear, you are not only the firstborn but the most gorgeous of the sisters," Picolet said, taking Kasumi's hand from where he had been walking next to her and kissing it, then twisting it around to kiss her wrist, holding it still as Kasumi tried to pull away.

"Sir, I am a lady, not someone to be so overawed by your flirtations. Pray unhand me," Kasumi said, her eyes narrowing dangerously.

"Ah, you Japanese, so staid and reserved. Still, allow me a kiss on the cheek to celebrate our new relationship," he said, letting go of her hand before leaning forward.

Kasumi gasped as the boy's head seemed to expand, his mouth opening like that of a frog which looked ready to engulf her head. Quickly she raised a ladle between herself and the man, stuffing it into his still open mouth and holding it open, making every other person in the room blink as they wondered where the heck the ladle had come from. They then then watched in shock as Kasumi, the most self-effacing and gentle girl any of them had ever met, grabbed the boy's still outstretched hand, twisted underneath his arm, and hurled him in a perfect over the shoulder throw to the floor in under a second.

The next instant Kusano piled in. The tiny plant sitting on the table suddenly exploded, growing faster and faster, vines shooting out from it to grab the young man around the waist. Then it lifted him off the floor before hurling him away out the door into the backyard.

"Milord Chardin!" shouted the elderly woman who had come with him, reaching for something in her pouch, but another bit of the plant had exploded outward and grabbed her too. "What in the world is this?!"

"Now," Kasumi said, dusting off her hands on her blouse. "Can someone explain to me what exactly is going on here?"

"Nee-chan, how'd you do that?!" Akane asked, torn between simple admiration and jealousy as she looked at her big sister. She discounted Kusano's power, both because of her age and because she had already heard about it before this. But watching her sister use martial arts, that was new. And worrying...

"Training?" Kasumi asked blankly. "Father didn't just train you or even just you and Nabiki when we were younger, after all."

"I meant the ladle!" Akane grumbled pointing at Kasumi's hand, only for her eyes to widen in surprise as the ladle had disappeared.

"Ara, I'd have thought that obvious. You have your hammer, I have my ladle, Akane-chan," Kasumi replied with a giggle before looking over at her father. "Father! I think you need to explain what is happening here."

That seems to rouse both the fathers, and Soun coughed. "Ah, um..." her father began, coughing and trying to recover some self-control before going on gamely. "I'm afraid I don't know who you are. Can I ask you what your

business is me and my family?"

"Surely you must remember us?" Picolet said with a pained groan, pushing himself to his feet and slowly making his way back into the sitting room, staying well away from Kasumi now which put him closer to Akane and Nabiki. "Oh, if I do not look enough like my papa, then maybe this will jog your memory?" He pulled out a piece of paper and set it on the table, but before her father could snatch it up, Nabiki grabbed it.

She quickly began to read the Japanese translation set to one side of the French, her lips thinning and her hands beginning to tremble with pent up fury. "The house of Chardin agrees to subsidize and feed one Soun Tendo and one Genma Saotome for the duration of their stay in France up to but not exceeding one year. In return, the two do enter an honor agreement to affiancé a daughter of either house, the specific daughter to be chosen at a later time, to the heir of the Chardin house's Martial Arts Dining," she said slowly and calmly before setting it down and giving her father a look that should by all rights have dipped him in liquid nitrogen. "Daddy, what have you done!?"

"I'm sorry!" he moaned, jumping back from the table and kowtowing quickly towards his three daughters, all of whom were now looking incensed, although at least his youngest was looking as if she just wanted to smash the pretty boy's face in. Or Soun's, he wasn't certain which. "I was weak! We hadn't eaten in over three weeks! We had just finished trying to escape from the Grand Master, and we needed food to survive and fuel our escape before he could come after us again. Making such an agreement, it was the only thing I had of any value!"

"That's sort of the problem, Daddy," Nabiki said dryly. "It's not something **you** have that's valuable; it's **our** lives you bartered away!" She glared at Picolet, gesturing at herself. "And don't you dare hit on this Tendo girl. I already have a fiancé." *Sort of, anyway.* Nabiki's thoughts on her and Ranma's relationship had shifted in the wake of his vicious fight with Karasuba, but they were still involved for now. *And, even if we weren't, no way would I not use it at this point to get away from frog-face.*

"Ah, and where would this individual be?" Picolet said, looking at Nabiki even as he rubbed his head. There was a sort of wicked fire to her eyes that he liked, and though he could practically feel Madame St. Paul's outrage at her mode of dress (a short skirt and tight blouse that accentuated her curves) and how inappropriate and inelegant it was, Nabiki's revealed form certainly called to a certain part of the young Frenchman.

"My boyfriend is getting over a wound sustained in a fight with one of the most dangerous Sekirei around. He's also an apprentice to easily the most dangerous Sekirei around, so I don't think you'd want to get on his bad side by trying anything with me," Nabiki replied bluntly, wanting there to be no misunderstandings.

Picolet paled at that, even though he wondered how much of that was true and how much a lie. Still, that does leave at least two to choose from. He nodded to Nabiki and then looked over to the younger girl sitting to one side, then quickly moved back to Kasumi. "Still, if the middle one is in a relationship, and the young one is rather not to my taste, then, I am afraid my dear, that it must be you," he said, smiling over at her. "You have the style, the strength of will that I would love to see in a wife. And, of course, the beauty!"

Kusano growled at him, pushing into Kasumi's lap and sitting there as if she was a soldier on watch, the little plant that she had once more grabbed from the table quivering again.

Stroking Kusano's hair, Kasumi shook her head, glaring at the man. She was about to speak up, but Akane, behind her, beat her to it, hopping to her feet and pointing at Picolet. "Now, wait a minute! I've never even heard of this martial arts dining thing. How do we even know it's a real style!"

"It isn't very well known in Japan. We prefer martial arts utensils or martial arts tea ceremony," Soun supplied 'helpfully.'

"BAH!" Madame St. Paul scoffed, shaking her head irritably. "Such heathen styles, they do not hold a candle to the overarching skill necessary to practice the original martial arts dining style of the Chardins! They are limited in scope, in style; they **lack elegance!**" she said, as if the last two words were an epithet of truly horrific portions.

"That's nice and all," the youngest martial artist said, cracking her knuckles, "but if this really is a martial arts school, the solution to get out of this whole honor agreement is simple." To one side her father began to shake his head frantically, and even the panda held up a sign with the words, 'Don't do it, girl!' written in large, blocky kanji. But Akane was nothing if not headstrong, and she ignored them, pointing dramatically at the blond boy. "I challenge you!"

"Most excellent!" Picolet said with a laugh before looking around thoughtfully. "But this venue is a little small for such a thing. Shall we adjourn to your dojo, perhaps? And, of course, as the challenged party, I choose the means of combat."

Akane winced but had to concede the point. That was the approved formula, after all.

"Excellent!" Picolet said again and then looked over to Madame St. Paul, who rang a small bell.

What happened next was somewhat predictable for Nerima but no less surprising for those involved. A veritable horde of waiters and servants poured over the walls. In each hand was a different item needed to create a seven-course dinner. These ranged from a long table being carried by seven men in the lead to small rolls of napkins around silver utensils. Others carried food, two chairs, and everything else, one after another.

They might well have been able to put all this together into a truly magnificent seven-course meal if not for the fact that Tsukiumi had just been hopping over the rooftops near the Tendo House from one direction, and Akitsu and Ranma had been approaching from the other side. Ranma, seeing the things they were carrying, might have given the group of weird servants the benefit of the doubt. Tsukiumi, however...

"Foul varlets, desist your attempts at invading the Tendo household at once! Water Celebration!" A wave of water rushed out from her outstretched hand, crashing into and through the group of servants, upending and tossing a few of them—those carrying the table—back over the rooftop.

In response the rest of the servants, unencumbered by the table, leaped up over the water and began to use whatever was in their hands as weapons. Chairs were flung, then a whole chicken, and then other things, while those with knives—silverware, serving, and carving—closed, racing and dodging this way and that like ninjas, only wearing somewhat better outfits. The other servants, once bereft of their original burdens, started pulling out forks and throwing them with startling accuracy. "Down with the interloper! Let the banquet commence!"

Blinking, Ranma looked over at Akitsu and shrugged. "Well, someone laid on a party celebrating my revival, I guess. I'll go help Tsukiumi. You freeze that lot at the back."

Below, Picolet was watching all this and scowled, shaking his head. "Ah, another uncouth Sekirei! Why am I not surprised that one so low would react in such a manner?" His eyes narrowed, however, as a young man and woman joined in. The woman was using ice powers and was thus obviously a Sekirei, while the man simply looked to close with Picolet's servants, catching the deadly forks hurled his way as if they were in slow motion before knocking out six of the servants of House Chardin in less than four seconds.

"Ranma!" Nabiki called, a smile splitting her features. Kasumi too looked happy, and the two girls moved out to watch the action, followed by the others. Akane and Yashima brought up the rear, but neither made an attempt to join in. Akane, instead, was looking around and shaking her head while Yashima was simply watching with wide eyes, not understanding how what she was seeing could have occurred.

Looking at the two oldest Tendo girls, Picolet scowled and twisted around, leaping up to join the fight. "One cannot fight the servants without fighting the master, buffoon! Prepare to face the GURK!"

No sooner had he come close than the man, Ranma, had turned, moving faster than even Picolet could track. A palm strike hit his chest and then, even as Picolet felt himself falling back, the boy had twisted around behind him. Several punches landed, then, through his pain, Picolet felt hands on his ankles before he was hurled into the last few remaining members of his personal retinue, all of them falling back to earth.

"Lord Chardin!" Madame St. Paul shouted, rushing forward only to pause at the edge of the patio, staring as the boy grabbed Picolet out of the air before he could hit, tossing him to land nearby.

"What was his problem?" Ranma asked quizzically, looking down on the blond, who was actually slowly coming to, though he seemed to be moving very stiffly. *Decent recovery time but no durability to speak of.* "Erm, and is he speaking in French? Sounds like some I've seen in a few foreign films, anyway... And where did all of these guys come from?" he asked, pulling two more of the butler types towards one of the corners of the backyard and dumping them on a few others piled there.

"I have no idea," Tsukiumi said, shrugging her shoulders and looking at the youth Ranma had dealt with so easily. He had been fast, so fast she had trouble tracking his limbs, but apparently not very durable. "But I will wager that we will discover more about it in a moment."

Genma, however, intercepted them, grabbing his son's shoulders and looking at him from head to toe. "You're all right, then?" he asked gruffly.

Ranma smirked, smacking his father's hands away and rapping him on the bandana with a knuckle. "Yeah, old man,

I'm good."

"That's good. When I saw that video of you being nearly cut in half by that one Sekirei, I feared the worst," Genma said, then looked around almost self-consciously. "Ahem, um, I mean, I was worried my son and heir had turned into a weak woman!"

"Oy!" Ranma growled, pushing him away. "You wanna see how weak I am, old man?"

But then Akitsu touched down behind him, and Genma looked at her and then back to Ranma, his attitude changing back to what it had been a moment before as Ranma blushed but also calmed down noticeably as he turned slightly towards Akitsu. "I wasn't the only one who missed you," Genma skirked.

"Nope," Ranma said with a soft smile, one hand finding Akitsu's. "No, you weren't."

From where she stood on the patio next to a very subdued and angry looking Madame St. Paul, Nabiki watched this, and the faint stirring of jealousy hit her. But she kept it off of her face as she moved up to Ranma, hugging him tightly now that the action was over. "Akitsu and your father weren't the only ones," she said, repeating what Genma had just said.

"Thanks," Ranma replied, squeezing her around the waist before looking over at the French madame and the blond boy who was now sitting up and looking around himself warily. "So, what's going on here, and does my old man have anything to do with it?"

Moments later, Ranma was almost rolling on the floor with laughter, smacking the table in front of him. "I was right; it was at least partly your fault, old man!" Once he had control of himself, he looked at Soun with a wry smirk on his face. "And I'd thought better of you, too. That's kind of sad, dude. Not as sad as the mess you've tossed your daughters into, though."

"You're talking like this isn't your problem, boy!" Genma growled. "Who else can defend the honor of the Anything Goes School here, hmm? Unless you think that Akane really can beat Chardin in his own specialty?"

"Not a chance, Oyaji!" Ranma said, holding up his hands in a timeout gesture, while the air in the room quickly began to become colder as Akitsu glared in her own, nearly emotionless manner at the two men. "In case you haven't worked it out, old man, I'm a guy. How would I..." He looked at his father and then growled, and the hand he'd had on the table clenched into a fist. "Oh, hell no! Even if my body changes, my mind doesn't. No way am I even going to tempt fate like that. Besides, this is **your** problem."

Again, he had to hold up his hands as both older men made to protest, who did not see Akane glaring at them all, an aura of fury appearing around her that actually counteracted the cold aura that Akitsu was currently putting out. "I still have to deal with this Sekirei Plan, healing Akitsu, and leading what amounts to a revolution against the corporation that owns the city. Where all in that do you think I'll have time to deal with pickle boy and his issues?"

"My name is not pickle!" Picolet shouted in anger, pointing at him while Madame St. Paul tried to get him to calm down. "I, I challenge you, you, you...uncouth Asian barbarian!"

"Let me think... No," Ranma drawled. "I don't see anything you could offer me, and I doubt you'd even try to fight me in the first place." He smirked evilly. "After all, the challenged party decides on the manner of the challenge."

Picolet gulped, and, when he gulped, it was an interesting sight, his whole lower jaw and throat bulging like that of a human-shaped frog, before he nodded. "Um, ahem, yes. I, I withdraw my challenge."

Both older men snapped their fingers, glaring at Ranma, but he ignored them with aplomb. "So, how about giving Akane here a week to prepare to face you, then? That will, offense greatly meant, get you out of our hair for a bit, which will be good for your continued health. And give the old idiots time to train up Akane to fight ya."

"Agreed," Madame St. Paul said before the more hotheaded—once he was bruised and battered, anyway—Picolet could say anything. "We will leave the city for a time. These Sekirei and their...unique mix of beguiling beauty and barbarous manners are a bit much for people of culture like us."

"I am not even certain why we are even talking about this being a point of honor between two families. The last time I checked those could only exist between humans, and, forsooth, given what I hath seen this one do with mine own eyes, I cannot swear to his being human, no matter his currently comely guise," Tsukiumi interjected, shaking her head. "You have not seen what this one thinks kissing is," she said, pointing at Picolet. "'Tis the most horrible of nightmare fuel, let me tell thee. I wouldst never have thought I would feel sorry for that little blonde slattern from the

south, but I didst after seeing what this one did to her."

"Ah, my dear, such horrible wounds from such a beautiful lady," Picolet said, going down to one knee and presenting Tsukiumi with a rose.

She backed away rapidly, growling and suddenly summoning two water swords in her hands. "Back off!" she shouted, her normal old-style accent in abeyance for the second. "I said I've seen how you would kiss fair maidens before, and I want no part of it!"

"Enough," Madame St. Paul shouted, grabbing at her charge's arm. "We are wasting time, milord. We should be off. And, in any event, romance is wasted on a Sekirei such as this one."

"Funny," Nabiki drawled, shaking her head. "I think kissing the frog's supposed to make him fully human in romances, not a bizarre hybrid."

"You will sing a different tune, my dear, when you are my in-laws," Picolet retorted with what little remained of his dignity before standing with Madame St. Paul and following Kasumi out of the room toward the doors.

Kasumi's normal smile remained in place as she showed the two French nationals out, while Ranma, Akane, and the Sekirei tossed their servants over the wall. Her smile disappeared, however, the instant she returned to the sitting area. It was replaced by a **FROWN**. This **FROWN** was accompanied by an aura of darkness rolling out from behind her and a small, blank-faced Noh mask appearing there. "Father, Mr. Saotome. I do not care how you will solve this problem so long as it is solved and none of us have to deal with that individual again. If this means you train Akane into the ground, so be it. If it means you buy them off somehow, just make certain it doesn't come back to haunt us. Anything and any means you must use to make this problem go away short of Is this understood?"

While the two men cowered and nodded so rapidly it looked as if their necks would break, Akane's survival instincts warred with her ego and, thankfully, won for once. Thus, she didn't comment on her sister's seeming assumption that she couldn't be trained up to beat Chardin. Instead she and Nabiki both hid behind the nearest solid object, in her case, Tsukiumi, and waited for this unnatural not-Kasumi to be appeased.

"Good," Kasumi said, and suddenly everything was sunshine and daises once more as she smiled brightly, the aura disappearing almost instantly as she sat down.

"A, ahem, yes. Well, of course we'll train Akane," Soun said, moving to slap his slowly recovering daughter on the shoulder. "Why, with both Genma and me concentrating on it, we can figure out a way to beat the Chardin style, no problem!"

"What does their style look like, anyway?" Ranma asked. "He sure as heck didn't show anything much before, though that huge mouth thing was kind of freaky."

The hammer wielder and the others winced and explained what had happened, with Kasumi's normal self-control kind of cracking as little Kusano hugged her side. "His mouth just, just expanded like you saw earlier, and, rather than kissing me on the forehead, he would have just eaten my head!"

"Their style is called martial arts dining," Nabiki said, scooting away from her sister just in case she decided to let loose with that scary aura thing again at their father for getting them involved with Chardin in the first place. *Not that he doesn't deserve it, but I don't want to get caught in the crossfire.*

"Huh, that makes sense, I suppose," Ranma mused, tapping his chin. "I mean, if you're able to shovel more food in your mouth, that automatically makes you a faster eater. So the solution to that is simply to stop them from doing that. Stuff his mouth with something; a plate, maybe; force him to defend himself as much as attack the food," Ranma said, looking at Akane. "Good luck with that; you're going to need it. And remember, speed is going to matter more in this kind of battle than anything else."

Akane frowned, thinking. "That could work, though I might need help training at controlling plates."

"Actually," Nabiki said, speaking up quickly, "we might know someone who can help you there. Would something like rhythmic gymnastics help?" she asked looking over Ranma and Genma. Ranma then nodded firmly. "Controlling distant objects and ribbon work, which I bet you could translate into napkins or those little serving things you put under your place at table."

"They are called placemats, as you well know, Ranma," Kasumi said with a laugh.

"Right, placemats," Ranma said, nodding in her direction with a wink. She giggled, shaking her head at him, some of her anger from a moment ago disappearing as he had hoped.

"You want to ask Kodachi to help me, then?" Akane asked her sister. She knew about the other girl's abilities in that area, though she didn't really like the idea of taking training from someone her own age.

"Yep. She can even teach you how to do the other thing that you'll need to do to, probably, when fighting this guy in his own specialty." Akane looked at Nabiki quizzically, and she smirked at her. "Cheat like hell. That apparently is also part of Rhythmic Gymnastics."

She looked at them askance. "What, what about winning with honor!? This is a martial arts challenge, after all."

"Hello, it's called Anything Goes for a reason, Akane! When it really matters, cheating should become second nature," Ranma interjected.

"And speaking of training, boy," Genma said, "I think it's time that we stop playing games and get serious too."

Ranma blinked at that. "What the heck does that mean?"

"It means, boy, that I might be doing something I promised never to do except in the direst of circumstances. I'm going to be training you in what I call the sealed techniques."

Ranma blinked, crossing his arms. "Sealed techniques? You've been holding out on me, Pops?" Despite his tone and attitude, though, there was a grin on his face as he looked at his father

Even Soun was looking at Genma in question. "Sealed techniques?"

"Yes. As you know, to be a true master of Anything Goes you must devise two entirely new techniques or abilities, modified and fit to our existing style." Genma began pushing up his glasses and nodding his head seriously.

Ranma nodded. That was why he had come up with his Ki Blade attack, but his father had said at the time that it was too close to already existing techniques to really count. It'd only been when Ranma had modified the attack so that it could be used in midair that his father had grudgingly deemed it sufficient for his first personal technique. "So, what are these sealed techniques?"

"I call them the Umi-Sen Ken and the Yama-Sen Ken," his father said, his entire manner and attitude both secretive and pompous.

"What do they do?"

A second later they all watched in shock as the man in front of them slowly disappeared. From one blink to the next it was as if he'd simply covered himself in a blanket of invisibility, though as Ranma tried to squint and stare, he realized that really wasn't the case. He could see something, but he couldn't really make out more than a blur. "Okay, color me impressed, Pops. But that's gotta be the silent thief," he said after a moment.

But despite that blur, Ranma was shocked when his father's hand touched the back of his neck. "Yes, it's the silent thief, and it is deadly," the old man said grimly. "In all honesty, I think it is actually the more dangerous set of techniques, though it isn't nearly as flashy as the Yama-Sen Ken."

Ranma simply nodded, and Genma moved around him, staring down at his hands, which were shaking. "No, we'll not test out the loud thief here. It's far too destructive."

Ranma nodded again, looking at his father with renewed respect. He had always known that his father was an excellent martial artist and had created his own katas and ki attacks before, but this was something entirely different, a whole new level. "Let's just say," Genma said after a few minutes, "that the Yama-Sen Ken was something I devised in case I truly had to fight that Miya woman. I still do not know if it would actually allow me to win, but it might allow me to fight her on an even footing."

"Well, I won't argue about results, I guess, though the reason you came up with it does kinda piss me off," Ranma said slowly, his eyes narrowing at the very idea of someone trying to take him away from Miya. Despite the woman's own protests about it, she had truly become something like a mother figure to him rather than the big sister figure she liked to be called, though he would never be so stupid as to mention that to her face.

"But let's set that aside for now, and let's concentrate on the Umi-Sen Ken," he said. "I might need something like that

to move against the big cheese, though I don't like the thought. Still, his willingness to send that bitch Karasuba against me like that means that we're going to have to escalate right back soon."

Just then the doorbell rang, and Kasumi rose to her feet, showing far more energy than anything Soun had seen from her for years. He blinked after her, and Ranma and his other two daughters all smiled. It looked as if Kasumi was beginning to set aside her normal housewife matronly attitude. Ranma had to wonder how much of that was because of her ongoing courtship with Homura and how much was just the fact that her life was now anything but boring.

Kusano quickly hopped to her own feet and raced after the girl, who paused and looked back at her, smiling before moving on. The two of them moved to the front door where Kasumi opened the door. "Yes?"

"Ahahah, why, good afternoon, my dear," shouted a loud voice, a voice which matched the appearance of its owner exactly. He was rather rotund, with heavily tanned skin, large ears, and an outfit that looked more like that of a pimp than anything else. This was finished by two wide fans in his hands which he waved, one after another. "Would this be the Tendo residence?"

Kasumi tried to keep a smile on her face, but the expression was honestly more of a rictus now. This man's entire manner was just screaming over-the-top to her. Kusano hid behind her, peeking only her head out from behind Kasumi. *Oh, my God, I know where this is going.* "It is. Might I ask what business you have my family?"

"Actually, no, I'm here to talk to a few of your guests. I understand that the Saotomes are staying here with you?"

"...They are," Kasumi said slowly, feeling something like relief flood through her at having dodged this particular bullet. "In fact, they are here right now, in the sitting room. Why don't you come in, please?"

The man followed after Kusano, exclaiming over the house, saying it looked quaint and simple in a rough manner, which made Kasumi twitch just slightly. He then tried to pat Kusano on the head, but she ducked away, the plant that she was still holding wriggling nastily as she tried to get away from him.

Soon they were within the sitting room, and Kasumi gestured towards Soun and Genma. "Mr. Saotome? There's someone here to see you."

"Ah, there you are Genma," shouted the man, moving into the room and waving his flags as he moved around the table before making them disappear and grabbing Genma's shoulder as the almost entirely bald man stared back in shock. "Why, it took me a while to find you, let me tell you."

Genma twitched, trying to back away without seeming to. "Er, ahem, I am sorry, but do I know you?"

"Ahahah, I guess time hasn't been all that kind to either of us, has it? Still, you can't say you've forgotten me entirely. We met each other on the road of life, when the both of us were on our martial arts journeys, remember? Why, you were looking after your boy the same way I was looking after my girl! And then you collapsed in front of me and begged for some of my food. Do you remember now?"

Moments later it was all that Kusano's plants, at Kasumi's behest, could do to hold Ranma back from smashing his father over the head after the man, Daikoku, of the same name as the restaurant chain, introduced his daughter. The daughter was dressed in a formal white outfit as if heading straight to her wedding. This had not done Ranma's temper any good at all. "The minute! The minute I think you have some redeeming value! And now this! Come on, old man, how low can you go? I mean, you sold me out for ONE crummy little stinky fish!"

"And rice," Genma said, nodding his head sagely. "And one shouldn't forget the two pickles either; they were quite exquisite."

Ranma was about to retort when he suddenly realized that the air was so cold, he could see his own breath. "Oops."

Still sitting and holding her now frozen watermelon drink, Akitsu was quietly furious and didn't care who knew it. Frost was beginning to flow out from her, crystallizing over everything and reaching towards Genma and this fat, ugly man who thought his daughter could take Akitsu's Sun-sama from her.

Ranma quickly decided to try to defuse the unexploded Akitsu, taking her arm in his. The cold instantly receded from around them, but Ranma could still feel Akitsu's tension, her eyes for once not on him but on the fat fool, Daikoku. "Well, I'm sorry, but I'm not interested. I already got one fiancée as well as Akitsu here, and that's more than enough."

"Now boy, this is a matter of honor!" the newcomer said sternly. "I'm certain that a martial artist like yourself would..."

That was as far as he got before Akitsu attacked, despite Ranma's attempts to stop her. Within one second the man was frozen solid in a sheet of ice along with his daughter. With both of them taken care of, Akitsu turned, reaching forward with a hand that grabbed Genma by the front of his dirty gi and then lifted him into the air with surprising strength. "How many more?" she hissed, her irritation coming out in a cold tone, of course, and her face showing little to no emotion as was usual. Yet that made her all the more frightening to Genma.

Despite that, however, there was little he could do to appease her. "I don't know! I never kept track! It was hard on the road, what part of that is so difficult to understand! I did what I had to in order for the two of us to survive."

Thunder crashed ominously in the background, and rain started to fall, showing Mother's Nature's grasp of a dramatic moment, and Ranma groaned. "That'd make sense if selling my hand like that hadn't been your freaking default move!"

Shaking his head and gesturing out towards the dojo, he continued. "Why don't you lot take Akane off now for a bit of training before bedtime, let Akitsu cool down a bit before she makes ya into a Pops-sicle."

Nabiki wasn't the only one who groaned at the use of two puns in one sentence, but she was the only one who reached over and clocked Ranma on the back of the head. "No, no puns for you." She then looked over at the ostensible patriarchs of the two families. "But that idea has merit despite the jokes. Right now I think some distance would let us all cool off. Gah, I did it too!"

As the others laughed, Genma and Soun decided to follow this advice, and the two of them and Akane left after a few minutes. Tsukiumi then started to dominate Ranma's time for a bit, demanding that he tell her about the fight with Karasuba from when she and the others had been forced to retreat until the end. She was still dealing with a lot of guilt about having to retreat and, indeed, how little help she'd been before then, just like Akitsu, if not to the same degree. Ranma willingly complied until the Water Sekirei was satisfied and made her farewells for the evening, taking with her the still frozen forms of the loud fellow and his daughter, dropping them off outside at a nearby train station.

Nabiki had waited somewhat patiently while the two combat junkies talked, doing some paperwork, as Kasumi and Kusano left to head up to the older girl's room. The moment Tsukiumi had left, however, she had moved around the table, hugging Ranma tightly to her. "You, you gave me a hell of a scare, you know. Don't, don't do that again, okay? I can't say I love you yet like Akitsu does, but I do care for you, you lug, and watching you get nearly sliced in half was one of the worse moments I've ever had to go through."

"Heh, um, thanks. It means a lot to hear you say that, Nabs." Ignoring the girls mutter of, "Don't call me Nabs," he put his arm around her in a sideways hug as he felt Akitsu move to lean into his other side.

The three of them sat like that for a bit before Nabiki pulled away, getting to her feet and motioning for the other two to follow her. "Come on; I think you owe me a stay at home sort of date. We can watch some Jackie Chan movies and fall asleep on the couch." It wasn't exactly the height of romance or spontaneity, but it would do for now.

As Ranma and Akitsu followed her over to the TV Room, Ranma paused, staring at a floorboard underneath them, and then very deliberately stuck his big toe down onto a knot in the wood. It should not have done anything but instead it knocked the knot out of the wood and down into someone's eye. That someone instantly began to squeal in agony, and Ranma turned to Nabiki, cocking an eyebrow. "Any reason why we have a plague of ninjas around the place? I mean, first those foreign guys, now someone below us, and I think I can spot another guy hiding over by the tree. Wasn't going to do anything about that one since it's raining, but the guy underneath us was about to get a nice upskirt shot of Akitsu, and that just ain't on."

Nabiki groaned, then smirked a little, shaking her tight, toned rear at Ranma, something she could do easily since she had taken the time to change into her normal exercise shorts and shirt after the Chardins had been dealt with. "Oh, not worried about someone peeping on little old me?"

Ranma flushed but didn't back down, staring back at her dryly. "I might be if ya were in a skirt, but since you're dressed to show off like that, I'm not. You really have the whole 'if you've got it, flaunt it' thing down, don't you?"

Giggling at that and feeling quite pleased with herself, Nabiki was feeling charitable, and she leaned over the revealed hole to look into it. "Sasuke, is that you?"

"Gah, that hurt! Um, ye, yes, Miss Nabiki. Sorry about this, but some habits are very hard to break. Um, I was sent to watch for Mister Ranma's return and then to ask if Mistress Kodachi could come by at some point to meet with you both. Would tomorrow be acceptable?"

"Sure, though the weather might have a vote in that too," Ranma quipped. "And next time, dude, don't choose the floor to hide under. It's way to freaking obvious."

With school closed down for the moment, its façade having been damaged in a recent Sekirei fight, they had the week off. Perhaps more, considering everything else going on, unless, of course, the school was willing to pay Nabiki's rates for having Ranma use his martial arts construction to repair the building. The last Nabiki had heard was that she would be approached for it, once the school could procure the materials needed. But given all the other construction projects going on around the city on a near continual basis thanks to the Sekirei fights, that wasn't going to happen anytime soon.

Thus it made sense to meet with Kodachi the next day, so long as Ranma was going to be there, something that would not continue for very long, given how much time he was spending at Miya's inn and the fact that he wanted to break the block on Akitsu's ki as soon as possible. If he had to do it with as little help as Tofu had been able to give him so far, Ranma was willing to take that chance to free Akitsu from what she saw as a major, life changing defect.

It was still raining and, according to the weather channel, would continue to rain well into the night, with only brief stops. So, it should not have surprised anyone who knew her that, when Kodachi arrived, she came prepared. An old-fashioned covered rickshaw pulled up to the front door of the Tendo house, and the large, powerfully built ninja pulling it whipped out an equally large umbrella, covering his lady for the few steps it took her to get from the conveyance to the front porch.

As Kasumi showed her into the dining room, Nabiki saw that Kodachi's attire was equally high-class today. She was dressed in a formal kimono, with her hair done up in a loose but intricate coiffure, complete with two hairpins through the back, the length and sharpness of them not detracting from the fact that they were gold gilded with a ruby in each handle. Kodachi even had some makeup on: a hint of purple lipstick and eyelash along with the barest hint of rouge.

Wow, and this is Kodachi coming over to just meet with a few allies for a strategy session? Who does she think she's kidding? All of this told Nabiki that Kodachi wanted to make a good impression, specifically to look feminine and refined to Ranma. *And this despite the fact that I told Kodachi that Akitsu and I aren't willing to share.*

Nabiki's eyes narrowed, and she almost glared at the younger Kuno. Kodachi caught the look and shrugged her shoulders just slightly, as if saying, 'can you blame me?' That only caused Nabiki's eyes to narrow further, and she very firmly gestured the other girl into a seat across from, not next to, Ranma.

Luckily for everyone, though, it looked as if the way Kodachi was dressed had gone right over Akitsu's head. She kept sipping from the now chilled watermelon drink Kasumi had made, her concentration totally on the drink in her hand as she sat next to Ranma. It was almost cute in a way, and Ranma had been smiling at her before Kasumi had come back with their guest.

Looking at Kodachi now, Ranma cocked his head, his lips twisting into a wry grimace. "So, you're sword boy's sister, huh? I can't say I see any kind of family resemblance."

"I will take that as a compliment, Ranma-san," she said with a demure, feminine smile and a nod of the head.

At that Akitsu looked up from her drink at the girl, taking in the formal kimono she wore. "Ahh...pretty," she said, nodding her head before reluctantly setting her drink aside and turning her attention fully on the world around her again.

Kodachi smiled politely at that, but her eyes remained on Ranma. "Have you made a full recovery from your clash with that ogre of a woman, Karasuba, was it? She was the same woman who injured my brother, and I have to say that I took a certain amount of satisfaction hearing that Asama-sama took her head for her effrontery against you." Despite not having met the woman, Kodachi had no issue with giving Miya the honorific she apparently richly deserved.

"Yeah, I guess I am. I'd like a few more good meals in me before we actually do anything major, but yeah, I'm good to go. But was there something specific you wanted to talk about?" Ranma asked. "Nabiki said you wanted us to get a bit more organized in our kind of revolution against MBI. Can't say I'm all that at home with the idea of organizing things, but I can see the point."

"HOHOHOHOH!" Kodachi laughed, causing Ranma to bite back a cringe, and even Akitsu to shift uncomfortably. As nice and sane as Kodachi was acting, that laugh was something else altogether. "I can well see that. But, as you say, to business. Well, first of all I have to say that Namiji, Akane, Tsukiumi, and Yashima did their job very well. We have warned every Sekirei/Ashikabi pair in Nerima about the dangers of the MBI card and have talked them all into using

alternative methods of paying for their upkeep."

She frowned, her nose wrinkling. "Despite that, many of the Sekirei who settled here still want to fight in the game. They just don't wish to be overwhelmed by the...power players, I believe I've heard is the term. There have been several dozen fights between Sekirei around this area alone. All of them have been small-scale between individuals rather than groups but still destructive for all that, as Furinkan can attest to. Few of the Sekirei/Ashikabi pairs wish for real peace; they just don't wish to die or be removed from their partners. And despite the warning about the MBI card, they still believe there is some kind of prize worth fighting for, something that would make all their dreams come true." A sneer on her face showed what Kodachi thought of such stupidity.

"We'll need some sort of internal policing system in place to make certain that they don't break any rules we set, then," Nabiki said, frowning and exchanging a nod with Kodachi.

"In other words," Ranma said with a grin and a crack of a knuckle. "You want me, Akitsu, Tsukiumi, and fire boy to smash any of them down who get uppity. That's fine; we can do that easy."

"While I wouldn't have put it precisely in those terms, it is somewhat close to what I would envision, yes," Kodachi said with a giggle, though her amusement faded somewhat as she saw the possessive way Akitsu leaned against Ranma's side. Oh, the clinging wasn't physical, but how close she sat next to Ranma and the way her eyes seemed to track every little movement he made said volumes.

And then she watched as Ranma took Akitsu's hand, squeezing it gently. *Ara, I've never actually seen a girl melt before*, she thought with amusement. While Akitsu's face didn't change, her entire attitude seemed to shift despite that, and a tiny little blush heated her cheeks. *My word, that is very cute!* she thought for a moment, and then sighed. *No, it would be dishonorable to encroach on such a loving couple. If they don't work out for whatever reason, which is frankly doubtful from what I've heard of Sekirei, I will attempt to sweep in and pick up the pieces, but I will not poach. It would be most dishonorable.*

Across the multi-verse, several thousand different Kodachis sneezed and were silenced.

"However, that is but one issue at hand," Kodachi sighed irritably, before becoming serious despite her thoughts about Akitsu. "As of this morning, Nerima has also been completely cut off from water and power. All civil utilities, trash collection and such like, have also been suspended, something done with malice aforethought since today is supposed to be a trash day. And, unlike last time when they stopped the trains and buses, this will no doubt remain in place until we either back down and follow MBI's rules or force them to break."

Ranma's eyes blinked, as did everyone else's save for Nabiki, who had known about that since the moment it had happened. He looked over at the light in the ceiling and then around before glancing at Kodachi, who giggled behind one hand as she smiled at his confusion.

"At the present moment, the entire area is running on independent energy supplied by the Kuno house's power station, and we also have our own water filtration system that can be linked into the district's central water processing plant. But there will be water shortages soon for all of that." Kodachi shrugged. "We can't create water, only purify what is there already. That is to say nothing about trash and such like. Luckily, the district has never been as energy dependent as elsewhere, but we will still feel the pinch of this soon."

"Okay, I gotta ask, why does your family have that kind of thing? It's not normal is it, even for rich folk? You also are kind of emphasizing it too much for that to be all you're here to say."

"My family..." She hesitated, then began again. "You must understand, this area, Nerima, it was odd long before this Sekirei game began. There are things, things hidden underneath and forgotten that must be kept that way."

"Okay, you're going to have to have to unpack that a bit," Ranma replied, though his eyes were narrowed as he looked at Kodachi, already figuring out what that could possible mean. His father too had sat up straight, while Soun was frowning, tapping his fingers on the table in front of him.

Kodachi hesitated again. "The problem is not only that I am still considered a minor in many ways of my house and therefore do not know all of our secrets, but that those secrets I do know I am sworn to keep," she said, honestly. "Suffice it to say that while the Age of Gods that madman Minaka spoke of before starting this game did end with the gods disappearing, that is not the case for all their creations and certain...others...from the same time."

Ranma's eyes instantly narrowed, and he leaned forward, while both Soun and Genma stiffened. The others didn't seem to get it, though Tsukiumi did, her eyes widening. "You're saying their enemies are also still around?"

"Something of the sort, yes. Their power is vastly diminished, but they could still wreak havoc upon the world if they could but escape their underground prison. And that cannot be allowed to occur." Kodachi shook her head. "I'm sorry, that but that is all I can say about that matter."

"That was more than enough to give me the heebie jeebies," Ranma said, running one hand along his pigtail thoughtfully.

"Only obliquely at present, but that might not last. My brother rather insanely challenged MBI in person, as you well know. What you don't know is that the woman who dealt with you so harshly, Karasuba?" When Ranma nodded, she went on. "She slaughtered more than two thirds of what we call our Shadow Legion."

"I've actually heard that term before," Genma murmured, scratching at his chin thoughtfully. "Something about undying ninjas or ninjas made of solid shadow or some such nonsense. Ran across a mention of them in a temple turned library near Kyoto somewhere."

"The Shadow Legion provided much of the bulk of my house's available strength which could be used in the Great Dungeon. Without them there the odds that the beasts within could escape the underground prison is quite high. Further, certain artifacts within my house are acting up, creating more difficulties without the Shadow Legion around to suppress them. Say what you will of him, but my brother has been forced to spend much of his time dealing with many of them."

Akane smacked one hand into her other palm. "Is that why he's not been in school?" Before this she hadn't really cared, but it sounded serious.

"Indeed. That is precisely why. Even injured, Tatewaki is at least able to help empower the family's magical items. I myself have missed a few days, ruining my perfect record! Most irritating," Kodachi grumped.

"So you're asking for help on that side of things?" Ranma asked.

"Indeed. I would very much like some help if the beasts below attempt to escape from their prison. Until then, if I could have Tsukiumi and Akitsu's aid?" Kodachi asked, looking at the two of them. "Creating several layers of frozen water would be a most powerful defense. Without that aid, I estimate we have another four days, perhaps as many as six, no more than that, before we see the dungeon breached."

As both Sekirei nodded in assent, the conversation was interrupted by the house's phone ringing.

Kasumi blinked, staring over at it in some consternation. They rarely if ever received phone calls. Indeed, it was so rare that she had honestly forgotten that their phone could handle incoming calls at all. Shaking her head at that thought, she marched over to it, lifted it off its receiver, and put it to her ear. "Tendo residence, may I help you?"

She blinked in surprise, listening to the other end of it. "Minato? What's wrong? I thought you were out on an all-day date with Kazehana." As she listened to Minato's reply, her eyes narrowed, and her aura of fear made a reappearance, making everyone still sitting at the table step back, with Kodachi going so far as to squeak and shift to hide behind Tsukiumi. "I see," she said icily. "One moment, please."

She sets the receiver down then looked over at Ranma, her aura disappearing. "I think you need to hear this, Ranma."

The younger man blinked, then slowly nodded and moved to join her at the phone. "Hey, Minato, what's going on?"

"Ranma, I just got a message from MBI over my cell phone. I still can't believe you don't have one, by the way," Minato teased.

"Hey, at least I bought one," Ranma said defensively. "It's not my fault it was lost somewhere in that fight with the crazy sword wielding bitch!"

"Replace it, seriously," Minato deadpanned, shaking his head on the other end of the phone. Although, of course, Ranma couldn't see that. "Anyway, the message says, 'Tomorrow, two for the price of one! Two of the last four free Sekirei are waiting for you in Nerima district. First come, first served.'"

Ranma growled. "I get it. Thanks for the heads-up, Minato. What're you up to now?"

"Well, I wish I could say this is important enough for me to break off our date, but Kazehana is giving me her version of the puppy dog eyes. That kind of thing should be illegal on a woman like her," Minato mock-grumbled. "So we'll be

by your place tomorrow morning if you want us there."

What Minato didn't tell Ranma was that their date had been in a love hotel. And, since entering it two days ago, they hadn't left it even once, ordering in food and then...getting back to business, so to speak. Kazehana was almost literally insatiable, and, despite all the aphrodisiacs, energy drinks, and everything else, Minato was very, very close to simply dying of exhaustion. But even Minato had his male pride, and until he keeled over, he would not relent.

"Got it. See you then." Hanging up the phone, then, Ranma turned to the others, anger still plain to see on his face. As Kasumi explained what the two of them had heard from the only official Ashikabi among their little group, Ranma stared off into the distance, thinking. By the time Kasumi finished explaining, the others were in a right frothing fury.

But by that time a plan had formed in Ranma's mind. He moved over to the table, gently tugging Kasumi behind him, where she had bundled Kusano into a hug, making them both sit down. "All right, so, Tsukiumi, you can handle yourself, so feel free to act however you want," he said with a somewhat vicious grin over towards the water user, who nodded, slamming her fists down on the table. Water cascaded around it, and her own return grin was just as shark-like.

"That leaves Kusano. No way is this message about Matsu—Minaka has to know that, even if she's come here to see Tofu, she's still under Miya's protection. And if they know where we are, they'll come straight here. But they'll have to go through the rest of Nerima to do it. And I'd bet that'll include Sanada, Mikogami, and the Bishole. But not anyone who already lives in the area," Ranma went on.

"That's true," Tsukiumi replied, nodding her head. "The other Sekirei who live here have mostly all met Kasumi by this point and indeed know, after the past few days, that she is looking after Kusano until she is of an age to be winged. They wouldst no sooner go against her than you wouldst be able to not eat one of Kasumi's meals."

Kasumi blushed, but Ranma nodded seriously. "Yep, that'd be just impossible. But, just as importantly, we need to tell all of the other singletons out there that they're now working for us," he said, looking over at Kodachi and Nabiki. "Get them to work in teams, patrol the territory, then call in everyone else around them if they run into outsiders so we can overwhelm the power players between them and us."

At the look in Ranma's eyes, the middle Tendo sister felt a strange shiver through her spine. *Holy flipping hell! I do like a take charge attitude. Mmmm...*

Kodachi was thinking the same thin as well as damning her own sense of honor and dignity, while Akitsu was simply preening, moving to stand to sit directly next to rather than behind her Sun-sama as was normal. "Mah, I do hope you're not counting me out, are you?" Kodachi threw back her head and laughed, missing the wincing this caused in some around the table. "HOHOHOHOHO! Why, it would be most foolish to not count the Black Rose of the house of Kuno in your deliberations."

Genma nodded his head. "I'll take part too. In fact, it will be a good way to judge how much more training Soun needs before being up to par." He looked over at Akane, who grinned. "Even Akane can take part, perhaps, so long as she and Yashima work as a team. Her hammer generation is actually getting quite good. It would be good training on using it in real combat."

Ranma blinked and clicked his fingers together. "Speaking of training, old man, you wouldn't happen to have any idea about a little gnome guy who was using the aerial style of Anything Goes to molest Sekirei recently, would you? The girls I talked to said he was fast, good, and perverted all in one and looked like a wrinkled grape and a gnome combined. Could jump around like someone born in the air and steal their underwear right out from under their clothing."

While Kodachi Yashima joined the three Tendo sisters in evincing disgust at the idea, Tsukiumi nodded seriously. "Indeed, I have seen the little gnome at a distance and didst decide on the better part of valor rather than confronting him. Small, incredibly agile enemies like that are not opponents I have been training for, after all. I had not connected his style to yours, however, Ranma."

At that point, Soun and Genma had both heard enough to know exactly who they were talking about and responded in the appropriate, mature manner of adults faced with such a dilemma. They screamed like little girls, in other words. "GAHJAHHAHHH!"

Everyone else winced at the volume and then watched as Genma turned into a panda and curled into a ball, a large sign sticking out, reading, 'No one here but us pandas!' At the same time Soun's face had frozen in an expression of horror, and he fell to the side like he was made out of wood and lay there, comatose.

Staring at the two statues that had previously been their fathers, the three Tendo sisters and Ranma exchanged glances before he started to poke his father with a stick. This evinced no reaction other than a whimper. He actually peeled open the panda's eyelashes and saw that his eyes had rolled back in his head, completely out of it.

Standing back, he shook his head, sighing. "Right, well, I think that ended any and all serious talk for now. We'll have to wait until these two regain their senses."

"What passes for their senses, anyway," Nabiki cut in dryly, causing a few laughs around the room.

Conceding his girlfriend's point with a nod, Ranma turned his attention back to the younger Kuno. "Kodachi, we'll see you tomorrow, I suppose?"

"Indeed. I should be getting back; it is rather pushing lunch time." She looked out past the open doorway to the porch and sighed, seeing it was still raining. "Ah well, even a rose as beautiful as I need to be watered upon at some point in her life, HOHOHOHOH." With that she stood and bowed before Kasumi escorted her out.

The others took this as their cue to leave as well. Akitsu and Ranma would head back to the inn for dinner, and perhaps for the night depending on if it was still raining by the time they got there. Nabiki wasn't happy about that but understood that Ranma wanted to talk to Miya and the others in person about what was going to happen tomorrow and also to check on Matsu and Tofu's research on Akitsu's condition. This didn't stop her from pulling Ranma up to her room, though, looking at Akitsu with a pleading expression. Akitsu looked back at her for a moment and then remained where she was at the table, turning her attention to her watermelon drink.

As they entered, Nabiki walked ahead of Ranma, frowning as she stared out of the window and crossing her arms under her breasts. Even Ranma, not exactly an expert on this whole boyfriend thing, could tell that something was bothering her, and he moved up behind her, putting his arms underneath hers, around her stomach. "Something on your mind, Nabiki?" he asked, all his hard-earned experience with Nabiki telling him that this wasn't the moment for nicknames or teasing.

"It's just, you just woke up, Ranma and now we're heading into another crisis. I know you think you can handle whatever is out there, but that doesn't make it any easier for me, especially not after I, we, Akitsu and I and everyone else who cares for you, nearly lost you. And yet you're all eager to rush off again into the next fight. And Akitsu will be right there beside you. She's both that devoted and that determined to protect you, to prove her worth beside you." She turned around in his arms, her own going to his waist. "Me, on the other hand, I don't know if I can deal with that, deal with you throwing yourself into danger every chance you get because you enjoy it so much."

"I can't change who I am, Nabiki. I'm a martial artist. I live to get better, to use the Art, to challenge myself against other opponents. That's as much a part of me as my eyes or skin," Ranma said, trying to make light of it but looking at her closely. "Is, is this going somewhere?"

"I don't know." Nabiki flushed slightly, looking at Ranma's face, his jaw and lips, his bright blue eyes. "I am extremely attracted to you, Ranma. I just, I just don't know if, in the long run, that's enough. Not if this Sekirei thing is just the start of the trouble I can expect to see."

Nodding slowly, Ranma gently began to weave his fingers through her hair, causing her to close her eyes in pleasure. "Ya want some advice from the uncouth, hardheaded martial artist? Don't go borrowing trouble. As far as we know, the Sekirei could be the toughest opponents I'll face for a while. My old man's mentioned training me on secret techniques. And Miya-nee's gonna keep training me too. So live for the now and trust the future to luck, Nabiki. That's what I'd do."

"Mmm, I suppose I can get behind that..." Nabiki murmured, then leaned up the short distance separating them to kiss Ranma on the lips. This was no chaste peck. No, this was a full-on lip lock as if Nabiki wanted to reaffirm their connection after her words earlier. Neither would forget them, but they both knew that those kinds of problems were for the future. Right now they were just two young people who were very attracted to one another. That was enough.

Ranma responded, his arms around her waist tightening as he opened his mouth, his tongue flicking out into Nabiki's, finding her tongue, and sliding along it, causing her to start to flush, a bit of a whimper starting deep in her throat. She started to walk backwards, pulling Ranma with her but never releasing their kiss. Then they were bumping into her bed and she fell backwards, with Ranma crouching over her, one knee between her legs, the other to one side, breaking the kiss for a moment. He looked down at her, and she shook her head slightly. "We're not going to do anything under the clothing, Ranma, but if you think you're leaving before my lips start to bruise, you have another think coming."

Chuckling, Ranma obeyed her demand and leaned down, kissing her again, the kiss deepening instantly until their tongues were once more dueling in her mouth. At first he tried to keep his body's weight off her, but Nabiki eventually just pulled him down until he was laying on top of her. She began to grind her hips down onto the knee caught between her legs, her breathing becoming heavier and little whimpers escaping their locked lips. At that point Ranma took over again, his knee starting to move this way and that,

How long they were at it, Ranma didn't know, but eventually Nabiki stiffened and her nails raked at Ranma's back, doing no damage as her eyes fluttered in her hair and she bucked up underneath him. Ranma pulled back, staring down, and blushed at the rosy tint to her cheeks, the heavy-lidded gaze she sent back to him, and the heaving of her chest as she breathed in deeply. "That, that was a, a bit further than I expected to go, to be honest. You're, you are kind of addicting, Ranma."

Still blushing, Ranma nodded his head, then shuddered as Nabiki ran one hand up from his knee to his crotch, causing his erection to twitch again. Her hand lingered there but then moved on to rest on his chest, where she pushed him away with a laugh. "But that's enough for now, Ranma. Just, just something for us to remember each other by. Now get out of here and go see Miya and the others. Tell them about what's going to happen tomorrow, and I'll see you back here in the morning." She looked out the room lazily, her breathing become more normal as she took in the rain still pounding down. "No reason for you to try and travel back in this muck too."

Gulping, Ranma nodded and left without a word, shaking his head. *Women. I am one half the time, and I still don't understand them.* Collecting Akitsu, the still-dazed Ranma had to step outside onto the rain, using the shifting to his female body to clear her head. Once she was once more tracking well enough to speak coherently, the two of them made their farewells. Studiously ignoring the glare from Akane, who had a good idea of what Ranma and her sister had been up to, Ranma hugged Kasumi from the side while high-fiving Kusano as she told Kusano to defend her new big sister.

Kasumi rolled her eyes at that, but Kusano took it seriously, nodding her head firmly. "No more frog-people!" she shouted, throwing her arms up in the air with the plant she was holding between her hands.

"Well," Kasumi said philosophically, "I suppose that's better than using curse words in front of her or anything of that nature. And every child does need one irreverent, teasing, and, above all, corrupting elder sibling."

"Did you have one?" Ranma asked, quizzically.

"Alas, no," Kasumi replied with a twinkle in her eye. "Perhaps I'm making up for it now."

Moments later Kasumi watched Akitsu and Ranma go, then smirked to herself as she went up the stairs and into Nabiki's room, looking at her thoughtfully. "So, while the spark of love isn't there, the attraction is?"

"Ooooh yeah," Nabiki said, not looking up from where she was still laid out on her bed, flashing her older sister a peace sign. "You can definitely say that."

The two of them looked at one another and then burst into wicked giggles as Kasumi sat next to her sister and asked the one question that was almost universally asked in moments like this. "So, how did it feel?"

OOOOOO

It was still raining by the time Ranma and Akitsu reached Izumo House, so Ranma was kind of surprised to see Homura sitting on the back patio, staring up over the outer wall at the sunset visible through the rain. "Yo, Homura, I'd've figured that you'd not like nights like this, what with you being fire and all."

"I'll have you know that the element I use certainly does not define me to that extent," Homura replied, rolling his eyes. "Although you're right, it is rather damp out here, but Miya-san has a guest at the moment, and her cackle when first laying eyes on me made my skin crawl."

"Cackle?" Ranma blinked, then visibly set that aside as Homura went on. "But what about you two? I would have thought you would be happy to head back to Kasumi's cooking. Not that there's anything wrong with Miya-san's, of course, but..."

"I'm hoping to talk to Tofu and Matsu about their research into Akitsu's ki block. And I also wanted to make sure that you all knew that Minaka had sent out a message to all the Ashikabi, telling 'em about Tsukiumi and Kusano both being in Nerima." The redhead then took Homura's still warm kettle of tea, dumping it over her head. With malice aforethought, he waited until Homura had taken a sip from his cup before continuing. "More importantly, I figured you

might want to know that you've got some competition for Kasumi."

Homura's spit-take was everything Ranma could have hoped for. "Wagh!h, w, what!?" he spluttered, clearing his mouth with some difficulty. "Who is it, another Sekirei? Wait, no, that's impossible. Almost all of us have been winged at this point, and all the ones left I know of are girls, except for maybe... Wait, is it Tofu? Kasumi warned me he might not have given up on her entirely just yet, though I thought Matsu had him under control at this point."

Homura was working himself up into a fury now, sparks flickering from his fingers, and Ranma decided to take pity on him. "Apparently my old man and Kasumi's were going through France at one point, and, long story short, in return for feeding them during their stay in France, Soun sold the hand of one of his daughters in the future to this Chardin house."

"He sold her into marriage for food!?" Homura shouted, coming to his feet, wisps of fire appearing around him as fire blazed from his hands. "I'm going to give Soun a fire lance enema!"

Before he could do more, though, a ladle smacked into the side of his head, thrown from inside as a feminine voice shouted, "Lighting yourself on fire is forbidden in Izumo house!"

Chuckling and now moving around the groaning Homura, Ranma entered the inn, intending to go upstairs to see Matsu. He paused on the steps, however, when he heard Miya calling his name.

Moving in that direction, he found Miya in the dining room sitting across the table from a short, extremely wizened individual, the sight of whom caused Ranma to blink in surprise. "Um, you'd be...Cologne, right? From the Chinese Amazons. What're you doing here? What, are ya here to recruit?" he ended with a laugh.

Taking in their expressions was giving Ranma no clue as to what Miya wanted or why Cologne was here. Miya seemed amused by something, and the older woman, was utterly unreadable to him, though she was keeping one eye on Miya as he entered the room with Akitsu behind him.

"Of a sort, perhaps," Cologne said with a smile of her own and clicking her mental fingers together. She had sent Shampoo out to find out if they could discover any hint of whether or not this very young man was around. He had, after all, offered to show them around Japan when he was within their village, and the boy had been prime husband material even then. *To think that I would simply run into him here like this. But what am I feeling off him now? His ki reserves are at least twice as strong as they were before? How did that happen!? Or could it be that I just didn't look hard enough? And why is he here with this woman who could so easily be Artemis reborn?*

"As I was telling Lady Artemis here, myself and a small hunting band of young sisters have come to Japan to look into these rumors of superpowered women engaging in fights both physical and magical in nature. Imagine my shock when I felt your presence, Great Lady Artemis," she said nodding to Miya.

Miya simply giggled, shaking her head, while Ranma blinked, trying to place the name Artemis for a bit before he finally remembered where he had heard that name before. "Miya," he exclaimed with a grin, "you're a goddess and you never told me? Although I suppose, given your looks, that's not exactly a stretch." He winked.

That caused Miya's giggle to turn into a laugh, and she reached over to ruffle his hair affectionately. "Ara, thank you for the compliment, Ranma, but am I the woman you should be saying that to?" she asked archly.

Ranma reached back and, without even looking, found Akitsu's hand and squeezed it. "Akitsu knows how I feel about her," he said simply, causing Akitsu to blush quite a bit more than the words should have entailed, but she slid forward silently on her knees, moving to sit beside him now instead of behind and to one side.

This drew all of Cologne's attention off of Miya for the first time, and she stared at the shorthaired girl, cocking her head thoughtfully to one side as she looked at the tattoo on her forehead. *What in the world? Why is she wearing an Indian style chastity brand?*

Before she could ask about it, Miya spoke up. "At any rate, I'm afraid I will have to disabuse you of this notion that I am Artemis reborn. I will admit that perhaps one of the other Pillars might have become the goddess Artemis, and, indeed, I could see Sekirei being taken as gods and goddesses by the ignorant and simple humans of the time all too easily."

"Let's see..." Ranma drawled. "Some of ya have superpowers, strength and durability—even elemental types are more durable more than humans—a general level of beauty far higher than most human," he winked at Akitsu, "and all of ya arrived from the sky in chariots of fire. Yeah, I think I can see you being taken as goddesses too." He

became serious then, looking across at Cologne with some worry. "But what's the point of this conversation?"

"We Amazons are not just patrons of the goddess Artemis, we were her disciples," Cologne said seriously. "Though many tomes and items of power were lost during the great crossing on the Silk Road, our village still retains a few historical notes that go that far back. Some even that go beyond, although most are now unreadable. And it was Artemis's teachings that eventually allowed us to start using our body's internal energies."

"That makes some sense, but what does it have to do with the here and now?" Ranma asked.

"In the long run I personally would like to learn more about these Pillars, what that means, where you Sekirei come from, anything and everything I can that could shed more light upon the heritage of my people. In the short term we would wish to ally with you, Lady Miya, simply because to do otherwise would be to face the wrath of a goddess, and what mortal would do such a thing?" Cologne said slowly, staring over at Miya and then to Ranma.

"Who indeed," Miya replied dryly, knowing offhand the names of several men who would and others who would scoff at the very idea of there being goddesses. *While Minaka might spout words about the age of gods returning and such rot, all he really means it is the age of his wielding the power of a god.*

"And of course we would want training, and your patronage, perhaps," Cologne said leadingly. If the goddess across from her currently wearing a human guise had been able to train a male like Ranma—regardless of his curse he was still a male in terms of his ki, at least half the time—then perhaps she could teach someone like Cologne, or Shampoo, at the very least, to better themselves to a far greater degree than they already were.

"That's nice, but what is in it for myself and my existing allies?" Miya asked promptly, setting aside any thought of trying to protest that she was just a simple widow woman. Like Ranma had all those years ago, Cologne had evidently seen her ki signature from afar. As much as she disliked the necessity, there was a time to set aside such small pleasures. "As you yourself can tell, I need no followers to look after me or defend me. And I am uncertain how much aid you could honestly be in our current goals."

Cologne smiled. "Ah, but that is because you haven't seen Amazon techniques in action. While these Sekirei might have strength and speed well beyond humans, they would not be the first such my clan has dealt with. Believe me, we can even the odds."

"I would have to see these techniques in person before agreeing that they were worth my training in return," Miya replied, though she actually agreed with that point. She was simply doubtful that adding whatever force the Amazons brought to Shin Teito was going to be worth the hassle of training them in payment for their help. *Especially since it would take away from my training time with Ranma...and the others, of course. Although, since Musubi has disappeared with Ryoga, I suppose I have a bit of time free now.*

In contrast to Miya's ambivalence, Ranma leaned forward eagerly, barely refraining from rubbing his hands together in glee. *If I could see these techniques even once, maybe twice, I bet I could figure them out and add them into my own style.*

Cologne saw this and scowled, her inner Amazon nature rearing its head. "These would not be techniques that I would want to share with a man," she said bluntly.

"Then I'm afraid you're out of luck," Miya said equally bluntly and more harshly. "Ranma is my apprentice, my little brother in all but blood. He has been my sword in dealing with the Sekirei plan and with my issues with MBI and how they treat my young Feathers. If you cannot work with him, then please see yourself out."

"That is..." Cologne said, then stopped as Miya simply looked at her, a haze of darkness and something else appearing behind her.

"Yes? That is what?" Miya asked, in a cool, yet commanding, tone.

Cologne blanched, shivering and feeling more terror right now than she had ever felt before save for the first moment she felt Miya's ki reserves from afar. *Good goddess, this is not fun for my old heart!*

"I, *gulp*, that is, I was going to say that it is, it is highly unusual to teach a man our techniques," Cologne stammered. "However, I could do so if he was added into our clan rosters in some fashion," she went on, regaining her equilibrium. "That would be a nod toward those who would be most furious with the idea. And naturally, any children he had would therefore become part of the clan, strengthening it."

"Exactly how would I be joining your clan?" Ranma asked, frowning and thinking that maybe he should've brought

Nabiki along, because this sounded like a Hagglng Moment™.

"Nothing onerous, I assure you," Cologne said, but when both Miya and Ranma looked skeptical, she sighed and elaborated. "There are many ways. The best and certainly the one that would soothe the most egos among my people would be a simple marriage between you and..."

The table in front of Akitsu suddenly began to grow frost, and she leaned forward, almost glaring at the woman. Despite the fact that her face didn't change at all, it was very clear what she thought about that idea. Indeed, looking at her, Cologne was actually somewhat surprised she could exhibit that much emotion with that chastity mark on her as it was.

Ranma chuckled, putting an arm around her and shaking his head. "I don't think so."

"Hmmm... Well, on a slightly different topic, can I ask why the young lady has a chastity mark on her?" Cologne inquired. "I have only seen such in our records of our passage through India before. Seeing it here in modern day Japan, especially upon a Sekirei, is highly unusual." Despite her chained status, Cologne could feel the ki energy coming off Akitsu. She was certainly powerful, despite the blockage on her ki.

The effect this had on her interlocutors was gratifying. Akitsu's expressionless anger disappeared, and she leaned back, while Miya's hands clenched, and Ranma's eyes widened. "Wait, you know what this is!?"

"I have seen the like of it before," Cologne said cautiously. "It is a chastity mark, a lock on an individual's inner energy linked to their ability to feel emotions and sexual arousal. It was used in India for a time to both defend the virtue of princesses and to punish adulterers, both male and female. The young lady's looks a bit different, which I would imagine means it is concentrated more on suppressing emotions and ki than arousal, else the mark would be directly above her privates."

Ranma blushed, looking away, and Cologne cackled while Akitsu just continued to stare at her intensely, a desperate, longing look in her eyes despite the fact that the rest of her face wasn't showing nearly as much emotion. Cologne idly wondered what had happened here, but then realized something shocking. *Not even Miya knows about this. How odd to think someone of her power does not know of such things.* "I take it then that this mark was placed on her in some fashion out of her control?"

"You might say that," Ranma growled. "Some asshole in MBI attempted to wing her or something; I've never gotten a complete story there. Akitsu thinks it was just someone working there who didn't realize there needed to be some kind of genetic compatibility between them in order to wing Akitsu, but I'd lay odds it was deliberate, that Minaka set it up so Akitsu would be what the Sekirei call broken, unable to bond with their Ashikabi, just to see if it could happen."

At Cologne's surprised expression, Miya took it upon herself to explain how the Sekirei found their destined ones, their genetically compatible mates. It was a prerequisite for a Sekirei to be able to access their full strength, something that horrified Cologne. She had gotten the idea that most Sekirei were women, and the idea they needed a man to reach their full potential was anathema to her, until Miya explained that the bond should also have been one of love, making the Sekirei and Ashikabi equal partners. "And it also has to be said that, while my Feathers are mostly women, this was not always the case."

That mollified Cologne somewhat, as did the fact that it was obvious these two young people were devoted to one another. "Can I presume, then, that you would like the mark removed?"

The looks from Ranma and Miya became almost laser-like in their intensity, and a pressure built up in the air, pressing Cologne down into her seat. For all her strength and ability, for all her vaunted knowledge, Miya's ki, let loose even so lightly and without form or even aura to accompany it, overwhelmed her. *Whatever she might say with power like that, Miya Asama must be a goddess reborn unto the Earth!*

"If you can help my little Feather here," Miya said, touching Akitsu gently on the arm, "then I believe that we can come to an agreement. Although you will still have to find another way to allow yourself to teach Ranma these techniques."

"Given how alike it is to the chastity mark, I believe it can be broken via the same kind of tantric ritual that was used on the wedding night of the princesses to break the mark back then," Cologne said, cackling again as Ranma began to flush.

Ranma looked away, then turned to look at Akitsu before looking away again, his blush now suffusing his entire face. "Um, we, well, that, that doesn't sound like a hardship or anything to me. So, um, how do we do this ritual?"

Above them, in her room, Uzume suddenly looked up from what she was doing, her hands lifting from Chiho's feet. "You ever get the impression that you're missing out on some prime teasing material?"

"N, no, but I know what you'll be missing out on if you stop now," Chiho moaned, waving her feet in her lover's face. "Please?"

With a smile, Uzume turned back to her current task. With how weak Chiho was, they couldn't really do much, but foot massages and manicures, those they could do. And after spending so long in the hospital, Uzume had decided that Chiho deserved it.

Back in the sitting room, Cologne smiled. "It actually isn't all that convoluted a process. Of course, you have to have sex with her, but a ki master needs to be present. I..."

She paused as Ranma held up a hand. "Just tell me what I have to do. I can do it. The, the whole needing to have..." He blushed even redder. "...s, sex at the same time thing is new. But Doc Tofu mentioned that ki manipulation might be part of helping Akitsu through this the last time I talked to him about it."

"Indeed," Cologne said, blinking. "There is a doctor here who knows of such things? Perhaps the old ways are not as lost as I have long feared."

"He was able to see the blockage, but beyond that he had to send away for help," Ranma replied, making a get on with it gesture.

"Well, in essence you, as the ki master, would have to basically use your own ki like a key in a lock. If the ki master wasn't part of the pairing, it would be much tougher, and she or he would have to use her own ki to funnel that of the individual who is supposed to be the key in this image. There will be a pattern within the mark in her ki that you can unlatch with the appropriate pressure."

"Is there anything else you can tell me about this?" Miya requested. "Surely it cannot be that simple."

"Simple, she says!" Cologne laughed. "No, not simple, not even for those of us who will help prepare the area the ritual will need to take place. The energy in the lock will be dissipated when you start to work on it and will need to then be trapped, or else it'll simply reform even after you unlock it, to continue abusing the metaphor." She looked at the pattern on Akitsu's head and then nodded slowly. "I believe that simply putting another similar mark on the ground to absorb the energy should do, as well as a containment matrix beyond that. There we begin to blur the lines of ki and magic most seriously."

"Containment?" Ranma asked, his brow furrowing.

"Of course," Cologne said, waving her hand. "At the moment of completion," she said, cackling again as Ranma blushed hotly. *My word, this boy is fun to tease!* "A lot of the energy you are releasing into the lock will dissipate into the physical world, and you'll need to block that from causing too much damage to the world around you. The containment is a mix of various languages set and hardened by a second person of considerable power, normally a journeyman or apprentice, since the energy, once set in the array, doesn't need to do anything but be there, able to absorb the power released within the sphere."

At that point she paused, looking at the would-be lovers and chuckling ruefully. "I would normally offer to energize that barrier myself, but given the energy I'm feeling within the boy and within Akitsu, that is going to be a little more difficult than it should normally be. It might well be beyond me."

Miya nodded firmly. "I will offer my energy."

"How long to set this up?" Ranma asked, while Akitsu looked on, hope now plain in her expression to his eyes.

"Let me copy the mark down now, and then I will start work on it and the containment array, if you wish. It's better to have it happen in the home, either here or wherever you two are staying, where both you and the girl have happy memories. It makes that initial connection between your ki easier to forge, even if you are as in love as the two of you seem to be," Cologne half-asked, half-stated.

Ranma blushed again, but he took Akitsu's hand and turned to her. She too was blushing, but only very slightly, and you would have had to both know her and be looking for it to notice. She turned her gaze to his, however, from where she had been staring fixedly at Cologne the entire conversation, and Ranma could see the desperate desire there. It almost reminded him of her look when Ranma had woken up the day before. And he remembered her from last night, clinging to him in his futon, as if the moment she let him go Ranma would disappear.

Really, he already knew the answer to this, but he still had to ask aloud. "Akitsu, this sounds like, well, a real long shot. And I wouldn't really call myself a master of ki. I'm willing to try this, but you're the one this might hurt if things go wrong. Do you really want to try this?"

Akitsu nodded once, sharply. "Yes, Sun-sama, I want to try it, and I want you to do it. I want to do this now. Please?" *Please let me become your Sekirei in truth. Please, please don't make me wait anymore to feel that warmth, to be able to be whole...*

After seeing the near desperation in Akitsu's eyes, Ranma nodded. *It's like, now that she knows there's a solution, she can't bear to wait a minute longer. And, and even if I'm not certain I can pull my part of this off, I can't really deny her, can I?* With that thought Ranma leaned forward and kissed her lightly on the cheek. He wasn't comfortable with doing any more than that in public in front of Miya or Cologne. *Although, if Uzume were down here she would probably just want to join in,* he thought to himself with a well-hidden chuckle. "So, do you want to follow us to the Tendo place? We can do the ritual there, I think." He sent a smile, made of equal parts nerves and teasing, over at Miya. "That way we won't have to break your rules about there being no illicit activities allowed in Izumo House."

"I think for this one occasion, Ranma, we can make an exception," Miya said with an equally teasing and warm smile. "Unless you're saying you have more fond memories there than here."

"Not a bit," Ranma said with a shake of his head. "I just didn't want to bother you. Are you sure?"

"No," Miya replied honestly. "But if this is something that will help one of my little Feathers become whole, it behooves me to aid as best I can." *Especially if she then can wing herself upon you, my dear.* As Ranma stuttered his thanks, she went on. "However, I think you and Akitsu should also be alone for this. I will roust out Homura, Uzume, and Chiho. Perhaps they can move into one of the houses next to us. Many of them are empty at this point, thanks to people leaving the city over the Sekirei plan. Matsu is out, and I believe she said something of tripping the good doctor into bed tonight, so I doubt we will see her until morning."

"Ah, that, might be a good idea, yeah," Ranma said with a slow nod, blushing once again in far too short a time. *Seriously, I'm starting to feel light-headed here.* "Er, Homura's probably already left, though. I didn't get the chance to tell ya what Akitsu and I ran into yesterday when we went to the Tendos' before Cologne made her pitch. It turns out my old man wasn't the only one to play games with the hand of his kid when he was younger..."

Telling that story had both Miya and Cologne shaking their heads, though Cologne seemed concerned that perhaps Chardin represented some kind of unholy human-frog hybrid, given Ranma's description of the man. Beyond that, it took about four minutes to explain what was going on to Uzume and Chiho, asking them to move to one of the nearby houses. Chiho was a little appalled at the idea of just moving into someone's abandoned house like that but understood the necessity and wore a blush to match that of Ranma at the moment as she realized what all was going to happen.

Uzume, on the other hand, was visibly torn between her desire to make fun of Ranma about the idea of using a tantric sex ritual in order to break Akitsu's block and honest joy at the fact that it was a possibility. In the end, with her hands still smelling of massage oil, she pulled both Ranma and a somewhat startled Akitsu into a hug. "Good luck, you two," she said, then leaned back and winked. "And bro, if you need any last-minute advice, now's your chance. There's this little trick you can do with your tongue that..."

She fled instantly with Chiho in her arms as Miya began to manifest her Hanya mask. Once the two of them were gone, Miya and Ranma returned to Cologne and Akitsu, who was studying the picture that she had taken staring between it and the original on Akitsu's forehead and slowly nodding. "Yes, yes, I think I can replicate this quickly enough. The absorption ring will take a bit longer, but not overmuch. I should be ready in an hour or so?"

At that Ranma was about to suggest that he and Miya go out and spar for a bit, but Miya seemed to read his mind and pointed to him and Akitsu. "Excellent. I will help you in this as best I may. I have a dab hand for calligraphy, and I should be nearby to charge this absorption ring in any event. You two, I think, should figure out how to, ahem, get in the mood a bit."

Ranma nodded back and then looked at Akitsu thoughtfully, wondering how they could really get in the mood, both in a romantic kind of way and in a physical kind of way, without leaving the inn. The very idea of going all the way like that with Akitsu made him blush, but he couldn't say that he hadn't thought about it. He was a guy, after all. But there was a lot more to this than just breaking Akitsu free from her block. No, this was a big step in terms of their relationship. And that, that sort of almost demanded something special, or something that meant, well, something to them.

After a moment's thought, Ranma decided he might have figured out what they could use. *The baths*. It was in the baths where Akitsu had first made plain the fact that she was honestly interested in him rather than simply interested in him because he had helped her. And while they had been together in the baths at the Tendos' for a bath or two, they hadn't been together in the baths here in Izumo House, which he had honestly rebuilt from the pipes out when he was younger. And he knew that Akitsu liked baths and warm places in general. With that in mind, he stood up and reached down to Akitsu, smiling at her tenderly. "Let's, let's go take a bath first, Akitsu."

Akitsu looked up at him, then smiled her small, shy smile and took his hand, letting Ranma pull her to her feet. "Yes, Sun-sama," she said simply.

Moments later they stood in the changing area of the bathing room, and Ranma slowly peeled out of his clothes while Akitsu did the same. Given her normal attire of chains and suchlike, this was a far more involved project than it was for Ranma, so he had plenty of time to stare.

Letting her chains drop to one side, she slowly peeled out of her kimono. Now Akitsu felt his eyes on her and practically preened, knowing that her Sun-sama was looking at her in such a way and was doing so openly now, something he rarely allowed himself. Pulling her kimono open, she revealed more and more of her perfect porcelain skin, allowing the kimono fall to pool around her feet. Then she slowly reached behind herself to unclasp her bra, letting her breasts jiggle freely for a moment. Hearing Ranma gulp made her smile ever so slightly, and she leaned forward, raising one leg and pulling off her panties, tossing them to the side.

Finally, she stood naked in front of Ranma and allowed herself to take in Ranma's body in turn as he too removed his underwear, looking at it appreciatively.

{Warning, Lemon Start}

His shoulders were broad, and his upper and even lower arms showed the amount of work he had put in with a sword under Miya's tutelage. His waist was thin but tight with muscle, as was the rest of his body, the kind of muscles that were built for speed and endurance rather than strength with those of his arms being a perfect mix of the two, though she knew from experience that Ranma truly was very strong regardless. Akitsu had no words for the muscle groups she was seeing, but she knew from many of Uzume's novels that it was not usual for a man to have such perfectly proportioned muscles like this. He also had very little hair visible on his chest or back, which she appreciated. Even his missing finger and the bit of his missing ear, or even the large scar across his chest or the other scars she could see here and there scattered across his body, didn't take away from his basic attractiveness.

Akitsu let her eyes slide down, then smiled that slight yet so very warm and inviting smile again as she noticed that Ranma was already erect. She didn't know how large men were normally, but again, going by Uzume's magazines, she believed that Ranma was quite big. He looked almost like a sword hilt, or perhaps the thickness of a staff? Obviously not as long as one, that would be beyond bizarre. He was unshaven down there, of course, and his hair was curlier than she expected when dry, and she wondered idly for a moment why that was before setting that aside.

For Ranma's part, he too was taking in Akitsu in her natural state. He'd seen her like this before, though only in glimpses before she would put a towel around herself, or he would flush and turn away and order her to do just that. Now, though, with what they were going to be doing soon, that seemed almost inappropriate. Regardless, Ranma found a strange hunger welling up inside him as he looked at Akitsu.

She was short, he noticed anew, shorter than his male body, which, of course, he had known before, but for some reason he was noticing it again now. Her waist was trim and fit, but she didn't have a six-pack or anything like that. Rather, Akitsu looked almost soft, though Ranma knew that that was deceptive. She had slightly wide hips, a bit wider than his female form, well-built thighs, and skin the color of porcelain, so delicate and perfect as to make a model weep in envy. Her breasts were heavy and full, smaller than Uzume's, or possibly Tsukiumi's, which, of course, meant they were nowhere near the almost preposterous size of Kazehana's, but they were a bit larger than Nabiki's, Ranma thought, having to fight his body for self-control for a moment as his hands urged him to reach forward and test that theory. Her breasts were tipped with small pink nipples, which were already hard and inviting, the pink of them almost stark against her skin. Her neck was well formed, with an almost perfect arch to it, and the curve of her throat drew the eye for some reason. Her light blue eyes were luminescent in her face, her small nose perky, and her lips small but imminently kissable, as he knew from experience.

There Ranma's self-control failed him, and he leaned forward, kissing Akitsu for several quiet moments as their arms went around one another. He tried, he really tried to keep his hands from straying to her rear, which was as pert and well-formed as the rest of her, but Akitsu had no such compunction to wait, and when she grabbed at his own firm rear, Ranma's hands instantly found their way downward, taking a cheek in each hand, kneading and squeezing.

But finally Ranma pulled away, leaning his forehead against hers, directly over the mark that he hoped would soon be gone. "Come on," he said, somewhat breathless despite the fact that the kisses hadn't gone on for that long. "Let's, let's go get you that bath. And, er, me too, I guess."

Akitsu nodded, but then leaned forward and kissed him once more before pulling away again. She shyly took his hand and then waited for him to move, which took him a few seconds as he shook his head once or twice. Then he smiled lopsidedly at her and pulled her towards the inner doorway.

Once within the in the bath, Akitsu gently tugged Ranma's hand until he was sitting down on the stool to one side, where she began to wash him, splashing cool water over his head and turning him into a girl for a moment.

The now female Ranma shivered and looked at her questioningly, looking for some sign that Akitsu was startled or annoyed at the change. But there was nothing, no sign that she was bothered one way or the other by her sex change. No irritation, no nothing, simply that same accepting, loving look.

Ranma felt a shiver going through her again, and this time it was much more pleasant as, without pause, Akitsu started to use the soap and a small loofa on Ranma's back before moving around Ranma, and gently pouring more water over her now. As Ranma sat there docilely, Akitsu continued to wipe her down, starting from her feet and then moving up. Feeling the redhead's breasts, Akitsu paused and seemed to be fascinated with them for a moment, almost playing with them for a few seconds before Ranma moaned out her name. "Akitsu, that, that's a bit much for in the baths ismmm, isn't it?"

That seemed to take Akitsu aback, but she didn't stop for a few more seconds, now playing with her Sun-sama's nipples directly before she gently leaned forward and took one of Ranma's nipples in her mouth. "Ahh, A, Akitsu..." Ranma moaned, feeling a series of extremely unfamiliar feelings bursting throughout her body, almost causing her body to go weak. The redhead could barely muster enough energy to push Akitsu away. "N, none of that, please. I, I'm not totally comfortable with that kind of thing in, in this body, no matter how good it feels."

At that Akitsu paused, pouting almost. But she nodded and moved to dump hot water over Ranma's head. A second later she gasped as she felt Ranma's excitement smack into her lower chest, pulling back. She accidentally, or Ranma thought it was accidentally, anyway, took his length between her breasts, and Ranma groaned before reaching forward and pushing her away. "Enough of that! Or else we will never get to the whole ritual part that supposed to happen later," he said, somewhat relieved at the fact that that feeling had been even more intense than what Akitsu had done with his-then-her nipples.

Akitsu smiled happily at that, the warm smile on her face a little wider than was normal. Ranma smiled back, leaning down and kissing her very, very thoroughly, wringing out a panting muffled moan before slowly pulling back, their tongues flicking in midair around one another before he pulled back. "Your turn," he murmured.

With the same amount of loving attention Akitsu had shown him, Ranma washed her in turn. He started from her arms, marveling at the strength in them, how her muscles felt like corded steel under his touch, her skin like silk it was so smooth, before washing her back slowly and lovingly. Her lower legs and her feet got much the same attention, and Akitsu found that her toes and the arch of her feet were very sensitive. She began to let out little breathy sighs as Ranma worked on them, practically massaging them in the same manner that Uzume had been doing to Chiho earlier. Then it was Ranma's turn to play with her breasts. He spent several moments simply weighing them, gently feeling them, his fingers kneading into them, before he began playing with her pink nipples, finding them as hard as tiny pebbles under his fingers, wonderingly noting how different they felt than the rest of her.

By this point Akitsu was quivering on the stool, her hips lifting her off it slightly as she let out little whimpers and huffs, breathing heavily. Her huffs were of a different timbre to someone who was out of breath or had pushed themselves hard or anything of that nature. Ranma couldn't quite describe it, nor was he really interested in trying. Instead Ranma decided to move on. He moved down her chest, to her stomach, feeling the muscles there, marveling at the strength of them and smiling almost in delight as she let loose a little breathy giggle as he stroked her side. "You're ticklish!" he said with a laugh.

She looked at him quizzically, and he poked her side, causing that same reaction. "Yep, ticklish," he said with a nod.

Akitsu flushed, but since it looked as if that was a good thing, she decided to simply smile at him again, that same small, warm smile she always showed when they were alone. At that sight Ranma just had to kiss her again and leaned up, pulling her nearly off the stool into his lap.

After he did so, he debated moving onto her thighs, and after a moment's hesitation did so, cleaning them slowly and efficiently, but not lingering as his male mind was demanding he do. Then he did something that took Akitsu's breath

away. He leaned forward slightly again and kissed her right above the small thatch of tan hair that marked her most private area, his eyes dark with promise as he looked up at her face from his position there, between her legs.

That caused her to shiver in something like delight, and she could not stop herself from gasping, her hips now bucking entirely off the stool.

Ranma smiled in delight but pulled back and gently doused her with more water before standing and gesturing for her to follow him. "Come on; let's take the bath now."

The two of them sat in the bath, which was a little larger than the Tendos' but not quite big enough for them to sit side by side. Instead they sat with Ranma behind Akitsu, his arms around her waist, just enjoying one another's company, the passion within them banked but still present as they kissed or as Ranma gently lifted her breasts or nipped at her throat. She continued to let out these little whimpering moans that delighted him, then Ranma slowly slid down, dunking his head into the water, and taking Akitsu with him.

They broke then out of the water a moment later, and just sat there for a time, until a knock on the door broke their reverie at being together like this. "Ranma, Akitsu, you had best not have done anything too illicit in there," Miya said, trying and failing to sound grouchy. Even considering her normal rules, there was just something so poignant about Akitsu and Ranma's relationship.

Ranma knew her though and could tell it was a front. "Hah, no way! You'd probably make us clean the floors with our tongues if we did."

As Miya laughed in response, Akitsu gently stepped out of the bath, flashing her lower legs and bright, almost pink cleft at Ranma, causing him to gulp and stare. The two of them pulled on long robes and moved out into the changing area, where Miya waited them.

She smiled at the two of them, shaking her head in mock sternness before waving them off. "Go on, the room is ready for you. It's the same room where we looked after you when you were injured, Ranma. And I've even taken the liberty of removing any and all recording devices and have made certain that Kocho is over with Uzume and Chiho and that the others know not to return until tomorrow."

"Does that mean you're going to go out for the night too?" Ranma asked 'innocently.'

"Cheeky brat. This is my house, you know," Miya said with a laugh but shook her head. "No, I think I'll stay here. I doubt the two of you will be that loud, after all. Will you?" she finished darkly, her Hanya mask again appearing behind one shoulder, its eyes gleaming.

Both of them quickly shook their heads in unison, and she smiled warmly, the mask disappearing. Then she moved forward and kissed Akitsu right in the middle of her broken mark before doing the same with Ranma, whispering, "Good luck, my little Feather; good luck, Ranma."

Although I wonder if you are really prepared for what is going to happen here, hehehe. A Sekirei's passions should not be underestimated, and ones like Akitsu, who has been denied so long... The image that springs to mind is of a dam being swept away in a sudden tumult, Miya thought as she moved away, only to frown at that. Hmm, perhaps I should stop by Kocho's rooms and borrow her headphones, just in case.

Upstairs they found Cologne waiting outside the room, gesturing them in. "Go in," she said with a cackle. "It's ready for you."

Inside Ranma could see a wide circle of strange marks, and writing in some foreign language had been chalked out around the center of the room and up on the ceiling. Another series of marks had been set in the center of this outer sphere, a series of symbols that Ranma recognized easily as matching that on Akitsu's forehead. On top of that symbol, a bed had been set up in the center of the circle, carefully enough to not obscure any of the image.

After a few minutes of staring, Ranma gently pulled Akitsu towards the bed, his earlier desire suddenly coming back for some reason as he looked at her. He then smiled at her, his expression both loving and anticipatory. "Come on, love, let's get rid of that mark."

To his surprise, though, Akitsu paused, looking thoughtful. He waited then, simply looking at her and waiting for her to speak. Eventually she did, looking down at the floor. "Ah... This, is this, are we doing this just because we, because you want to help me heal from my broken status? It, if that is the case, if you would rather wait... I..." Earlier she had been far too concerned about her own issues, but she knew from previous experience with Ranma that he had

problems with how fast their relationship had gone. Now they were about to take the final plunge, and for all the little signs he had given that he had come to love her, she was still worrying that at least part of this was because Ranma was just trying to help her, along with a smattering of lust.

Ranma reached forward, cupping Akitsu's face with his hands. "Akitsu, you, you know that talking about emotions and stuff isn't easy for me. Blame my old man, blame my life on the road, blame my being a guy, whatever my body looks like." This won a small smile from Akitsu, and Ranma plowed on. "But despite all that, I know that, that I love you. Eventually we'd be having sex, sex anyway, so, so why not now? Why not use that to help free you, so that I can become your Ashikabi in truth? I love you. This is, this is just another way I can show that. Okay?"

Her breath becoming heavy at the amount of passion Ranma's words conveyed despite his stuttering, Akitsu nodded, her smile so sweet and heartfelt it nearly made Ranma weep. "Ahh... I love you too, Sun-sama, Ranma..."

His control fraying again Ranma kissed Akitsu ardently, pulling her against him, his hands busy on her back, going up and down, kneading, stroking, simply dragging his fingers up and down her spine. At the same time Akitsu tried to meld their bodies together, her own passions rising again from the banked ebb they had been at in the baths. She flipped one leg over Ranma's waist and began to grind her core against his, never letting loose their lip lock as she almost hopped into his arms, her legs around his waist.

She only pulled back when Ranma began to work at the belt of her bathrobe, trying to get it apart. "Tear it..." she whispered before leaning in and kissing Ranma again.

Ranma obliged and tore the belt apart, letting her robe fall open. He then deposited her lightly on the bed, pulling back slightly to take in her body again. "You're so beautiful, Akitsu..." As he spoke, Ranma leaned forward, taking one of her nipples in his mouth and sucking gently, then harder as Akitsu began to breathe more heavily, her fingers in his hair.

Sucking harder at her nipple, Ranma's tongue began to work on it, his other hand rising up to grab at her other breast, causing Akitsu to throw her back at the new sensations rocking through her body. He grinned up at her, then switched to her other nipple giving it the same attention. After several minutes of this Akitsu pulled him up into a heated kiss, their tongues once more dueling beginning in midair then diving into her mouth. Then she pushed him away slightly, reaching down to his robe and pulling it open.

This revealed Ranma's turgid length, and Akitsu flushed, the sensation going through her redoubling at the sight for some reason. A part of her wondered how Ranma would taste, what it would feel like to take his cock into her mouth. But she was far too turned on for that kind of play at the moment. There would be time later to attempt various acts or kinks. Right now she needed Ranma inside her, a need she could barely understand, let alone show. She reached down and grabbed at him, working her hands down his length, then pulling him to her as she leaned her back down onto the bed.

For one moment Ranma paused, hovering over her, then, at her slow nod, he worked his hips forward, one hand moving between them to help guide his cock into her. At the same time Ranma concentrated on his ki, feeling it pulsing, responding to their current activity, his hips still inching forward without any direction on his part. And as Akitsu whimpered into his shoulder, he began to gather his life energies, focusing them. It was weird, very strange to focus them there, and yet, at the moment of entry, somehow, in some weird fashion, he found the connection. That brief instant where his ki and Akitsu's merged.

She didn't hiss or look like she was in pain, and so he continued, listening to her letting out these little whimpers and squeaks as she looked down to where they were joined. She then pulled him down hard, and Ranma bottomed out into her.

The sensation of his full length suddenly being engulfed in Akitsu's tight, hot wetness nearly drove that connection out of his mind. "Fuck, you're so warm, Akitsu!"

As Akitsu whimpered and giggled lightly at that, her eyes shining, Ranma had to concentrate hard, harder than he ever had before on keeping control of his energy as he felt that connection. He even closed his eyes; he couldn't deal with looking at Akitsu right now: her loveliness would simply unman Ranma, and he couldn't let that happen. Couldn't let himself be distracted from the task at hand.

Akitsu gasped louder than she had ever made any noise before, her hips rising up against Ranma's in a moment, of sheer, unadulterated ecstasy. Nothing in her life had ever prepared her for this, nothing she had read, nothing she had seen, nothing Uzume had told her or that she had felt before by being with Ranma had prepared her for this. Akitsu felt as if all of her body was on fire, and she gasped and trembled. Yet at the same time, somehow, she knew it

could be better. She knew that the block was still blocking something within her. Then Ranma was kissing her, and even that thought fled, that sense of incompleteness fading to the back of her mind.

As Akitsu started to writhe below him, Ranma could feel his endurance waning quickly. Even as he tried to control the ki within him, he could feel it, his body slowly reaching a peak for which he had no previous experience with. It had to happen, it had to happen soon and when it did, the connection between his and Akitsu's ki would fade, Ranma knew it.

With a grunt of effort, Ranma pushed his own ki deeper into Akitsu, trying to feel where the block was, his own ki moving around hers and within hers. It was like a single red string winding its way into a rope, joining the whole yet still apart. And in this manner Ranma found it, found the knot in her key, the block containing her power and emotions.

With his target in his mind's eye, Ranma began to gently push his energy forward into it, trying to undo it from within. It was hard, it was very hard. There was no truly exact metaphor to use for this moment, but the description of a knot Ranma's mind had come up with was perhaps the best way. Ranma was that single line of string within the knot, trying to push and pull out at it from within, in order to unravel the knot and push on through the rope beyond. But if Ranma removed his senses from that string, that knot disappeared, he couldn't find it again. It had to be broken from within. And at the same time, Ranma had to deal with his physical body's urges and desires.

But he was Ranma, and one thing, one mantra above all else had been drilled into him from the earliest age: Don't lose. Whatever happens, whatever you have to do, don't lose, not for real, not when it matters. Be the best and don't lose. While Ranma knew, intellectually speaking, he wasn't the best—Miya was still well above his own skill level—this mattered, it mattered a lot to the young woman he had come to love with every fiber of his being. And when the chips were down, Ranma refused to lose.

So held back his own peak even as Akitsu whined and moaned under him, her own orgasm coming closer and closer, little peaks hitting Akitsu now with all the thunderous report of a four-point-five earthquake. It was a little better than the one previous orgasm she'd had, when she and Ranma had had their first make out session. Yet something within held her back from hitting the true heights she should be hitting given their current activity, and even as the feeling of pleasure rose in her body, Akitsu could also feel a certain amount of panic, a part of her mind that wasn't blissed out on pleasure knowing that if Ranma did not succeed, she would never truly bond with Ranma as a Sekirei should to his or her loved one

How long Ranma worked, he didn't know, time became immaterial and so great was his concentration that the physical world went away, the sensations pulsing at the back of his mind but kept away by sheer willpower. But finally, finally, he was able to push at the knot and unravel it, pushing away the excess energy that had somehow built up there. The knot disappeared, shattering almost, as the force that it had been containing behind it roared through, blazing away through the knot, straightening the 'rope' out.

Back in the physical world, Ranma and Akitsu's bodies glowed with ki, white and blue light searing. The energy flashed out like an explosion almost, but the absorption array activated to keep the energy within, and it slowly grounded itself in the mark beneath the bed before flaring out. As that energy disappeared, though, it was swiftly replaced by another, the power of Akitsu and Ranma's bond forming instantly in its place. Wide bond wings made of ice but looking like the feathers of a swan almost flared out to either side of Akitsu, so large they encompassed the room from one side to another, smashing into the absorption sphere and almost smashing through it before slowly being forced to curl back and above the two lovers creating a canopy almost of ice feathers above them.

As this was all going on Ranma could no longer hold himself back. The sensations of his body flooded his mind all at once and he almost roared like a beast as he his cock erupted, emptying himself within Akitsu, both his energy and his cum spearing into her.

At the same time Akitsu came, a near-scream erupting from her lips so loud it almost tore out her throat. "RAAAANMA!" The feelings she had been feeling since they started to make love multiplied by a factor of ten and hurled her over the edge with a suddenness that made her eyes roll up in her head and her body go completely limp, collapsing back under Ranma.

Ranma fell too, gasping, as he barely could make sure he fell to the side. But he quickly twisted his head to stare at Akitsu, who was now looking at him, her eyes wide and almost unseeing despite the fact that for a brief moment before, she had smiled as wide as any normal woman would at a moment like this. At the same time, as he looked at her, he could see the mark over her forehead disappearing, replaced by another mark at the back of her head.

{End Lemon}

Licking dry lips, Akitsu had to wait a moment to let her throat recover from her earlier scream, a part of her somewhat bemused that she could even make a sound that loud, let alone one in such circumstances. But even so, there was something that had to be said right now and she started to speak softly, reaching a tender, almost disbelieving hand to Ranma's cheek. "With this, our bond is sealed, me to thee and thy to me. By the ice I control through the power of my soul, do I pledge myself to thee, my Sun-sama. Let our enemies freeze under the power of my love."

As they slowly pulled away, Ranma smiled at her and gently stroked her forehead, winking at her. "Well, I suppose it's a good thing to get it all official now, isn't it?"

To his surprise and delight, Akitsu began to laugh, to honestly and truly laugh aloud, and then she leaned forward kissing him again, causing him to harden within her once more. Needless to say, the two of them weren't quite done just yet.

This was much to the consternation of Miya, who was currently learning the fact that headphones were not nearly good enough at blocking out noise as she had hoped. Still, even Miya could not begrudge the two lovers this, their first night together. As she found a CD of Strauss to listen to, she reflected that tomorrow would be soon enough for the rest of the world to intrude on them once more. *Although I wonder if the world will be ready for them in turn*, she thought with a laugh.

End Chapter

So there you have it. Akitsu and Ranma have finally done the deed, and Akitsu is now free of her Broken status. Now, I wonder how Minaka and the others will reply to this... HOHOHOHOHO.

As always, hope you enjoyed it, and if so please leave a review.

Chapter 13: Chapter 13

I can't draw, ergo, the original's ain't mine.

This story won first place in July's small story poll thanks to my editors all voting for it this time - normally they vote for different stories – beating out FILFy 1,622 to 1,534 despite FILFy doing better over here on fanfic 364 to 102.

Edited 12/10/19. This has been edited by Hiryo, me via Grammarly and Kariston Draconis now. Hopefully this means that we have now caught the majority of the small mistakes.

Chapter 1# While You Were Umm...

While Ranma and Akitsu were otherwise occupied, the rest of the world did not stop moving. The rain kept a lid on everything citywide. Even Minaka could understand that no one wanted to be out and about on a day like this. He groused about it quite a lot, growling about how once he was in charge, things would be different, or, "When I truly do have the power of the gods, everything will be run much more efficiently, none of this unpredictable weather nonsense."

Thankfully, no one was around to hear his ramblings, else he would have had to deal with making more people disappear thanks to their believing he was crazy, which he patently was not. After all, he knew what could be had if he was able to take control of enough Noritos. Thus, it wasn't insanity to say that he would be able to achieve the powers of the gods. Rather, it was the purest height of ambition, and yet even that was nothing compared to what he would do once he had that power.

And once the rain ended, everyone started to react as he had anticipated. Watching the screen that was tracking the movements of everyone with an Ashikabi power structure, he laughed maniacally. "Yes, yes, let the chaos rise and take them all, oh this should be fun!"

The Sekirei were not the only ones who changed once they were bonded to their chosen ones, those Ashikabi also changed. Humans who mated or even just exchanged DNA with Sekirei took in some of their power, becoming faster, stronger, better than most humans, although, Minaka now knew, there were other ways to gain that power, as the martial artists like the bastard Ranma had shown him. Still, Ashikabi could be tracked by their changed biosignatures, and Minaka had found out how, creating the equipment and designing the intricate web of near-invisible sensors the city over to watch not just the Sekirei but also the Ashikabi, even when they weren't using the easy-to-track MBI cards.

Now he watched in a series of giant TV screens spread out over a wall the number of Ashikabi and Sekirei on the move. There were several groups of single Ashikabi who hadn't joined the Nerima alliance on the move now into Nerima. His message, that the four free Sekirei were in Nerima had grabbed their attention something fierce, as he had expected. The new Disciplinary Squad was also moving in, slower, than the rest, waiting to attack at the most opportune moment. There were groups of Sekirei also moving in without their Ashikabi, the largest of which was a group around the signal showing a single digit, Mutsu's greater power signature being easy to spot.

He frowned though as his sensors noticed something off. Izumo House was completely uncovered. *What the... Miya should not have known about the sensors!* Minaka, of course, knew Miya had known about the cameras around Izumo House. She occasionally destroyed them, but their agreement was such that she didn't then go out of her way to stop his work crews from putting up new ones.

But sometime during the night, she had destroyed not only all the cameras she should have known about but the sensors she had never even shown she knew about at all. "Damn it, when did that happen and why?" With that thought, Minaka shouted down at the observation department, asking when that had happened.

To his surprise, he got his ex-wife instead of someone more easily bullied. "You!" Takami replied, her voice somewhere beyond a roar. "You asshole! What the hell have you done!? I'm seeing nearly every Ashikabi and a lot of Sekirei on the move into Nerima, where there was already more than a sufficiency. You're pouring oil and gunpowder onto a simmering inferno! I ought to come up there and smack your ass as flat as your sense of decency!"

"Takami-dear, you really need to work on your insults, if you take away the physical, you really have next to nothing in your repertoire. Now, please, tell me what I want to know and none of your blustering," Minaka said, his voice serious. If Miya was on the move despite their deal, that was dangerous, even to him and his new, near-to-godly-form.

Takami's teeth ground audibly in the pickup, but eventually she replied, "Fine! But I swear to god Minaka, if any innocents get caught in the crossfire, I will have your head. As for your question, Miya annihilated your vaunted invisible sensors at around eight last night. If you kept normal hours, you might have already known that. She did so by going over to each of them in turn and smashing them with that damn ladle or just stomping on them! She knew where they all were you ass! Matsuo played you, the two of them have known about your secret sensors all along."

Minaka scowled at that but then frowned his voice shifting to one of scientific curiosity. "Hmm, I wonder why she went to that effort?"

The reason for this move by 01 would not become apparent for another few hours, and by that time, the results would be apparent to everyone. But of course, the Sekirei were no longer the only players in the game...

OOOOOO

How does my grandmother deal with this?! Shampoo thought to herself, as she stood between two of her friends/rivals (it was a **thin** line with Joketsuzoku), who had been arguing vociferously about what kind of uniform to wear in their new hideout/business. *Why does it matter anyway!?*

Under her direction, the four younger Joketsuzoku had found and purchased a small café situated right along one of the main roads connecting two of the city's districts that had been closing down due to the owner wanting to get out of Shin-Teito and away from the craziness. That had let them drive a hard bargain, and they had moved in that very day, getting out of the rain and setting up their tents inside, waiting for the Elder to return. She hadn't, but she had called them and told the foursome to get on with creating their cover here. This had, after breakfast, sparked the current argument.

The two other girls had been going at it for a while before she stepped in, and pushed them apart, with her best rival Cot Ton looking on in amusement. "Alright Rin Ser, this is idiotic. You know that this café is only a cover for a few days. In fact, we could have just as easily gone for a food cart if we didn't have to get special permission for them for some bizarre Japanese reason. We're not going to be here for very long, at least I don't think so, so why does the kind of uniform we're going to wear matter? And Panther, why are we even bothering with uniforms in the first place?"

"Because they will help us blend in," Panther retorted. She was younger than the others by a few months and was the daughter of a woman whose ancestors had mixed their blood with that of the ancient Musk, hence her animal name. She didn't look it though, being shorter and rather more self-effacing most of the time than the rest of Shampoo's age group.

She used a massive battleax that Shampoo would have trouble lifting and was a bit of a berserker going into battle at times. Looks, especially among Amazons, could be deceiving. She also was a bit of a Japanese fangirl for some bizarre reason, which often put her at odds with the others, particularly Rin Ser whose family had suffered prior to coming to the Chinese Amazons in World War 2.

"Because we're gorgeous foreign girls who are supposed to be here to blend in. But with all the Sekirei or whatever they are around, we don't want to stick out at all. If we can set this place up and make it really look like a legit business, we're golden. But unless you all want to do with odd men coming around and trying to 'wing' us like those idiots from last night, then we need to do this."

Shampoo grinned viciously as did Cot Ton who quipped, "I don't know, putting more men in their places like we did those buffoons sounds fun." The two best fighters of their generation shared a wicked giggle as they remembered what happened the night before.

Flashback:

Having secured the café they would use as cover, the four Amazons had taken the rest of the late afternoon and early evening to go shopping, and, because they were without adult supervision and in a foreign land, they decided to also purchase some food and drinks for a party. They had purchased all the foodstuffs they would need to open the café in a few days, and were happily chattering away at one another in Japanese about various sweets and other things they wanted to try, while also training their ability to speak the local dialect when Shampoo noticed something.

She had just turned away in a huff as Cot Ton made fun of her accent. Though the best of them in martial ability, Shampoo's grasp of foreign languages was a running joke among the rest of her sisters. Her eyes however had glimpsed a young man entering the store. He was a decently dressed fellow, in a good, sharp business suit, with slicked-back hair and a good body build for a non-warrior. In other words, there was nothing about him that should have caught her attention. Except for the fact that he looked to be arguing with someone both on a phone and in

person. The other man wore a normal city man appearance: jeans and a muscle-T. But they had both been looking towards Shampoo and her fellow Amazons a moment ago.

She turned back to Cot Ton and engaged them all in conversation once more, but kept the two men in mind, and, when the man in the suit walked off, kept watching the other man whenever she could. Because of this, she noticed when several more men of similar age and appearance showed up as the girls shifted from one store to another. "Don't look now girls," Shampoo whispered in Putonghua, "But we seem to have attracted a following."

The others, without making any move that could give the game away, also began to look around and noticed the groups of young men who were now watching them from various points around the street. "Hmm, a welcoming committee you think?" Cot Ton asked.

"Oh please, please don't let this be like it was in Hong Kong when we beat up a group of idiot males only to find out they were connected to the Triad!" Rin Ser groaned. "I really don't want the old ghoul to decide she has to set another example of why our tribe is exempt from their games. I still have nightmares about what she did to that one local leader guy."

Ignoring the disrespect sent her grandmother's way with the ease of long practice, (and general agreement with the sentiment,) Shampoo shook her head. "Nope, this looks like something connected to the Sekirei or some such."

It had only taken the Amazons a few hours to learn about the Sekirei plan and how nearly all of them were supposedly extremely good-looking women. That had amused them all greatly: the idea of this possible alien race being made up of mostly women on the one part, and the fact it showed that the galaxy at large knew about the primacy of the female gender.

"Good, then there's no reason we can't roll them for some cash right?" Panther said bluntly. "I want me munchies darn it!"

"Ugh, you and your weird accents," Shampoo muttered, shaking her head. "Still, that is an idea. Now, let's see if we can find a convenient alleyway."

The four Chinese Amazons continued on, talking in Japanese as the group of men gathered. Then they cut through an alleyway between two streets, a relatively wide one but still an alleyway, with no doorways within. The men had followed them, and one of them, the man Shampoo had seen talking to the man in a suit earlier smirked. "Heh, like lambs to the slaughter. Now, remember boys, first kiss, first served. They might fight back, but they aren't allowed to kill, or use weapons or elemental attacks against humans so we should be able to just overwhelm them. Let's go!"

From both ends of the alleyway, the men advanced grinning. The four Amazons paused in the center of the alleyway, looking around them in what might look like concern to the unwary, but was really more... analytical than that term usually warranted.

The man who had organized this little gathering, over the stern objections of his contact with Izumi Higa, in the belief that these four were unwinged Sekirei, smirked as he took a step forward. "Now girls, you know how this goes. We've got you outnumbered, and you can't break the Sekirei plan's rules, so you can't possibly fight us all. How about we just go about this peacefully huh? Get to know one another, maybe over a few drinks? Who knows, you might..."

That was as far as he got before Shampoo had launched herself forward into a kick. The kick gave a lot of the men an excellent upskirt shot, but also placed her foot right in the face of the man speaking, hurling him backward through his fellows. "You going to talk day long, or fight?" she taunted as she landed where he had been standing, her hands going down her sides as she smoothed out her skirt as she looked around her challengingly at the suddenly warier men. "Well, what you waiting for?"

That did it, the group charging forward as one from both sides of the alleyway. And soon enough the sounds emanating from the alleyway caused many passersby to run away. And it certainly was not the four foreign girls begging for mercy.

End Flashback

"I wonder if we're going to get in trouble for that?" Rin Ser mused. "Putting them in among the burnables I mean."

"Silly Rin Ser, everything is burnable. If something doesn't burn you're just not trying hard enough." retorted Cot Ton. The daughter of the village blacksmith, some of them felt Cot Ton had an unhealthy obsession with fire.

"Still, we don't want to have to deal with more like those fools, even if they were a nice source for local cash," Panther

interjected. "So we need to look legit, which means uniforms. And because we're foreign we either have to wear costumes and try to look local, or emphasize the fact we're foreign. Hence the Qipao."

"And that's what I have a problem with!" Rin Ser said, becoming serious again. "The idea of opening up a café is fun, it makes sense for so many foreign girls to work together, and Chinese food is popular here, I get all that. But that's already practically a stereotype, and I refuse to turn from a stereotype into a cliché!"

Shampoo rolled her eyes. "And again, why does that matter? We're not going to be here long enough to get to know the locals, and besides, they're Japanese men! With few exceptions, they're all going to be pigs anyway."

"It matters to me, okay! I am a modern Chinese Amazon, I'm not going to pander to these Japanese views of foreigners! Not after what they did in the wars to us."

Shampoo rolled her eyes for a second time. This was stupid, but working out a compromise was part of being a Pack Leader in training. "Fine! Panther, she's got a point. I like how I look in a Qipao as much as the next girl, but there's blending in for good reasons and then there's putting yourself on display for the wrong ones. You can choose the uniform Rin Ser, so long as my grandmother doesn't overrule you. But I'll expect you to be the meet and greet girl for the first few days as recompense all right?"

The other Amazon nodded, and Shampoo was about to nod back but then stopped as they all looked up, hearing the sounds of pattering feet above them on the roof. "There's too many to be the elder," Cot Ton stated, looking over at Shampoo. "Do you think that some of those aliens?"

After only a day or so of asking around while getting to know the renamed Tokyo, the story that the Sekirei, the women whose powers and abilities had brought their elder's attention to this place, might be aliens had reached their ears. The idea of them being aliens had amused them all, showing, in their minds at least, that even aliens knew women were the superior gender since so many more of the Sekirei were women than men.

"Let's go and see," Shampoo said, hopping to her feet and moving towards the door.

"Your grandmother said we were supposed to keep a low profile," Panther objected.

"That just means we can't be seen," Shampoo retorted, having become bored waiting around for her grandmother. "Now come on."

Outside the four of them easily took to the rooftops, hiding in among the machinery on the café's roof, where they stopped and stared at the number of people moving around the street nearby. Just in sight, they could see three different groups moving along, staying well clear of one another so it was obvious they weren't together. One to their left they could barely make out but Cot Ton who had the best eyes of them all said that was a group of four. The other, the people who had gone over their own roof, was a group of seven and were still visible easily as they raced along. And in the third direction from their current hiding place was a third group, who seemed to be moving along slower than the rest, comprised of two men and two women.

"Is it just me, or are they all moving in the same direction?" asked Cot Ton, whispering the words into Shampoo's ear.

The others were too busy giggling under their breath and nudging one another, their eyes set on one of the group that had moved over their rooftop a moment ago. Racing over the rooftops at the head of a group of six other women was a man, and what a man! He was an older looking man, mid-20s perhaps. He had short-cropped silver-colored hair and grey eyes, thin of waist but wide in the shoulders, wearing a decent looking outfit designed to accentuate movement, as well as an extremely handsome, serious and calm face.

Even Shampoo could barely take her eyes off him, he was that pretty. She could hear Panther was mumbling something about 'older bishounen', whatever that meant.

Despite having just witnessed the second-best male ass she had ever seen however, Shampoo kept her eyes flickering in every direction and nodded in response to her rival's question. "Yes. They are. And I think we need to follow them, don't you?"

With that, Shampoo and the others raced after the nearest group of Sekirei, the one led by the pretty boy. He really was quite handsome, Shampoo thought, looking at him from a nearby hiding place. Every time one of the Sekirei seemed to be looking around them rather than straight ahead, the Amazons would duck into cover with the ease of trained and experienced hunters. Their prey this time might not be of the normal four-legged variety, but that didn't matter to their instincts.

But this was easier than it should have been because these Sekirei didn't seem to have as much situational awareness as most Joketsuzoku did. *It's like they think they're the top of the food chain* the village champion (under 30) thought to herself, almost giggling at the idea. This was a lot like the stalking games young Joketsuzoku were trained with when they were younger, one Joketsuzoku stalking the other through their village or through the nearby forest.

And yet, as Shampoo took the lead, she frowned, thinking that perhaps the man had noticed them and had simply not done anything yet. He stopped to look around him with a bit more wariness at one or two points as they moved into the district called Nerima, but he seemed loathe to act.

As they stalked the large group of Sekirei, the layout of the city around them changed from an ultra-modern urban sprawl to barely modern suburban squish. The number of apartments and business offices decreased, the buildings shrinking and the general feel of the area becoming less modern with more wood and stone than concrete and steel. They also started to see fewer people around, and those that managed to spot them – there were few such, Shampoo was appalled, did these Japanese just not look up? - frowned or began to vacate the streets. Soon enough, though it was at the end of the morning rush hour there was little traffic around any longer.

Now the group of Sekirei leaped down from the rooftops onto the road below, spreading out as they did, into a loose wedge formation. Two of them quickly leaped back up onto the roofs while two more of them moved along the sides peering into alleyways and side streets, with the furthestmost back, the pretty boy, simply marching along the street openly with two others.

"Remember, we want to take them both basically intact," the man said, as Shampoo slipped off the roof, climbing down the side of the building and hiding in the shadow there, leaning out her head to listen. "Number nine is known to us, and we know Tsukiumi is going to put up one hell of a fight. Isolate her, and I can overwhelm her easily enough, but you're not to try to take her on yourselves unless she's already been weakened by some of the other competitors."

"If we're searching for that stuck up bitch we should spread out more," grumbled one of the others who wore a traditional-looking kimono minus the sleeves with a wide hakama tying it together, but the man shook his head. "No Juusa, we know the address where she'll be and where that little girl with the plant powers stays. Although honestly, I'm not exactly happy about acting on information so easily handed to us by MBI. Minaka is playing some kind of game here I just know it." The man finished speaking in a mumble, one hand rising from his sword blade to pull at his scarf.

One of the other women cackled. "Aren't we all playing a game here, Mutsu?"

"You know what I mean Dorothy!" the man barked back shaking his head. "I don't like how our master has gone all-in on this either." None of the others responded, while the three Shampoo could see from her position looked confused, as they glanced back to the man. It was evident they didn't agree with him or didn't understand, a sentiment Shampoo understood since she too wondered what this Mutsu meant.

In actuality, Mutsu was **very** worried about this. One thing, he'd done some research on his own, and that crazy girl Kodachi was living in the Nerima district, where Tsukiumi and Kusano were supposed to be living along with the other two unwinged Sekirei, who thankfully Mutsu had convinced his master not to go after. Mutsu would not add anything to their firepower and Mutsu in no way wanted that pervert anywhere near Mikogami. And Mikogami had lost interest in Shiina once he learned that #107 was a guy.

For his part, Mutsu had no desire whatsoever to run into her again, and he also knew that the one human man he tangled with at the zoo had also lived in this area. The rumors of some kind of alliance between the smaller Sekirei and their Masters were telling. Regardless, Mutsu had his orders and his orders had brought himself, and the six most combat-capable of his master's flock into Nerima.

It was an all or nothing grab, and if they ran into either of the other power players, West or East, it would be a winning hand, simply because Mutsu was here. He knew that, but he feared that his master was severely underestimating Ranma or the opposition he and the other natives could muster. *Or perhaps*, Mutsu thought, scowling as he marched through the almost empty streets, *my master has made a deal with the devil from the high tower. I'm not certain which idea bothers me more.*

Best to remove any variables I can as we go, keep us together, work as a unit, and know when to fold this hand I've been dealt as best I can when it becomes unavoidable, Mutsu thought. Thankfully his master had given him command here, rather than insisting he come along as he sometimes did. That would've been a variable he really didn't want to deal with right now. *And speaking of variables...*

He turned towards where several of the Amazons were hiding and shouted, "You can come out now!"

For a moment, Shampoo hoped that her sisters wouldn't react response to that bit of blatant taunting, but after a moment, two of them did, Panther and Cot Ton. Seeing the two of them hop out into the open she sighed, hopping out herself.

Though he didn't show it, Mutsu was surprised: he'd only sensed one of them but now was faced with four extremely good-looking young women, all of whom looked as if they knew their way around a fight and were wielding weapons of all types. All of them were somewhat pretty, although nowhere near as top-heavy as most Sekirei tended to be, wearing a variety of silk clothing. They all looked extremely competent and had a narrow-eyed focus on him for some reason rather than his fellow Sekirei's. He could tell at a glance all of them were human, and he frowned. "We have no quarrel with you, why are you ladies following us?"

"We wondering what you doing?" said one of them, with red and orange hair. Her voice was heavily accented, as she stared at him, a certain predatory look in her eyes that made Mutsu hide a flinch as she moved to stand in the center of the foursome, crossing her arms and suddenly holding two large heavy-looking tulwars in her hands. The woman next to her, a slightly prettier girl with purple hair, was holding two large maces, their heads round and somewhat comedic looking, but Mutsu figured they were real weapons despite that.

"What we are about is no business of yours," he said, one hand slowly falling to the sword at his side, pulling it up out of its belt, and holding it loose at his side. "Judging by your accent you are all foreigners. Perhaps you don't know about the Sekirei Game, but we are all Sekirei and we are going about our business of challenging our fellows, as allowed in the game. We have no quarrel with humans, particularly foreigners."

The girl grinned, flicking her swords around in an intricate display. "And what if we think we want to make it our business?" said one of the others, her voice much less accented. She was the smallest of the quartet but was wielding a battle ax of all things, and Mutsu's eyes widened wondering where the heck she had pulled it from.

Himeko, another close-range specialist who wielded a double-sided blade asked that aloud and the girl winked at her. "Wouldn't you like to know?" she teased.

The two in the center however were still staring at him, and Mutsu frowned, asking abruptly, "You're not related to a Kodachi Kuno, are you? Uses a ribbon as a whip?"

That caused much blinking among the foursome, as they quickly fell into a discussion in Chinese that none of the other Sekirei or even Mutsu could follow – he'd chosen to learn English when at MBI as part of the Disciplinary Squad. Finally, one of them shook her head, "No, no Kodachi among us. We haven't even heard that name before."

"Thank goodness for small mercies," Mutsu muttered, before concentrating on the moment once more. "As I said, we have no quarrel with you. We're here on a mission, and you're not part of the Game. Walk away and no one will get hurt."

This was precisely the wrong thing to say to the prideful Joketsuzoku, and even Shampoo, who had been willing to think of trying to calm things down at least, scowled at him. This man was dismissing them as if they were no threat! Even Shampoo wasn't about to stand for that. "We have a quarrel with you! We show you we not weak!" she shouted in her pidgin Japanese, the best she could muster at this point.

"What did I say?" Mutsu shouted as all four young women made for him.

The other Sekirei were quick to pull out their own weapons, but Mutsu waved them off, just as quickly. "Spread out, watch for anyone else taking an interest, I can handle these four."

As Mutsu finished speaking, he blocked one blow with the still sheathed blade of his sword, then slammed the hilt of it point first into that woman's chest, hurling her backward. He then twisted, ducked underneath a blow from the double mace wielder, only to get hit by a second blow landing on his shoulder, which deadened his shoulder for a moment but did no serious damage.

He rolled with that blow, coming up underneath her guard, and grabbing the mace's shaft with one hand, twisting her around one hip, then flicking his sword out in a quick strike that sent his sheath out to slam point first into the double-tulwar wielders forehead, sending her ass over kettle. Then he was forced to dodge the battleax which slammed into where he had been standing a second ago coming up quickly in a rebound, faster than he had expected.

Still, he blocked it easily enough, the training he had done to try to match Karasuba coming to the fore, even as the

hit slammed him up and into the air. He stumbled backward, desperately regaining his balance, feeling almost panicky for a moment as he felt his connection to the earth break for a second.

The four pressed in, with the ax wielder throwing a massive blow at his side. He blocked it with his sword though and twisted away, kicking out hard into the short girl's chest and hurling her backward to slam headfirst into the nearby building.

Then as he regained his control, he shifted backward quickly and then used the reason he had his fellow Sekirei leave him to fight these mad gajins alone. He leaned down and slammed his blade into the ground, shouting "Destructive Point!"

The ground rose up, an explosive wave flowing out to capture all three of his attackers in its depths, but two of them were able to get away, leaping up and bouncing off the metal lampposts to either side. The other one, a girl with a serious expression and black hair, took the attack full on and was hurled backward to be buried under the attack against a building on the other side of the street, which collapsed in on her.

Shampoo stared for a brief moment as she crouched on top of the slowly tilting lamppost at the edge of Mutsu's attack, astonished at the ease with which he had just hurled out what amounted to a major magical or ki attack. "Amazing," she breathed. Then she shook herself and leaped forward, thrusting both maces forward and shouting "Chestnuts Roasting over an Open Fire" in Chinese.

Mutsu blinked in shock, breaking off his own attack and kicking off backward, stumbling back and raising his sword to block her strikes. Several got thought and Mutsu winced, knowing he was going to have quite a lot of bruises to show from this day's work, but he was able to withstand her furious assault until she made a mistake, his sword flashing through her guard to nearly cut into her face.

That caused the purple-haired woman to back off, but then the other woman was back, swinging her tulwars with an extreme level of skill, shouting something in Chinese that he couldn't make out.

"You've been holding out on me Shampoo, since when were you able to do your Grandmother's signature move?" Cot Ton shouted.

"I can't do it for long though, and oh my god my muscles and tendons are going to be sooo sore when the adrenaline wears off," Shampoo replied. "For now, let's concentrate on this man!"

"Agreed. Let's see if he can handle the both of us!"

"Why did that sound dirty!?" Shampoo shouted back, eliciting a laugh from her best rival, as the two of them moved in tandem, circling and attacking as one, one charging in, the other, forcing Mutsu to split his attention between them.

The man was very good, his blade flashing this way and that, not blocking their blows or locking weapons with one of them but redirecting their attacks so that none of their blows could hit. Despite that, two girls were pressing him hard, or so they thought.

Having gotten the measure of his enemies, Mutsu ducked underneath a blow from Shampoo letting it sail almost into the other woman, then bringing his sword down onto the ground right at the feet of that other woman, shouting "Earth Hammer!"

Cot Ton's eyes widened as a smaller, more concentrated blast of earth erupted like a tower directly beneath her, slamming into her chest and hurling her upwards. Then he flipped to the side, his sword flashing out, cutting into the hilts of Shampoo's maces as she tried to bring them down in a double strike on where his head been a millisecond before. She still turned to attack, wielding the stumps like clubs, but Mutsu caught her with a kick in the chest doubling her over, and then all she felt was pain before the lights went out.

As the last foreign girl slumped to the ground unconscious, Mutsu shook his head as he stared around him at the four girls he had had to defeat, and who had battered him more than a little, shaking his head irritably, "What in the world was that about?" *Those last two, they fought better than most Sekirei! More weird, super-skilled humans and this time foreigners too!*

"I think they thought you were being condescending," said Juusa shaking her head in amusement.

"They were decent though," said one of the others frowning and looking down at the one who had been using an ax that had fallen at her feet. "Better than a lot of us with weapons in our hands for certain. Maybe we should..."

"No! These are humans, not Sekirei." Mutsu barked, then shook his head. "That means that not only do we have no way of tying them into our flock, but that they're far more trouble than they're worth." He rubbed his chest and side, which had taken a pounding from the mace wielder, shaking his head. "No, just leave them where they are and let's get a move on."

Humans, where in the hell are all these weird humans coming from now! God, what is wrong with my life!? It had to be said that Mutsu had yet to get used to the sheer amount of chaos and carnage that had begun to infect the game since the pigtailed warrior he had fought first showed up. *Let's hope that the rest of our day goes more smoothly. For my sanity's sake if nothing else.*

OOOOOO

Soon after Mutsu and the other Sekirei with him moved off, Shampoo groaned and sat up, smirking. Mutsu had beaten her for certain, but she had decided to take a bit of a fall there, knowing she couldn't win and having no real desire to spend a few hours out of it. "Well, I think while my grandmother might have said we can't husband hunt, she won't say no to getting that one's blood in our tribe. What do you think Cot Ton?"

Cot Ton too stood up, cracking her neck and wincing as something in her back popped. "Ow. I think if you want him, then you can have him. For me he's a bit too... blah maybe? I don't get a sense of his personality in his blade. Weird, and very unusual."

Shampoo paused, then nodded. "Maybe. Still, I haven't given him the kiss of marriage just yet. Let's go and dig out our friends, then... then I think we'll follow them again at a distance this time. I get the feeling there's a storm brewing here and I want to see what happens."

OOOOOO

For once Ranma woke up on his own. He yawned, stretching luxuriantly, feeling good, better than he had in a while honestly, if somewhat tired and a little sore in odd places. The closest example he had to what he was feeling now was the feeling of having mastered some new exercise, his muscles all loose after having been pushed to the brink. It was only when one arm refused to move, that he realized there was a weight on it and that weight turned out to be Akitsu. He blinked at that, then looked down at her face, his eyes widening as the memories of last night started to flood in. *So that wasn't a dream but damn if she doesn't look like she should be.*

First came the memory of needing to be in control of his energy to an extent that even he might have thought impossible, if not for the desperate need to do it. The feeling of using his ki like a key in a lock to shatter the block within Akitsu, then the feeling of her ki, once freed, merging, almost melding to his own.

Then came his memory of... everything else. The feel of Akitsu around him, squeezing, warm and wet. Her kisses, the feel of her breasts under his hands, the taste of her skin on his lips. All the memories flooding back like that caused Ranma to blush and his body starts to respond, more than eager to continue this new and exciting cardio workout. He finally had to look away shaking his head to dispel the image. "That was, that was, something else, damn," he muttered to himself.

Beside him, Akitsu woke up as she heard his voice, although she couldn't honestly think about moving her body. She was too busy getting used to the feel of, well, **everything**. The feel of their bond, like something burning with light and love and desire and everything else good and honest and excellent in the world blazing at the back of her neck and in her soul. The feel of the love above all was just intoxicating to her. It was all Akitsu could do to not squeal in delight.

Mentally there were other changes too. Akitsu found her thoughts moving faster, less disjointed. Her emotions too were free now from any constraints and she felt all of them to an extent she had not felt since being broken. That, and the positive emotions flowing into her from the Norito was a heady elixir Akitsu knew she would no longer be able to live without.

That, and I can barely move my legs. Whatever they had done last night had worn her out entirely too well and her face burned even as she kept her eyes closed as some of the memories of the night before came back to her as they had to Ranma.

Ranma turned to her as her face wriggled up, and smiled, leaning over and kissing her forehead tenderly, not able to keep a grin of triumph off his face as he noticed again that her broken mark was gone. "I know you're awake," he said teasingly. "Come on, open those lovely eyes of yours."

Akitsu did so quickly, staring up at him and smiling brightly, far more broadly and openly than Ranma had ever seen

before even when they were alone. "I love you," she said, the openness and honesty of those words giving them an impact like that of a building falling on Ranma. "I love you my Sun-sama! My Ranma."

"I love you too," he said, leaning down and kissing her neck lightly, then her lips, then down again to her pulse point licking and nibbling. She moaned, her hands reaching around Ranma's neck before moving down to trace along his bare back, before gripping his rear in delight, as he began to move his head down to one of her nipples and shifted to lay on top of her fully.

Their fun would have continued from there in a most spectacular fashion, except for a cough from the door. "Ara, I think that's enough of that. You both have other things to do today after all."

With a yelp Ranma turned to the door then rolled off of Akitsu, grabbing up the covers and tossing them not over himself but Akitsu, only then taking in the fact the voice had been Miya's. "OH cra-, I'm sorry Miya-nee," he yelped, pushing himself off of the bed onto the floor on the other side hiding there and sticking his head over the futon as he laid out on the floor behind it, trying to use Akitsu's now covered body and the futon to block him from view.

Miya giggled but made no motion that she had seen anything shaking her head. She looked a little tired, and Ranma asked solicitously, "Um, hey are you all right Miya-nee?" before he could stop himself.

At that, Miya's giggle ended with the abruptness of a guillotine as her eyes narrowed before she shook her head and laughed, gesturing at the two of them. "I don't suppose the participants ever know how loud they are," she replied, winking at him.

Ranma got it then and started to blush bright red, while Akitsu simply looked on in amusement before moving to stand up, rolling out of bed on the other side, unmindful of her own nudity. Indeed, she reveled in it, the sharp intake of breath from Ranma causing her to smile over her shoulder at him.

She was brought back to earth however by a firm smack to the forehead by Miya's ladle. "None of that," she ordered. "I'm serious, it's pushing midmorning, and both of you need to get on with everything else that is going to happen today. And while I am happy for the two of you, I have no desire to listen to another round." Miya's feelings were more along the line of jubilation for her adopted little brother/student and her young feather, but that didn't mean she was going to let the two of them lose themselves in hedonism.

Ranma glanced over at the one window in the room and realized that Miya was right: the sun was bright in the sky and he estimated it looked to be early to mid-morning. "Looks like it's going to be a good day," he said absentmindedly, and then laughed, looking over at Akitsu, "for more reasons than one. On the other hand, that means that the Ashikabi who got that asshole Minaka's message might already be on the move."

With that, he pulled the blanket from the bed and wrapped it around his waist to protect his modesty, pushing his feet a second later. "We need to get going."

"Not before you have breakfast," Miya replied firmly, looking away as she had no desire to see her brother in that light. "The least I can do to aid you in your day's exertions is to give you a hearty breakfast." She then smirked at them, "And after last night's activity I have no doubt that you need some."

Ranma found himself blushing again at that reminder, poking his fingers together as he stood there undressed save for the blanket around his waist.

"I left some clothing for the two of you out here, please take the time to change, then come downstairs. Note, that my leaving you is not an excuse for the two of you to get back to what you were doing," Miya said sternly, looking at Akitsu in particular as she said that, causing the younger Sekirei to blink and look away, a sheepish expression on her face.

Below they found Cologne on the phone with someone, shouting and gesticulating angrily. None of the others were around, all of them having found other lodgings for the night. They were told that Matsu, Uzume and Chiho were over at Dr. Tofu's. Homura had attempted to tough it out but had rushed off afterward, moving into an empty house next door only to leave early that morning to head to the Tendo's, leaving Kocho behind in the same house, giant headphones on her head blocking out all noise. Minato and Kazehana had stayed for a time, taking advantage of Miya's allowance for lewd things to have some fun in their own rooms for once rather than a love hotel. But they too had eventually moved out, with Kazehana carrying a near-comatose Minato, who had learned the folly of attempting to match a martial artist's endurance.

"You were, as I said, rather loud," Miya intoned once more, causing both young folks to blush and look away, eating

quickly.

Before they finished though, Cologne had finished her call and turned to them cackling. "The Sekirei seem to be on the move, a lot of them, including one young man who bested four of my tribe's warriors a bit ago. I think you need to get going, or else you might miss the fun."

OOOOOO

While Ranma and Akitsu ate, elsewhere around Nerima, other groups like Mutsu's team were on the move. Over a dozen single-Sekirei/Ashikabi pairs found themselves embroiled in a brawl to the east of the district, which only became more chaotic as a perverted little gnome made himself known. Many a 'Hotcha!' were shouted and many a squeal heard from that area. Genma and Soun had also found trouble in the form of a single Sekirei and her Ashikabi who were leading a group of twenty men into the district from the north.

The Disciplinary Squad moved into the area as quietly as possible, making no move to engage anyone, scaring off any Sekirei or Ashikabi who saw them, but not taking part in the slowly escalating violence just yet. Mutsu's group had the furthest to go to get into an area where the Sekirei or the others had moved into, let alone the Tendo Dojo.

But the most dangerous groups pushing into the district was the group led by Mutsu, the Disciplinary Squad and two more, each of whom represented the other two strongest players in the Sekirei Plan: Higa Izumi and Nishi Sanada, although neither of them was actually present. The group sent by Higa found trouble nearer to the borders of Nerima than they had expected, however.

This was a team of four: an Ashikabi/Sekirei pair allied with Higa, and two of Higa's own Sekirei tasked to aid them. Their orders were simple: retrieve any and all of the unwinged Ashikabi they could. The Ashikabi's name was Hotaru, and his Sekirei was Suelan, a dark-haired girl who dressed like a schoolgirl and could have been a Yamato Nadeshiko, a perfect Japanese woman in appearance, if not for this slight tan and the fact, she had brass knuckles on both her hands.

The two Sekirei sent on this mission by Higa were named Oriha and Katsuragi. Katsuragi dressed somewhat like an exercise enthusiast or a Bruce Lee wannabe in a yellow and black jumpsuit. Oriha dressed in a typical manner for a young woman although with a much shorter skirt, and a larger bust on display. Katsuragi was a fist type who specialized in mobility and a style that emphasized kicking. Oriha, on the other hand, was more eclectic.

The three of them were moving around along the rooftops for a time, but as they started to see more people in the streets below, they hopped down out of sight, one of them releasing her master to walk beside her. Hotaru growled irritably, shaking his head and staring around him. "Damn you Higa, if I was able to figure out where that blackmail material is, I'd be free of your clutches and wouldn't have to walk into the lion's den like this." Despite his appearance being that of a thug, there was nothing wrong with his basic intelligence, and he had followed what had happened to anyone who went up against Ranma in a straight fight and wanted no part of it.

"We could strike out on our own master, you know that, right? He's only got, what, four more Sekirei to his name than these two?" whispered Suelan.

"Maybe, but if I do that, he'll release that blackmail tape and ruin me. I need to think about more than just the Sekirei plan Suelan. No, we'll have to stay the course. Which means, finding either the water user or this little girl, and getting them back to Higa. Or maybe... maybe winging them myself... if I can. With two more Sekirei to my name, maybe I can force Higa to at least treat me as an equal."

"What about the other one? The guy whose power is like Agent Orange or something," said one of the other Sekirei, one of the two who answered to Higa.

"I doubt that Higa is at all interested in a male Sekirei" the master said, rolling his eyes.

"That's a pity because I think he's right over there," Oriha said dryly.

"Wait, what!?" The master turned and stared. There, at the far end of the street from where he and the three Sekirei were standing was a group of a dozen spread out food stalls making a small marketplace. Among them was a young boy in short shorts and suspenders along with a tight white shirt and short gray hair, the very picture of a young bishounen. His face did match the description they'd been given on the fourth as yet unwinged Sekirei.

"Okay," he said thoughtfully. "I'm not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, even if he's a guy. Let's take him." *And besides, he's supposed to be very powerful, that's a good thing, even if I'll have to kiss a freaking trap.* Hotaru

gestured his Sekirei forward, and they quickly spread out, coming in on 107 even as he broke away from the crowd, looking down at a map and following some directions or something similar he must have just been given.

"That's far enough!" Hotaru said, holding up his hand as he stepped out of an alleyway about 50 feet away from the male Sekirei. "Sorry about this kiddo, but you shouldn't have shown off by clearing that botanical garden of all the plants there. You're going to have to come with..."

His words broke off in a yelp however as the young man thrust forward with both hands, and a wave of some kind of almost unseen energy lashed out towards him. He ducked to one side as did his Sekirei, and the energy hit a tree directly behind him. The tree started to decay as they watched before the three Sekirei dashed forward.

"I'm not interested in fighting you and if you know what's good for you you'll stay away from me! I don't want to fight in this game, but if you try to force me to, I won't just stand by and take it!" Shiina said firmly his hand still raised as he tried to back away and watch all of his enemies' ones. "I'm only here to find Kusano!"

"Heh, I like..." the man scowled, stopping himself from finishing the line. It was true he did like women feisty, and normally when faced with Sekirei trying to get out of being winged, that would be the proper response. The fact that he was facing a man though just made him cringe. *Why can't they all be women?* Instead, he said, "Well that makes two of us kiddo, but I'm also here for you so I'm afraid I'm gonna have to insist. That is unless you think you can face three Sekirei at once!"

"HOHOHOHOHOHO! While my inner yaoi fangirl might disagree, I've been told that when propositioning someone, you shouldn't be so forceful," a new voice said.

Cringing at the sound of that laugh the man turned to stare up at a nearby rooftop to see two women dressed in leotards, a sight that made the young man grin, as he took them both in from head to toe. One of them was slightly older looking than the other, her body type svelte and trim rather than large-breasted as most Sekirei were. Her hair was in a long braid down her back and she held a ribbon, coiled slightly around her arm.

"Besides which, bishounen like the young boy are gifts from the gods and should never be bullied by anyone! In the name of my love for a pretty face, I mean, in the name of the house of Kuno, I cannot let you take that pretty, er, innocent youth with you." The girl with the ribbon said, before letting loose another laugh that caused most of her listeners to grimace. "HOHOHOHOHO! Never fear young man, you are safe now!"

Next to her was another woman, her hair a light pink-blond sort of color, her body a little bigger in the chest but not as toned in the legs, a halberd in her hands.

"Is this a private party or can anyone join?" the one with the halberd said, and suddenly any hope for victory left Hotaru's mind as they leaped down to engage his Sekirei while Shiina looked on in astonishment.

OOOOOO

As for the group from the Western Ashikabi, they found their target, but quickly learned an ancient aphorism: war is a democracy because the enemy gets a vote too. And this enemy had no desire to be taken by them, or anyone else.

Tsukiumi was asleep in her bed, a double poster that would have done any Disney princess proud. It had been one of her many purchases once she decided to move into this apartment and was one of the ones she was most happy with. It had silk sheets, a nice awning, and was extremely large and comfortable, as she liked to toss and turn at night. She was not tossing and turning that night though, having been lulled to sleep by the sound of the ongoing rain and wanting to get a lot of rest before the next day's activities. Everyone in Nerima knew what was going to happen, and those Sekirei like Tsukiumi who wanted to fight wanted to be ready.

But despite the fact she was sleeping so soundly, Tsukiumi was also a light sleeper. So when someone tried to unlatch the doorway leading out onto her balcony near to sunrise, she started to wake up. By the time, the people that were doing so had worked the door open, she was awake and ready for them if not dressed to receive visitors, wearing a long silk chemise that barely contained her chest, falling to just halfway up her powerfully muscled thigh.

Still, Tsukiumi could not care less about her appearance as she faced down these invaders to her home. Rather she glared at them like a maddened Siren, her waterpowers creating a veritable nest of barely formed water dragons around her. "Trying to attack someone when they are sleeping is the height of dishonor weaklings! You will pay for this transgression into my home!"

Tsukiumi thrust out her hands and the water around her attacked, not en-masse but as a series of different attacks,

each of them targeting one of the invaders in a different way. There were four invaders now in her room, and all of them were Sekirei of the West led by a tall woman, with short black hair, a portion of which passed to either side of her face along with large breasts her darkly tanned skin display in a bikini top, which Tsukiumi reflected, was rather apropos. She also had tight jeans, which had seams down the inner edges, and long black gloves over which she wore claw knives, which she used to shred two of the water attacks sent her way, though she couldn't dodge the last, which took her legs out from under her, slamming her upper body down into the floor.

This was Hatae, the same woman who Ryoga and Musubi had bested along with her partner, Chiyo, who was also here. She had black hair, and also wore a bikini top and leggings if of a different type, and she was about as white-skinned as Hatae was tan, and Tsukiumi honestly thought she might have some form of anorexia if not for the manic gleam and the wide grin on her face, one that made her look quite like a shark. Her scythe had proven no defense against Tsukiumi's attack, two of which slammed her up and out, back the way they had come, to crash through the safety railing on Tsukiumi's balcony to crash down onto the streets below, she groaned there, and pushed to her feet, but she was most definitely the worse for wear.

The other two surprisingly were also both tanned and worked very well together, blocking most of the attacks that came their way and protecting one another when an attack got through as they beat a hasty retreat, unable to get around Tsukiumi's attacks to get at the water user in the space of her apartment. One of them was a short blonde-haired girl with long bangs and a chest that was almost too large for her frame, with a bikini that had two large stars embossed on it. She was a fist-fighter, with her hands covered by the same boxing gloves that Musubi wore. The other had a cheerful expression complete with dimples, short black hair and fought with knives. They called out little warnings to another, calling themselves Kujika and Kuzuri.

But as Tsukiumi slammed attack after attack against those two, Hatae was able to push to her feet and get around Tsukiumi. She leaped forward, her claw knives flashing out with deadly precision, looking to both incapacitate and possibly kill, forgetting her mission was to capture instead of murder thanks to the moment of humiliation before.

But Tsukiumi twisted around, dodging the blow, only to be pressed to the side and nearly backed up against the wall of her apartment. Grimacing she sent one half-formed attack into the face of Hatae, then ducked under a powerful blow from the tanned blonde, before flipping over a kick from Kuzuri. With that, she was by the door to her balcony and dodged out as an attack crashed through the glass behind her.

The blonde was in her face, punching out but Tsukiumi twisted, grabbing the kick that had been aimed at her back, and tossing Hatae over the edge of the rooftop before grabbing the blonde's arm in a lock and twisting her into the way of the fourth attacker, kicking the feet out from under the tanned blonde before disengaging, hopping up onto the roof.

Below Hatae groaned, shaking her head as she got to her feet beside Chiyo. "What the hell?! She's supposed to be an element user, where the heck did that grab and block come from!?"

"A warrior does not rest on her laurels, she strives to continually better herself!" the still-pajama clad Tsukiumi shouted, taking a stance that she had learned from observing Ranma and his family, one palm thrust forward, the other clenched back in a fist near her center. "Come, let us do this!"

The fight was interrupted at that point by an unlooked-for ally arriving to aid Tsukiumi. "Though thy appearances are most pleasant to the eye, such dishonor as a four on one assault cannot be borne by any samurai."

Blinking, Tsukiumi looked down to see the swordsman who Ranma and Akitsu had told her about, the madman named Kuno who had challenged Karasuba outside of MBI Tower before. He looked fully healed now and was standing, his hands around the hilt of a bokken, as he glared up at the four attackers. "Verily, for I shall not allow this in my domain. If you wish to fight in this game, you will fight fairly, one-on-one, as true samurai of old would. Prepare yourselves, for I, the Blue Thunder of Furinkan High, shall strike thee down!"

"Is this guy for real!?" Chiyo muttered, before looking around at the others. "God, what are you standing around for, let's just get rid of him then fuck that water bitch up!"

"You know that's not..." muttered Kujika before Chiyo rushed forwards, matching her scythe against Kuno's blade. The wood of the bokken actually blocked her attack surprising her somewhat, but she dodged his return strike, lashing out with the cutting blade of the scythe at his side before following up by twirling around, bringing the butt to bear. Yet astonishingly Kuno kept up with the move, unable to get any momentum on his own side to go on the attack, but not letting Chiyo finish him off as quickly as she wanted to.

At the same time, the other three continued their assault on Tsukiumi, who stayed away from them, lashing out

liberally with water attacks, forcing the close-range combatants to dodge away. This couldn't continue forever though: element type attacks took it out of their users just as much as an equivalent number of punches and kicks would and she was hurling them out like candy.

Yet, even so Kuno laughed. "Hark, the very maiden of the waves is upon my side this day!" he shouted, gleefully attacking Chiyo as Tsukiumi's attacks spread the others out. "Do not worry fair maiden, once we have finished with these uncouth ladies, I would most certainly date with thee!"

Tsukiumi and the short blonde-haired girl both shuddered, and Tsukiumi's attacks faltered as she finally realized that yes, Kuno was a male and her current clothing did not leave much to the imagination. *Oh, thank every god in existence I don't have Akitsu's problem with remembering to wear panties!*

Yet even as Tsukiumi's attacks faltered, Kuno's had increased, as he shouted. "Strike!" every time he lashed forward with his sword now, letting loose a point-blank series of Air Cutters, Chiyo dodging instead of attempting to block them, worried about what the slices of cutting air would do to her weapons or to her own body, seeing them slice through the concrete beneath them and the walls around her.

Seeing her partner so pressed, Hatae ducked under another attack and grabbed at a manhole cover, hurling it at Kuno. Kuno broke off his attacks to block it, slicing the metal cover in half, but nearly lost his head to Chiyo's scythe, and he couldn't move out of the way of the kick that took him in the thigh. He grimaced, and rolled with it, coming up a few feet away, then blasting out another series of Air Cutters, but he was unable to dodge Kuzuri's attack who flipped a dagger through his defenses, which stabbed deep into his forearm, making that hand useless.

Despite his endurance, which Kuno had always put down to his own abilities but was really more of a family trait, the fight was turning against him. And Tsukiumi's moment of inattention had cost her, letting the other blonde up onto the rooftop with her, where Tsukiumi was forced to divide her attention between her and making certain none of the others could close with her.

Yet even as she started to fight back more desperately, falling back away from the side of the roof and attempting to once more open the range, Tsukiumi felt something, although what it was she felt, Tsukiumi didn't know. There was a power getting closer out there, a power that she could feel creating some kind of resonance within herself, causing her body to become flush, her heartbeat increasing even more than it had already. Inside her soul began to pulse in time with the steps of the individual that was creating that odd call, tugging on her attention.

But she wasn't the only one who could feel it. Her attackers were also Sekirei, and though bonded, they too had senses beyond the human norm. The blonde girl pressing Tsukiumi faltered, and even Hatae turned for a moment to stare in that direction. "What, what the heck is that!?"

Then Hatae saw Tsukiumi's distraction and shouted, "Get her, now!"

Before she could recover her self-control, the water user took a hit that sent her sprawling, but she rolled with it, responding with point-blank assaults of water that hurled her attacker away. But Hatae also had closed by this point, and she stabbed forward with her metal claws.

Then Akitsu and Ranma were there, and with them came the power of Akitsu's awakened might. Despite still being two rooftops away she thrust out one hand and a wall of ice appeared spreading forward as fast as thought, covering the distance between her and the attackers in seconds. It enveloped two of the attacking Sekirei almost instantly and spreading on to attack the others.

All of them stared in shock, at her for a moment, even Tsukiumi stopping staring, her breath flushed as she stared between Akitsu and Ranma, awe visible in her expression.

"What the hell! She's supposed to be broken! How did that happen?!" Hatae shouted.

"Who cares, she's too strong for us! I like a good fight just as much as any girl, but not one when the odds are so stacked against me. We need to get out of here, run away and fight another day," said the blonde-haired ganguro.

However, in their concentration on Akitsu, the group had neglected to watch Ranma's closing in on them, and he now spoke up from directly behind them. "Yeah, no. You come into our house and expect to walk away, not going to happen! You're done!" he said even as he launched his attacks.

Within moments the remaining enemies Sekirei were down and unconscious. An instant later, they joined their fellows in a chilly prison as Akitsu quickly enveloped them in ice. "So, that's one group down. All of this lot come from that

Nishi guy. Funny, I didn't think he'd get involved in this, I expected him to stay out of it just like Seo probably is."

He looked over at Tsukiumi, frowning as he saw how red she was in the face and trying desperately to not look away from that face. If he did, Akitsu would have to freeze his lower half to stop him from reacting, if what he saw as he closed was accurate. "Tsukiumi, are you all right? It looked as if you have a fever."

Besides, Akitsu alone is more than enough girl, I'm not certain how I'll be able to handle both her and Nabiki at the same time, he thought, looking away even as he asked his question. *Though, why the heck is she dressed like that anyway?*

If she had heard those thoughts, Akitsu would have replied in the affirmative to the first point, then in the negative to the second. She was in no mind to share Ranma with another Sekirei, wanting to revel in her non-broken status for a while before she thought about doing so. She honestly no longer wanted to share him with even Nabiki, whom she knew intellectually had a claim on Ranma. She wasn't going to make waves about that, but beyond Nabiki, Akitsu wanted to be selfish for a time.

On the other hand, she would have put her newfound ability to show emotions to the test by snorting derisively at the idea that Ranma couldn't handle more than one woman. Despite riding high on her bond with him, Ranma had worn her out last night and had still been up for another round when she started to fall asleep.

Akitsu's desire to keep Ranma's affection to herself was a prominent thought at the moment because she did recognize the look in Tsukiumi's eyes and was prepared. When the water user lurched to her feet and made to move towards Ranma, she flicked a finger upwards and a wall of ice appeared between the two of them. "No," she said simply, "mine. If you're suddenly interested in having an Ashikabi, find one for yourself, don't think you can just horn into my relationship with Ranma."

Tsukiumi looked at her in shock, the volubility of that response and the ice that she had just slammed into causing her to stare at Akitsu. "That was easily the most words I've ever heard you say at one time. I take it that healing your ability to bond has had more an even greater effect on you than we assumed?"

"That would've been enough, but it does seem to have removed a few of my inhibitions," Akitsu replied in a nod.

Ranma moved up behind Akitsu, poking her cheeks, and then pushing them upwards in an attempt to make her smile. "Now if only we could do something about your ability to smile in public," he quipped, before releasing that grip and hugging Akitsu around the waist, kissing her neck right underneath where her hair began over her Norito mark, then around to the side of her neck as she sighed in sensual pleasure, bringing her hands up to clasp his.

Tsukiumi found herself glaring at the two, and she didn't realize why. *What about this bothers me so much!?*

"So," Ranma asked as he pulled away from Akitsu's all too inviting body. "Any idea of where to go from here to get it stuck in against the most dangerous group invading Nerima right now?"

Even as he spoke, there was a booming crash from the east, and Ranma sweatdropped. "Nevermind. Let's just head towards the sound of destruction, shall we?"

End Chapter

Next chapter, more violence, Akitsu shows off more and Ranma meets the new improved Disciplinary Squad.

Chapter 14: Chapter 14

Happy belated Mother's Day! Last month I made the decision to update this story instead of the winner of the small story poll, which was *FILFY* teacher, since, let's face it, I have not proven very good at keeping the chapters of that story small LOL. Turns out that was the right move since I couldn't get even this chapter done and edited in time. Indeed, I barely had started it before the month ended. Yet here it is. I will also be updating one of my patty-on-only stories here on fanfic as I do for international holidays soon.

This has been edited by [Hiryo](#) and myself using Grammarly.

Chapter 14: Gambling Isn't for the Faint of Heart

Almost as soon as the words left Ranma's mouth, more explosions were heard in the distance. "Okay," he groaned, several new sweatdrops appearing on his face to join the one already there. "Maybe running to the sounds of the explosions won't work as well as I thought."

As the sound of the explosion to their southwest faded, Tsukiumi twitched in fright as something appeared in her shadow to one side. A ninja was there, oozing out of the ground, and Ranma stared. He had seen something of the sort before, from the servants of that French frog, but those at least had appeared from spaces which could, theoretically at least, hide someone. To come out of the shadow like that was well it was something out of an anime. *I have got to learn that*, he thought to himself, rubbing mental hands gleefully at the very idea. *Oooh, maybe mix it with Pops' Umi-Sen-Ken?*

"What is it, Shadowed One?" Kuno asked, crossing his arms staring at the short shadow thing that was now wearing ninja garb.

The thing seemed to whisper something, its mouthparts moving silently, but unheard by Ranma or the others. But in response Kuno stiffened in shock, a scowl forming on his patrician features. "Very well, I will be heading home at once. Hold the line until I arrive to lead you, and gather the other Shadow Legion members."

He looked over to Ranma, scowl appearing on his features. "While it does not behoove one such as I from a family such as mine to ask for help from such as you, I understand that my darling little sister has informed you of what my family guards?"

"Something about a labyrinth underneath Nerima, where monsters and old legends and stuff were put?" Ranma asked, scowling.

"Indeed. The amount of ki and magic that has been thrown around in this city has awoken them, and they must be beaten back."

Ranma nodded then looked out into the distance towards the original explosion as another booming crash was heard from there. *If I'm right, that's the direction of the Tendo house. Too close to it anyway.* "I think that means we'll have to split up."

Akitsu moved to his side instantly, her eyes narrowing, having no need for her new verbal skills to make it plain that she was not leaving his side just yet. That left Tsukiumi, who Ranma looked at for a moment before blushing and looking back at Akitsu. "Er, do you think that you could hold on until Tsukiumi here can get changed and arrive to help you?"

"Most certainly," Kuno said haughtily before his eyes too turned towards Tsukiumi, becoming quite appreciative of the feast in front of them. "Although, if she wanted to show off as she is, certainly, no one with the eyes to see such a glorious flower in full bloom would..."

That was as far as he got before Tsukiumi remembered her state of undress. A loud scream and a blast of water later, Kuno was picking himself up from the ruins of a first-floor store several yards away, while Ranma huffed, wiping her face clear of the water. Ranma had been close enough to get hit by the splash of that blast. "Really you got to go there, Kuno? You deserved that."

Tsukiumi huffed but was still blushing hotly, as she leaped up towards her apartment. *So, my reaction to him did not go away when he changed genders. That is an odd development. Is this what others feel when they react to their chosen one? If so, perhaps I owe some apologies to my fellow Sekirei. I have no interest in giving them, but I might*

owe them, nonetheless. And I might... I might have to talk to Akitsu about sharing.

The thought was not welcome. Ranma had been a friend before this and an ally to keeping herself from being forcibly winged. Now he, (currently she,) was causing her body to react in no uncertain terms. Her nipples were nearly hard enough to poke out of the diaphanous silk negligee she wore, and she knew that liquid had become to dew down below just from being around him.

Now away from the reasoning for it though, Tsukiumi decided she did not like this reaction. It was too powerful, too sudden, and too out of her control. *But that doesn't change the fact that I am reacting so. I will have to figure out some way to either control it or to...quench my thirst.*

Of course, given the sounds of combat echoing elsewhere, the others did not wait for her. However, before they could leave, there was an explanation to give before they could go their different ways.

"Wh, what madness is this!?" Kuno shouted, bringing Akitsu and Ranma's attention back to him. He waved his bokken in the air, staring at the redhead who was standing where Ranma had been a moment ago. "Some, some foul magic or other or some magic inherent in the water perhaps?"

"Er, no," Ranma grouched, moving over to a puddle and pulsing some ki into it from her hand to heat it up. "I was in China a few months back and my old man and I got cursed. I fell into the Spring of Drowned Girl, so whenever I am splashed with cold water I turn into a girl." Ranma then splashed herself with the now heated water. "Hot water changes me back to my normal body. Now, I think that's enough explanation for now, right? Oh, and do you have a bokken I can use?"

If the southern brat sent who I think he will, I want a weapon in hand when I deal with him, Ranma thought. I don't need one to beat him, but I want to learn those earthquake-like attacks he's got and for that, a sword might be helpful.

"Hmmp, if I did not know what the Labyrinth contains within, I would be most suspicious of this talk of magic curses," Kuno grouched, pulling a spare bokken from his sleeve and tossing it to Ranma. "But I suppose you have shown yourself marginally skilled with the blade. See that you do not dishonor that worthy weapon with your actions. I will see you at my clan's mansion anon."

With that, Kuno turned toward home, racing away. From every small shadow he passed, more ninjas joined him until he had forty of the Shadow Legion with him eager to join their fellows defending the Kuno estate.

Rolling his eyes at the other man's ego, Ranma led Akitsu onto the rooftops where they sprinted alongside one another from one rooftop to another. Ranma smiled in delight at how Akitsu was able to keep up with him, and not just behind him, as she had previously thought her place and should be, but **beside** him. That felt good. Although why the difference in position should make him feel that way Ranma had little to no idea. Then there was another booming quake and Ranma turned back in the direction they were moving. *Right, mind in the game now. More Akitsu-'n'-you time later.*

OOOOOO

Near the Tendo house, Homura, Akane and Yashima had met up with Kodachi and her friend, Namiji. The Martial Arts Rhythmic Gymnastics pair had already beaten off the attack on Shiina but the young teenaged male Sekirei had collapsed afterward, having been pushing himself for more than twenty-four hours without food or rest to try and find Kusano's trail since he had been released into the Game.

Kodachi felt that showed the boy lacked a certain level of common sense, but that his heart was in the right place. She had sent him to the Tendo place with Sasuke to watch over him, while Kodachi and her kouhai had split off the instant they saw Akane and Yashima fighting it out with several of the invaders.

Akane and Yashima had been assigned close-defense of the Tendo house. Being the weakest twosome of the allied parties of Nerima, it was the obvious position for them. However, now they were being pressed back hard, almost to the street where the Tendo house was, by the group from the south.

Not that Mutsu and his followers had been having everything their own way. They'd been forced to go most of the way to this point over the rooftops. And every time they had stopped, the locals had seemed to find them all too easily, and once they did, the locals would start tossing everything they possibly could at the group of Sekirei. This had, to put it bluntly, not been fun. They were now covered by tomatoes, cabbage juices, watermelon chunks, and wounds given by people who had tossed knives and other sharp objects at them.

More than once Mutsu, who alone was not covered by such remains, had lost control of the others. The girls had descended on the locals, knocking dozens of them out, but while it had made them feel better, it hadn't stopped the humans from attacking them, shouting, "You leave that nice Kasumi girl alone, ya hear!?" or "You'll never get to the Tendo place alive!" More than a few had fought back with weird, esoteric martial arts or just flat out Judo and karate and all the Sekirei bar Mutsu was wounded and irritable by this point.

And then the group had been separated into smaller pairs by Homura, announcing his presence with a shout of, "For my future Ashikabi I will burn you all to ash!" Now Mutsu was contending with the fire user several blocks away, while the other southern Sekirei were faced off with two human women and two Sekirei.

"Hey! You're not the only ones who want a piece of these bitches!" a new voice sounded out, as two more Sekirei leaped up onto the rooftops from below. One was a slight girl, barely four feet tall, who wielded a claymore larger than she was. The other one was a more normal-sized woman at around five feet, who was wearing knuckle dusters on her fists. "We've been ordered to beat you all and then take the unwinged ones in the Tendo house. Judging by the message MBI just sent out, it's two for the price of one now."

Kodachi pondered that statement for a moment but Akane didn't bother thinking deep thoughts, instead, she sneered at Namiji, who she knew, having sparred with her occasionally. "Bah I knew these Sekirei were all trouble!"

"Do not denigrate the Sekirei themselves. It is the Ashikabi who make the decisions here. Just like children, they can never be content with what they have," Kodachi replied, twisting around and attack one of the southerners, her ribbon lashing out to smash the one called Dorothy back into the wall.

She yelped as an attack from behind nearly caught her in the back of the head. She dodged it, but the attack, made by the large claymore being wielded by one of the two turncoats cut off a large chunk of her hair, leaving a small but bleeding cut on the back of her neck just at her hairline.

The now bob-cut Kodachi turned, hissing "You'll pay for that!" as she spoke a baton appeared in her off-hand, which she thrust forward like a small spear.

The end of it quickly grew a spearhead, which caused the claymore-wielding Sekirei to yelp in shock, frantically dodging only to see a cut appear across her chest, causing a thin red line of blood to appear and causing her shirt to fall, revealing her chest.

At present there were only girls there though, so that didn't matter overmuch. The cut and the deadly look in Kodachi's eyes, made the girl scowled angrily. "Fuck the rules, this one at least is dangerous enough we have to put her down permanently!"

The others were fighting Yashima, Akane, and Namiji hard while Kodachi faced off against the two turncoats. The six Sekirei from the south were battered, but fighting well enough for that, and working in teams they were slowly pushing the defenders back.

Homura launched a few blasts of fire towards Mutsu, simple fireballs at first, then a tongue of flame as Mutsu tried to leap away, moving around Homura's position to the Tendo House beyond. But Homura pressed in, hoping to use his range advantage, cutting the angle on Mutsu's move, flinging an even larger attack the other male Sekirei's way.

That didn't work out so well. Instead, the sword user grabbed his sheathe with his free hand, and with a swift I-ai, cut the fireball in two with a blast of air pressure.

Then he was back to holding his once more sheathed blade almost lazily, tapping it gently against the outside of his leg as he looked at the other male Sekirei. "It's been a while hasn't it, Homura," he said pleasantly. "How are you doing? Hmm...you're not winged either, are you? But then again you are a guy, and I know that my master prefers girls."

"Is that a hardship for you?" Homura asked mock-solicitously. "I can't imagine what it must be like to have your advances rebuffed all the time like that by the one who winged you. However accidentally it might have happened."

"I imagine that would be pretty much like your journey of trying to find a way to an Ashikabi who would be compatible with you with that freakish body of yours," the sword user replied drolly.

Homura smirked, gesturing above his head with both arms where a massive fireball began to appear in each hand. "It looks as if your information is old then. I've found my master, it's only a matter of time before she realizes that's the case. No more freaky body for me!"

"I'm so happy for you," Mutsu drawled, again using single I-ais to create air pressure attacks, which sliced the fireballs in half the instant they came towards him, still looking somewhat unruffled. "Although I would've thought that you would be used to freakish bodies around Ranma, or is he the one that you reacted to?"

"...You know it's been so long, I forgot how horrible your so-called sense of humor was," Homura growled, before gesturing bringing it up from his side upwards, "Rising Dragon Bombardment!" The move created a dragon-shaped ball of fire that rose into the air, its tail connecting Homura's outstretched palm to the rest of the body. From that body several dozen small fireballs flew from several different directions down toward Mutsu.

Seeing the sheer amount of fire coming at him, Mutsu hopped backward, off the rooftop they had been sparring on, and down into someone's backyard, watching as the fireball came towards them. "Destructive point," he intoned, the tip of his sheathed sword smacking into the side of the house. The house collapsed but slowly enough that Homura got away leaping down to the street, but he lost control of his dragon-like attack, the fire disappearing without his direction. Before he could renew his assault, Mutsu went on the attack, closing the distance between them so fast Homura barely had time to react.

A quick I-ai blasted through a hasty fireball, and the sheath then flashed in an arc to catch Homura in the chest, sending him flying backward. He slammed into the side of another house, and through it to land in a rather nicely appointed sitting room. There he rolled, coming to his knees where he readied another pair of fireballs in his hands as he stared at the hole he'd made in the side of the house, grimacing at the pain in his ribs.

But instead of coming after him, Mutsu landed on top of the roof, shaking his head. "Thank whatever powers that might exist beyond us that all of this is being paid for by those assholes at MBI," he murmured, before bringing his sheathed blade down on top of the roof, with much more force this time. "Destructive Point, Heavy Style!"

The entire house collapsed all around Homura, far faster than the first house had come apart. Gasping as a piece of ceiling nearly brained him, Homura raced for the entrance he'd just made but was unable to get out before it all collapsed on top of him.

Sighing, Mutsu looked at the debris, then shook his head. It wasn't worth it to try to dig the other man out and drag him back to the south to be winged. "Hayato would probably reject him anyway." With that, he turned back to the others, intent on ending this battle before still more of the locals could show up.

As Mutsu moved to join his fellows, a sort of a lull in the battle occurred as all of them, including Mutsu, now turned in one direction. All of them felt it, could feel a power of some kind coming towards them. A massive pressure or power of some kind, not as large as Karasuba had been, or the Demon of the North, but huge in comparison to everyone here.

And there were two of them, not just one but they were so intertwined, only Mutsu could make that out. *Fuck, we are out of time!* "Break off," Mutsu ordered instantly. "We have a new threat incoming!"

His words weren't really necessary, and he could see that almost immediately, but they added to the seriousness as even the two locals moved with his fellow flock members. A second later only Mutsu was not surprised to see Ranma hopping along the rooftops towards them. He did nearly trip however when he saw who was with him. *I'd have put my money on 09, but no, it had to be the broken one! Who, I see, is no longer broken!*

He was not alone in his shock. All of the others, especially the two blondes who had fought Akitsu were surprised, staring in shock at the sight of Akitsu without her Broken Mark on her forehead. "I thought she was..."

"Isn't she the..." muttered Dorothy.

"Yeah, that's the ice-using bitch! She's supposed to be broken!" shouted Mitsuki.

Ranma heard that and scowling kicked up a bit of roof tile, then without even pausing his jump to the next roof twirled and used roundhouse kick to send the tile towards the speaker. It was only the intervention of Mutsu slicing it in half that stopped that one from being knocked unconscious and even so she yelped and fell back in shock.

By that point, Ranma and Akitsu were standing on the rooftop right above the fighters and Ranma growled, "I will kick the shit in of the next one to call Akitsu broken or even allude to the fact that she might once have been so by your people's weird-ass standards! Understood?!"

Mutsu sighed, knowing now that his defeat of Homura had been no reprieve, but merely the start of the next stage. "I don't suppose that we could say that we are simply after the unwinged one and back away? We really don't have a

problem with any of you, it's just that my master wishes to welcome Kusano into his flock. And it's not like he's a pedophile or anything, given his own age," Mutsu droned, moving away from the rest of Hayato's flock once more.

"Considering that both Kusano and her watcher are under our protection, no that's not going to fly. You came into Nerima, our town and started this!" he said, his voice almost switching to that of an American accent, before he launched himself forward suddenly, absolutely nothing about his body manner, face or anything else showing that he was about to start the fight before he was already in Mutsu's face. "You think you can walk away after that, you got another think coming!"

He and Mutsu started to trade blows faster than most of the watchers could follow but the first exchange ended with a kick that, though he blocked it, hurled Mutsu further away from the others. "Akitsu, keep them off my back," Ranma ordered mildly before leaping after Mutsu once more. "He and I have a fight to finish."

"Of course Sun-sama!" Akitsu replied merrily and even as she spoke a giant ice wall appeared between Ranma and the other Sekirei. A bare second later, large chunks of ice started to appear in the air all around her, being flung forward by tiny gestures her hands and neck. Two of the already battered Sekirei of the south fell to that sudden assault instantly, Juusa being flung off the rooftop and then pounded into the asphalt below, while one called Momo was knocked off her feet and frozen to the roof underneath her.

"Okay," Akane said, staring at this and shaking her head, wincing at the pain it gave her head. "While a part of me is really happy for the rescue, the rest of me is really pissed off! How is she doing that, I mean before she could've barely been able to conjure that first wall, and now she's not only tossing around more ice than ever before, but she's better at it?! And she doesn't even look as if she's winded at all."

Kodachi nodded her head slightly, but she was too busy trying to staunch the flow of blood on the back of her neck with her friend's help to do more at present.

That friend was squealing quietly to herself, a low keening sound that was interspersed with, "Oh my, oh my! I am so happy for her!"

"Dare I say that Akitsu being rid of that mark on her forehead means what I think it means?"

"It sooo does, senpai!" Namiji giggled, finishing with her bandage. "Those girls over there are so screwed!"

"Language, Namiji," Kodachi said grabbing up a new ribbon and a club from somewhere. "And whether or not they are overmatched by Akitsu, I am a scion of the house of Kuno, and I will not let someone else fight my battles for me."

The halberd wielding girl blinked, then nodded firmly. The two of them leaped forward, hopping up onto the rooftops again and engaging three of the attackers in close combat before they realized that the two of them had rejoined the fight.

One of them, the one called Dorothy who looked like an Americanophile, fell to an overhead strike from the end of Namiji's halberd, having blocked her first blow despite the surprise of the attack.

Another one, the local with the claymore was nearly knocked off the building, only to find herself bound up in ribbon. So tight was the ribbon she couldn't get enough leverage to pull even an arm loose.

The third, Himeko, fell to Yashima's hammer, which shattered her own double-bladed weapon and her arms with one strike, the girl having been forced to try to block an overhead strike from the other Fist-type Sekirei. The next second an uppercut blow with the hammer smashed into Himeko's chest and face, hurling her away to bounce several times off the nearby rooftops, her cry of pain fading away with her.

A fourth, Taki, nearly did for Yashima a second later. "Sorry!" she shouted, her kick flipping Yashima onto her rear. The next second a dropkick would have finished her off, if not for Akane grabbing shoulder and performing a perfect over the shoulder throw, crashing the girl headfirst into the ground. She tried to kick off, but by that point, Kodachi wrapped her up with a ribbon and dumped the girl on top of the claymore wielder.

This left only the two blondes facing Akitsu, trying to close with her and quite honestly not having much luck. Their shouts weren't doing anything but incensing Akitsu further and listening to them, Kodachi was torn between simply laughing, or going to get some popcorn. Regardless, she pulled back, gesturing Namiji to do the same.

"How did you do it how! How did you go from being broken into being fully bonded! You're supposed to be broken..." Mitsuki stammered even as she used her thin ropes to smash the ice coming towards her away. As thin as they were the ropes acted with immense strength when she flicked her wrists just so, to attack or constrain.

"I'm so jealous! So jealous! And you can shut up sister! At least I'm honest about it and not hiding my jealousy beneath arrogance or contempt for her previous status. I want the same thing with Hayato-sama damn it!" Mitsuha growled, ducking and dodging in every direction, as her whip flashed, smashing ice projectiles into pieces.

"MUUU, darn it, you're not supposed to say that aloud sister!"

"... can you just feel the seriousness slipping away senpai, or is it just me," asked Namiji, cocking her head to one side. *I mean, I'm actually kind of feeling sorry for them now.*

"It's not just you," Kodachi replied, before breaking out into giggles quite unlike her normal haughty laugh. As her giggles subsided, she sighed in mock-regret. "Still, I think we should have an opening soon. Watch for it."

"Do not take it out on me that your Ashikabi sees you as toys rather than lovers," Akitsu shot back, freezing one of them to the floor of the rooftop, before leaping forward suddenly, catching the other woman by surprise and a kick to the face.

She bounced up and off that one, leaping higher into the air showing that she had learned quite a bit from Ranma, although before, she would never have been able to utilize it along with her own powers. "Ice rain!" at that shout, tiny but quick pellets of ice pelted the blonde twins, who ducked and covered yelping even as the whip user shattered the ice that had tried to corral them.

"Actually," Kodachi said as she joined the fight. "I doubt they are being treated like toys. Toys, after all, would be played with." All three of the still conscious attackers flushed at that, and then that flush turned to anger as Kodachi went on. "Rather, they are simply treated as trading cards, to be used in combat or perhaps bartered away. Winning the game is the thing, as well as having the largest... deck."

"How dare..." That was as far as the two blondes Sekirei got before Akane, Namiji, and Yashima hit them from three sides. This proved to be too much for the already battered twins, and they fell quickly, to be tossed to the other side of the rooftop from their still bound and gagged friend.

Akitsu blinked, then smiled simply, and turned to hop up on top of the ice wall she had made, which was a story taller than the surrounding houses. There, she rested on her hind legs, watching her Sun-sama fight.

Kodachi joined her a moment later, and then with a sigh, used her ribbon to pull Akane up, the other girl having trouble climbing up the ice. "I see you have not truly been trained all that well Akane Tendo. See to it that is changed in the future," she lectured. "It would not do for an ally of the House of Kuno to be so unskilled."

"Blame my old man, not me," Akane grouched, before staring at the fight going on in front of them.

Rolling her eyes at that, Kodachi looked over at Akitsu. "Not going to interrupt dear?"

She shook her head. "My Ranma would not like that if I did so. He is as much a warrior as I am," she said, her tone ringing with pride, possessiveness, and pleasure. "Besides, it is not as if he will need it. He's playing with Mutsu."

Kodachi looked back at the fight, then slowly nodded. "He's using him as a training tool, I think taunting him into using those earthquake attacks of his. Good grief, is he really that good?" Then she shook her head. "Of course he is, I well-recall the fight he had with that sword-wielding woman. She was quite clearly above this man in skill."

Then she paused and leaned in quietly watching as her friend hugged Akitsu from the other side, her sheer exuberance and delight for Akitsu infectious. Akitsu in replied smiled widely, patting the other girls' arms gently, even if her eyes never left the fight going on in front of them. "So, how was it? Your, hmm, night of sinful passion, shall we say? Or rather, not so sinful as all that."

She was delighted to see Akitsu's face flush very noticeably. This was not a light flush that was only visible thanks to her porcelain skin like Kodachi had previously seen there a time or two. This was a full-on red-as-roses blush.

Yet, Akitsu replied with some spirit to Kodachi's teasing. "So good that were it not for the fact that we learned you all were in trouble, we would still be entwined with one another."

"Entwined, I like that," Kodachi said with a giggle. "It's dirty, expressive, and yet somewhat poetic sounding."

After that, the girls fell silent, watching the fight.

Almost the instant the fight had begun, Mutsu realized that either Ranma had been playing with him the last time they'd fought, or he had gotten remarkably better since. At first, he thought to put it down to the first option, but after a little bit, he noticed that Ranma and his sword work was simply more refined than it had been.

It was then that he realized, he also knew some of Ranma's stances and strikes. His eyes were wide he stared at Ranma in something approaching bemused horror. "Oh my God, you really have been taught by the Hannya of the North."

"Hey!" a fist flashed forward, and Mutsu nearly was hit in the eye, only taking it on his temple by jerking his head backward, but it still rang his bell and opened him up to a slash that would have taken him in the shoulder, if not for a quick block from his sword.

"That's my big sister figure. She might use a demon head, but she a demon herself. Get it right," Ranma huffed.

Backing away slightly, Mutsu rubbed his temple, grumbling. That had hurt, darn it. "I have known her quite a bit longer than you have, I think. Do you have any idea what she is capable of? The word demon is the only one..."

"Or goddess?" Ranma interrupted with a laugh, pressing in again but no longer seeming to take the conversation seriously. "That's another word for those who are so high above us mere mortals. Although this mere mortal is going to get there by hook or by crook!"

Mutsu gaped at that statement utterly unable to comprehend where Ranma's confidence that he could grow to challenge Miya. Then he was nearly done in by a double kick to the chest and then Ranma was in the air. But Mutsu had learned from the last time they'd fought that Ranma's aerial style made his normal abilities next to useless. *I have to break out some more of my skills here.* He thought, kicking off the street hard to get some distance, and then pulling out his blade entirely, no longer willing to try and rely on I-ai strikes or his seismic-based powers, which he could only use through the specially crafted sheathe.

With his sword now unsheathed, Mutsu's entire style shifted. He lashed out with his sword as he shouted, "Cutting Wave!"

From the sword's edge, a sliver of energy flew out, not the near clear air pressure attack that Ranma could routinely use from his own blade, but an energy wave, almost gray in color. It was a very odd color, matching the sword almost exactly, and made Ranma wonder if the attack came from the sword rather than the man for a split second since he hadn't used his ki sight at the moment it was launched before he ducked under it. Then flashed out his own attack, an air pressure assault.

To Ranma's surprise, Mutsu blocked the attack with his sheathe, and the next second, Mutsu slammed the end of it down onto the ground, shouting out, "Destructive Point!" Once more from the front of the sheath, a blast of earthquake-like energy shot out towards where Ranma had been standing, destroying the building beneath the two of them, allowing Mutsu to leap away to a nearby building.

But Ranma had dealt with Karasuba and her penchant for slicing buildings in half and his aerial style was up to dealing with the amount of debris tossed everywhere. He bounced between the bits and pieces, then to one bit that had been flung into the air above the rooftop, clinging there like a spider for a brief second, before kicking off hard, coming down after Mutsu.

At the same time, he put both hands on his bokken's hilt for the first time, and the sword, which had previously simply seemed to be a wooden blade, one of many that Kuno carried, began to glow with energy.

The next second, when Mutsu launched his own energy assault, it was met by Ranma's. "Asama-school, Fierce Piercing Fang!"

This was a ki attack, but one that had been condensed beyond even that of the previous type Ranma had been able to use either with his sword or through his own body, and it was pure gold in color, a far brighter blazing gold than those previous attacks as well. It pierced through Mutsu's attack and nearly took his leg off before he dodged out of the way.

Ranma followed his attack into and through the area it had cleared of Mutsu's attack. This time instead of a slash, his sword struck forward with the tip, before coming up in a quick economic strike toward the neck, then back down to the leg, up to the neck again, followed by a thrust, all in the span of an eyeblink. It was all Mutsu do to batter his attacks side, and he couldn't dodge a second thrust, one that Ranma hadn't telegraphed at all even in comparison to his other attacks. The tip of the bokken caught Mutsu in the ribs, cracking two of them and hurling him backward.

He still landed his own blow with the sheath though, although this time he hadn't been able to shout it out. A blast of some kind of seismic energy crashed through the sheath into Ranma's hand, sending him staggering sideways and sending his head ringing.

He shook his head for a second, then scowled. *Damn it, what the heck was that? I felt it, but it was like, like Mutsu converted his ki into something else, some kind of seismic energy? What'd be the term for that? It isn't vibration or anything like that either. Fuck, I'm not gonna figure those attacks of his out any more than I have already, I guess.*

"Not bad," he said, shaking his head and dodging a few more half-hearted attacks from Mutsu, who was dealing with his own wound as Ranma was trying to clear his head. "But not up to Miya's standards, maybe not even up to the Karasuba."

"I don't need you to tell me that," Mutsu grunted, pushing himself to his feet slowly, wanting to hold his ribs, but unwilling to drop either of his weapons to do so. When Ranma made to attack him, he slammed the sheath down onto the ground again, hurling it forward with an upward motion of one arm, as he intoned, "Shrapnel Barrage!"

This blow didn't so much crater the ground or create a fissure there, as lift up a large segment of it in small finger size chunks, hurling them towards Ranma. They did indeed look a lot like shrapnel.

In response, Ranma slammed a foot down on the ground, pulsing his ki out and down into it, shouting out "Tatami Shield!" A good 6 feet of the road flew up in front of him, creating a wall. "Ha, that worked at least."

With that, Ranma dodged around the wall quickly, his wooden sword punching forward again as he closed.

Mutsu again attempted to block it but was blasted off his feet by the pinpoint blow, his sheathe cracking from where he had used it to block the attack.

He rolled, then leaped upwards to another rooftop, trying to put in some distance between them, while the watchers moved after them. Desperately, Mutsu decided to retreat, lashing out at every rooftop with his sheath, destroying buildings behind him, in order to slow Ranma down. Any thought of keeping the destruction to a minimum was gone now.

All that mattered getting back to Hayato. And then maybe try our luck breaking through the cordon around the city. Being on the run wouldn't be fun, but we'd be alive, which I can't say will be the case if we stay in this cursed city any longer. Seriously, what is up with these humans!? Fuck, I wish I had taken Hayato up on his offer to kiss me again so I could use my Norito.

But once more, it didn't work. As Karasuba had found to her cost, Ranma was almost as at home in the air as a bird, flitting from one piece of rubble to another, always closing.

Three buildings had been destroyed by the time Ranma caught them, and their swords flashed, slamming into one another, again and again, midair, with Mutsu being pushed backward and down to the road once more. Several blows flew faster than most could follow between them, and Mutsu beginning to wonder how Ranma's bokken was holding up to his own metal sword, let alone the sheathe, which had been designed by MBI to funnel his tectonic energy. Yet now there were several cracks appearing on it under repeated blows from Ranma's simple ki-reinforced bokken.

Pushing his body to the limits Mutsu got in one shot, which cut Ranma across the shoulder biting deeply into his skin despite the human's insane level of durability, Mutsu's blade having been coated with his ki. Another slice down to his knee as Ranma stumbled from the first strike should have ended the fight in Mutsu's favor, but Ranma stepped back just enough so that what would have been a crippling blow simply cut the skin across his kneecap.

Then he stepped forward, his own blow lashing out catching swordsman in the side before he could pull back, cracking still more ribs. He gasped in agony, backing away, and had to raise the sheathe to block the next blow that came in. As he had feared the sheathe shattered, leaving Mutsu holding just a bare hand of wood, before Ranma ducked under the next desperate blow from Mutsu, coming up in a rising arch with his fist this time, catching Mutsu on the chin, breaking it and hurling the man backward.

Another blow from the sword, thankfully without any cutting energy added caught Mutsu on the forearm, breaking his arm, and his grip on his sword's hilt. The Fifth Sekirei was barely able to push himself to his knees, before the next punch crashed in, catching him on the side of the head and knocking him out completely.

Staring down at the guy he had just knocked out, Ranma took stock of himself. He'd been hit several times in the earlier exchange, but his ki healing had healed up the wounds easily enough. They did the same for these, but

Ranma watched the one to his knee, just in case. *That was close I gotta admit. I was certain that strike was aimed to my side and was only just able to shift my footwork to dodge and even that was just barely enough.*

He turned back to his friends, smiling at them broadly, only now noticing his Pops and Soun had joined his friends. "Well, that was interesting. So, were there any other groups coming in that we should know about?"

"No boy, I think that was it," his father replied smiling ever so slightly at his son. Then he frowned. "But you need to learn when to quit grandstanding! You should've ended that fight at least three maybe even five rooftops ago. Just for that, I'm going to force you to repair all these buildings yourself, and without pay either."

"Hey! I was trying to learn how he did that whole earthquake thing. I thought it looked cool, and you can't say I didn't learn something," Ranma shot back with a proud smile, gesturing towards where he had used the Tatami defense a moment ago. Then he waved one hand in the air to indicate a so-so gesture. "Offensively, the move isn't nearly as usable as I would like, but defensively, if I'm forced to the ground could work."

"Bah, it should be a cold day in hell when a user of the Anything Goes Aerial Style is forced to the ground at all!" Genma grumped, although he did nod fractionally, the only sign of approval Ranma knew he'd get for that idea.

Akitsu was looking around quizzically even as she nuzzled into Ranma's side, a smile of pure contentment on her face as she felt his arm going around her waist, his hand resting on her hip. "I believe there was a sign of Disciplinary Squad somewhere?"

"Actually yes there was," Kodachi replied, frowning. "But according to the last reports the locals passed on to us, they seem to have turned back, or perhaps they were just not here to fight in the first place."

As part of the defense of Nerima against MBI, Kodachi and Kuno had basically ordered a few people on each block to report in anyone unusual being in the area.

That and the Sekirei who were truly allied to them and the idea of no longer playing the game meant they had, at least at first, a decent information network. Since the fighting had begun though everyone had either been involved or been trying to hide so the reports had stopped.

Akane scowled looking around at the damage that had been done to the area all around them. "Personally, I think we need to start getting organized here. Genma might have said it jokingly but there could be people buried underneath this stuff, right?"

Ranma frowned but before he could do anything, Soun closed his eyes and then tapped his hands together. When his eyes opened, they glowed for a brief second as Ranma felt a light pulse of ki flow out from the long-haired man. It didn't go far, but it was certainly something Ranma would never have expected from the sappy man, who Ranma had categorized as an almost noncombatant at this point. "I can't sense anyone alive underneath it all. And I believe most of the citizens would have retreated when they realized the level of the combat going on."

At that Kodachi nodded. "I know that myself and my brother sent off orders to that point, but we didn't see any reports on whether or not it was obeyed. Still, for now, I think we should reposition to the Kuno estate and deal with the problem coming from below."

Just then, there was a booming bellow, like a herd of steers on steroids all lowing off at once from several dozen blocks over. As they all turned in that direction, they saw the head of some kind of creature rising above the roofs of the houses in that area.

"Oh no! Is it too late already! How could something from the caverns below get this far away from the estate!" Kodachi gasped, her eyes wide.

"Right!" Ranma growled, hopping up onto the rooftop before turning to the others. "Homura, are you good to keep fighting?"

Homura nodded. He had pulled himself out of the rubble during Ranma's fight with Mutsu, joining the rest a few minutes after Genma and Soun had arrived. "Yes. You want me to take care of that thing or head to the mansion?"

"Do you know where the Kuno mansion is?" When Homura nodded – he had been shown it during one of the times he had come to visit with Kasumi – Ranma went on. "Then head there right now. The rest of us will gang up on that thing and meet you there, but you're one of our two most destructive long-range fighters, and no offense, but Akitsu's better at working with friendlies around than you. Besides, Tsukiumi should be there and the two of you should be able to come up with somethin' explosive to use if things get out of hand."

"True," Homura replied, chuckling dryly.

With that Ranma led everyone bar Akane and Yashima up to a surviving rooftop and then away.

Homura turned and moved in a different direction, while Akane, with her friend accompanying her, grumbled but raced along the streets as fast as her legs could carry her to try and keep up with the others.

OOOOOO

The Disciplinary Squad had been moving through the area, mainly observing the fights, waiting for the opportune moment to strike at Ranma whenever he appeared. That was their objective here. Take out Ranma, the ringleader of all of the strangeness going on that was holding up the Sekirei game, then if possible anyone else they could who had stood with him. But they were under orders to leave the ones, unwinged, Kusano, Tsukiumi and Shiina alone entirely.

But at first, with no sign of Ranma, or Akitsu, there hadn't been much for them to do other than observe the fighting going on between Kodachi Kuno, Namiji and the forces Higa had sent in. So they had pulled back and begun to investigate the area in general.

Here, problems arose as should've been obvious from having four people whose attitudes were so incredibly different to another.

"And I tell you, that our job is just to observe, then wait for a chance to strike! Back me up here Haihane!" Benitsubasa growled, trying to stare down the two men who had joined their squad.

One of them at least she knew was as tough as he looked. The other one, the one with the more bishounen face, hadn't shown much just yet.

And what is up with the water bottle anyway? Is he another water user but he can't generate his own? And why was I told to keep this thermos of hot water on me? I mean, I know about the curses, but why would I be the one to carry it? And what's his curse that he would possibly want to use it, the pink-haired girl thought once more, staring at the chilled water bottle at the bishounen's side.

Benitsubasa and Haihane had not been told of Taro's curse-form. They might have been told eventually, if not for Takami's interruption of Benitsubasa and Taro's face-off. And after that, Minaka had felt it would be funnier not to explain anything and see what happened.

"That might be what our job entails, but how much do you want to bet, that the boss will want us to start taking out his allies too? We're near where the Kuno estate is supposed to be, and they are the moneymakers here, the ones with real pull both politically, and economically. Take them out, this entire area ceases to be able to look after itself."

Ryu Kumon was many things, a lot of which was negative in the eyes of normal society, but stupid was not one of them. He had carefully read a lot of the data that MBI had pulled together and knew that while Ranma was the titular figurehead of the trouble Minaka was so worried about, it was the Kunos who had been the ones to really get it all organized.

According to MBI's sources, the Kuno clan was paying for many of the Sekirei who had removed themselves from the game, food and board both. He felt that taking them out would force a lot of the Sekirei back into the game, which was what their boss wanted. "And if we do that, the way will be clear for me to challenge Ranma and his father personally. Not any of this gang up on him shit we're supposed to do."

"I agree with him," Taro said sticking his thumb almost into Ryu's eye as he did so, causing the other young man to growl at him, which Pantyhose smirked at before gesturing back down the road they'd been walking along. *And is it just me, or are there not nearly as many people around as there should be?* "You can see the water user back there too. She's supposed to be one of Ranma's best friends, right? I think that she's a better target than heading to the Tendo house itself. Take her back, hell, let one of us even 'wing' her, that'd add her power to our own and remove her from his side of things."

Whatever response Benitsubasa would have made to this was ruined by Haihane's sudden shriek of embarrassment. She had been looking into a store nearby, staring avidly at an old anime called Turn A Gundam, Special Edition, which she had never seen before when she had felt something land on her back. Turning her head slightly, she stared into the face of a wizened old dwarf. Then he suddenly disappeared from over her shoulder, only to reappear an instant later, nuzzling her chest happily where it was covered by her breast bands and half of her kimono which

covered her left side, which was open on the right.

"Oh, my dear! Why are you covering such well-formed, and perky beauties with that! I simply can't have it!" The next second, Haihane shrieked getting the other's attention as the little creature somehow pulled off her breast band before she could even blink. Pulling her black Disciplinary Squad kimono into its proper position with one hand, she lashed out with her free hand, the claws of her gauntlets glinting in the sunlight.

The little creature hopped up, landing on top of her thumb as light as a bird, before flicking out a pipe he was suddenly holding to smack into her forehead. It hit like she just been struck by a fist type of Musubi's strength or more and the blow hurled Haihane backward.

"That's no way to react to an old man who's about to do you a favor," he said with a cackle, hopping forward. In his other hand, he held a bra, a bright red, frilly thing that while in her size, Haihane blearily noticed, was something she would rather use as kindling than actually wear.

The others stared, fell into fighting stances as Benitsubasa screeched in pure rage, "You! You bastard, you'll pay for what you did!"

The old man looked over at her almost this interestedly, before blinking, smacking one fist into the other palm. OH, I remember you!" he then seemed to sag, shaking his head. "The flat-chested one. So sad about that. Still, my dear, I understand there are these amazing inventions called breast implants now anyway. Don't worry, I'm certain that modern medical technology can help you with your tiny... flat... problems."

Benitsubasa practically exploded in fury, her rage, and desire to inflict pain causing a visible aura around her as she charged forward, her feet leaving cracks in the ground. "DIE!"

The two men looked at one another, then shrugged, and charged as well, although Taro was frowning as he did so, staring at the little creature. Something about him was familiar. Almost as if I've seen his picture before, but it was kind of blurry or something.

While the old man simply dodged Benitsubasa's frantic, manic charge, he dealt with the two men more severely. His pipe flew to one side, catching Taro's fist flipping him up over his head, hurling him down the street. Then he lashed out with a kick to the face of Ryu, sending him in the opposite direction.

Like Haihane, Ryu was surprised by the force behind that blow. "Ugh, that was like getting hit by a tiny bulldozer," Ryu muttered, pushing himself to his feet, and rubbing at his forehead. "I'm going to have to break out the Yami-Sen-Ken to beat this guy."

The next second, his hands lashed forward, sending four black slashes of energy towards the little creature, and unfortunately, Haihane behind him. "Kijin Raishu Dan!"

Seeing these unknown energy weapons coming towards her, the claw user had a brief second to wonder if she could block them with her claws, before deciding not to try not knowing what the heck they were. She dove to the side, her robe flapping loose, which caused Haihane to hurt herself on the ground as her bare breasts rubbed against the concrete, while the little man simply skipped through them, staring at them thoughtfully.

"Oh ho, now that is something I've never seen before, and that my boy is saying something! An entirely new kind of energy attack. Or rather the absence of energy. Something like those black hole things are supposed to be. Fascinating! Why, if you are a follower of Anything Goes then..."

"Anything goes!" Taro growled interrupting the old man, pushing himself to his feet. "You're talking like you're a master of that school, is that right?"

"Indeed, have you heard of me, I am Happosai purveyor of beauty, liberator of silky darlings, and Grand Master of Anything Goes!" the old man said, looking back at Taro even as he continued to dodge the attacks coming from Ryu who stopped attacking an instant later, realizing that using the Yami-Sen-ken blades at long-range wasn't going to cut it.

Another person might well have been worried about the fact that he had nearly caught his allies with that ability, something that both Benitsubasa and Haihane were very aware of, as they slowly pushed themselves out from where they had hidden, glaring at him and then the damage he'd done to the surrounding area, ripping up trees, concrete, and houses with impunity. "Fucker could've killed us," the pink-haired one growled, shaking her head angrily.

"You! You're him! The one who cursed me with this name!" Taro growled, stepping forward angrily, stomping towards

the little creature in front of him. "Do you remember bathing a little baby in a cursed spring in China?"

Puffing on his pipe, Happosai frowned for a moment, then nodded, slapping his hands together. "Ah, I remember that! The poor woman had just gone into labor, as I was coming by. She needed help, and I did so. A pity about the whole, um, cursed thing though, there was no other water nearby to wipe you off with though. Would it help if I said sorry?"

"What, no! I don't care about that!" Taro replied, growling. "The mother was so grateful to you for your help she asked you to name the child. Then you gave that little baby a name, a name that no baby should have!"

"What's wrong with Pantyhose Taro? I thought it was a great name," the old man said.

"That name has haunted me my entire life!" Pantyhose Taro growled, lifting the ancient master in one hand. "Change it, or else!"

Happosai rolled his eyes, and the next second Pantyhose Taro was sent twirling away, his grip broken, and his body given so much centrifugal force that he looked as if he had just become a propeller for a moment as he crashed into a nearby building. "Or else what? You young ones, you never seem to understand that when you make a threat like that, you should understand where you stand in relation to the person you're threatening in terms of power."

"What is with this guy!" the claw user muttered. "He's tossing all of us around like..."

Whatever else she would've said was interrupted as Pantyhose Taro pushed himself out of the rubble of the building he'd been tossed into, ignoring the stares from a family that had been taking shelter there during all the martial arts madness going on around them. They raced down into their basement, hoping to hide there from now on. "Or else this!" Pantyhose shouted, triumphantly pouring the cold water over his head.

With that, he grew as his body changed shape. Where before a somewhat thin, bishounen young man had stood, now stood a giant Minotaur, easily two stories tall, with wings on his back, and a snake for a tail. The thing let loose a booming roar and charged, fist lashing down towards the ancient Grand Master.

"Now I've seen everything," Haihane drawled, finally settling her kimono into a position to cover her goods as she and the others watched the fight.

OOOOOO

This was the scene that Ranma and company arrived at, and Ranma instantly decided not to look a gift horse in the mouth. "That would be the Disciplinary Squad, although I don't know who the two guys are. Take them out, but be gentle with Haihane if possible, she's where she is because of her job, nothing more nothing less. As for the rest, put them down hard!"

As he spoke Ranma turned to the others, only to stop and stare at the sight of his father and Soun. They were both staring at the little gnome that was currently battling the minotaur, staring at it in abject horror in point of fact, their eyes bugging out of their heads and their jaws slack. *Huh, on the one hand, I want ta take a picture because that is hilarious. On the other hand, what's got them so spooked?*

"H, how did he get out?!" Soun jabbered to Genma, literally jabbered, his mouth opening and closing between each word as if he was having to really work on putting trouble getting the words out all at once. "How, how did he do it? The Boulder, it must've been at least forty tons. We had to get a construction crew to put it down for us!"

"I don't know, and I don't think it matters, Soun," Genma said, only a little calmer than his friend. "Unless you think he's mellowed in his old age..."

Soun gulped as a shout of 'hotcha' and a shriek from Haihane reached them. "It certainly doesn't look like he has. Oohohohoh god ohohoh god, ahhhh... he's going to kill us. Or worse, force us back into training! No, legs, be strong, gah, I, I'll need you to run, stop trembling!" he shouted to his own legs as his knees noticeably wobbled.

Ranma not wanting to waste any more time on what looked like the old men having a nervous breakdown. "Fine, you two just sit here and do whatever it is are doing, the rest of us, let's get down there. Akitsu do your thing! Kodachi and the rest gang up on Haihane and the Sakura-wannabe."

With that, Akitsu, instantly understanding what Ranma wanted, moved towards the fight around the minotaur, the largest and most dangerous of their opponents, as well as the one dealing with the unknown old man they had been warned about by the Seo's Sekirei. As the others leaped down to engage their targets, her ice powers lashed out with ice spears about as large as a man was tall launching them forward under her direction. They weren't pointed, so

they smashed into rather than cut the Minotaur, and yet, the Minotaur fell back squalling in pain.

At the same time, Ranma made for the guy who looked kind of like him, if Ranma's entire style was different, with camo pants and a black muscle-t and his haircut too. Still, the face was kind of similar, and that alone made Ranma want to smash it in.

That worthy turned and was the first of the Disciplinary Squad to notice they had company. "Shit! Heads up!" That shout having fulfilled his duties as a teammate, Ryu began to lash his hands forward, shouting out, "Kijin Raishu Dan!"

Ranma blinked, hearing the name that his father had shared with him as one of his 'Sealed Techniques' coming from this complete stranger. *I think my old man hasn't told me everything about those techniques just yet*, he thought even as he ducked out of the way of weird, semi-spherical bolts of blackish energy. At range they were fast as heck, but nowhere near as fast as Miya's own energy attacks or as fast as her training had made Ranma.

The effect though was something else. The energy blades pierced the houses to either side and behind Ranma, not so much cutting through, almost seeming to make the segments of the houses they hit disappear almost. Regardless, the buildings collapsed, and Ranma hoped no one had been inside them.

He had no more time to wonder about that though, as he landed in front of the man wearing camo pants, lashing out with a kick which was blocked, then attacking with his fists and feet faster and faster, pushing him backward, but only for a second as the guy replied with a decent amount of speed and skill himself. Then he lashed out with his hand thrust palm forward, his fingers outstretched like a claw attack, and from his palm, several more blade attacks lashed out at Ranma from a bare few inches away.

Ranma barely dodged in time to stop the attack hitting him in the chest and was still slashed in the side and inside of his arm quite badly before his ki healing went to work. *Grah, that stings, what the hell is that attack?* He hissed in pain, but once more the tougher training and fighting he'd been doing of late served him well. Like in his fight with Karasuba he pushed through his pain in order to hop into the air over the next attack, catching the guy in the head with a kick that sent him flying down the street.

The other young man rolled with it, and came up, grinning evilly. "Ranma," he breathed. "It's gotta be you, with that idiotic pigtail of yours. You and your old man are going to pay for what you did to my father!"

"As if I haven't heard that before, although, the to my father line is somewhat unused," Ranma quipped giving the guy up thing the finger.

Nearby, Haihane, Benitsubasa, and the others were being pushed back hard by Kodachi and the others.

Even Akane was getting in on it now, charging forward like a bull down the street towards the claw user, having followed the others on the ground as they made for the winged minotaur's position. "Finally, I get an excuse to beat you into the ground! Let's see how good you really are, you cheater!"

Growling, Haihane dodged around Akane, lashing out with a heel kick that caught her in the back of the head, sending Akane sprawling forwards but not doing all that much damage. Anticipating Akane's next strike she hopped up off of a back kick then as Akane pirouetted around to face her, Haihane slashed forward in a blow that would have at the very least caught Akane in the chest and face, mangling her badly. "GRraah take this you...HUH?"

But her arm was caught in a ribbon, and she had pulled away from Akane and tossed into a nearby building which she slammed into with numbing force.

"I regret to inform you this is no longer a one-on-one competition, but a battlefield," Kodachi said coldly while behind her, her kouhai and Yashima attacked Benitsubasa.

Elsewhere two others were now ganging up on the Disciplinary Squad. The name of the loud thief technique had broken Genma out of his stupor, and he had leaped down, watching as his son dealt with a young man who looked oddly enough, rather like him as Genma pulled the Umi-Sen-Ken around him. Under the Silent Thief Technique, Genma snuck up on the young man who was tossing that technique around.

Before the young man knew he was there, Genma's arms went around the man in a classic chokehold, which he tightened quickly, even as the man gasped in shock twisting his head to stare at Genma. "What, where did... **You!** Genma Saotome!"

"Quiet boy," Genma growled, shaking the youngest even as he tightened the hold to the point where he was close to

breaking his neck, twisting his body so the young man's free arm couldn't come into play. "You're tossing around a power that can all too easily kill anyone who comes in contact with it. I'll not allow that! Not with the technique I made."

"You made! My father made it! You just stole it! Or don't you remember the name of the man you killed!?" Ryu growled, trying to break out of the grip to no avail, only hurting his shoulder in the process.

"Kill? I've never killed anyone except in self-defense brat. Still, it's no great leap to figure out who you are. You'd be Kumon's son then? He helped me develop the Yami-Sen-Ken I'll give you that, but he only helped. And he should never have taught it to you someone who would use it so wildly. You could've killed people here today with that technique all too easily!" Genma didn't have the hyperdeveloped (as he thought of it) sense of honor that Ranma had, but even he would never condone using the martial arts to kill random civilians, as he was all too certain Ryu had when those houses had collapsed.

Nearby, Happosai had not been having fun dodging both the attacks of the maddened minotaur and the attacks of this new woman who was tossing around ice attacks as if she was some kind of mage in one of those children's games he'd seen of late. And then there were her immense ki reserves which he could all too easily feel, a monstrous amount of it. *Ooooh, I could live off even a touch of one of her silky darlings for weeks!*

"Come to Happy darling!" Happosai shouted, bouncing off one of the minotaur's fist and back to Akitsu.

Her eyes widening, Akitsu scowled, and with a single finger created a wall of ice all around Happy's leaping form, a square of ice forming out of thin air, a sign of the greater control and dexterity that Akitsu had gained upon being winged to her Sun-sama. With a thought more ice flowed underneath her, lifting her high into the air away from the old man as he smashed his way out of the ice box she had trapped him in.

Another gesture sent several more bullet-size ice needles pelting into him, going for his eyes and mouth. "No," she growled. "No man other than my Ranma will touch me!"

Then the minotaur roared up from where it had been sent to crash into someone's backyard, his fists reaching. An ice wall protected Akitsu and she leaped away, landing easily as the creature turned its attention on the old man.

With the Kumon guy being dealt with by his father, Ranma decided to switch his attention to the weird minotaur with wings. He raced past Akitsu, hopping into the air to get up to where, several stories up, the thing was doing its best to swat the gnat that was the old man as he used the Aerial style of Anything Goes to dance and move around him. *Proof positive he's got a connection to my old man if I needed more clues ta that. Still, we can get to the bottom of why an old pervert like that's part of our school later.* "Akitsu, I need a landing!" he shouted, near the top of his jump.

Instantly Akitsu summoned up more ice, creating a series of steps that Ranma used to get up to the Minotaur's head over the thing's flailing tail. Racing along its back he then hopped up as the thing turned, trying to shake him off, before flipping around a punch from the thing's massive fist, using his sword to direct it past his side. This put Ranma right above the creature's head, and he lashed down with his bokken, the wooden crashing down on top of the minotaur's head.

The blow was so strong that the wooden sword shattered in Ranma's grip despite his ki reinforcing it, but he also saw the minotaur's eyes rolling back in its skull as it was knocked out.

"Oh ho! Now that was as pretty an overhead power strike as I've ever seen boyo. And a somewhat acceptable use of the Aerial style too. You're working on mixing an armed Sword style with the Aerial school, interesting," mused the old man, staring at Ranma thoughtfully from where he sat on the minotaur's side as it started to fall towards the ground, tumbling lightly. Despite that movement though, the old man kept his seat on whatever portion was topmost, looking at Ranma as he rode down towards the ground with a grip on the shoulder.

"Seriously old man, who the heck are you anyway?" Ranma asked, scowling at him.

Below the tumbling minotaur, the battle was about to take another turn.

Realizing that they were close to not only losing this fight but losing their new fighting strength, Benitsubasa shouted out "Haihane, Norito!" With that, she brought both of her fists down on the ground, calling out, "By the power of my pledge, shatter and bury the enemies of my master! 8.0!"

From the epicenter of where her fists slammed into the ground, a massive blast of tectonic power crashed out in every direction, dwarfing the amount of energy that Mutsu had been able to put out, although it was of the same kind

of energy. The ground caved in, already ruined buildings shattered, and massive cracks appeared in the earth in every direction, dumping Kodachi, onto her rear, burying Yashima, flinging Akane and Namiji into the air. Even Akitsu, the still gibbering Soun, and Genma were buried or, in Genma and Akitsu's case, lost their balance.

Having not quite been choked into unconsciousness, Ryu suddenly felt Genma's grip loosen. Taking his chance his elbow slammed backward into Genma's side four times, which broke the older man's grip enough for Ryu to get a hand between them, lashing out with another blast of the vorpal blades.

Genma was forced to duck from this attack, which carved into the ground and the rubble of a building behind him, even as he rolled away shaking his head. "Genma... you'll pay, you'll pay for killing my father and stealing his work!"

"Your father was fine the last time I saw him. And that was years ago. Have you been following us all this time?" Genma asked incredulously. "Who does that honestly!?"

Ryu gave no reply but to launch more vorpal blades in every direction, causing the Nerimites to scatter, even Ranma who had to dodge away from where he had ridden the minotaur into the ground. Happosai had leaped clear, making for Akitsu who had found herself hallway buried by Benitsubasa's attack.

She panicked, throwing up both hands, and encasing Happosai, and about a hundred feet in every direction from the midget, in a column of ice.

"Retreat!" Benitsubasa shouted, racing over to Pantyhose and grabbing up her hot water bottle from her side, dumping it over his head. "Full retreat!"

Pantyhose Taro, who had just sneezed despite being unconscious, found himself tossed over the pink-haired Sekirei's shoulders, while Haihane, who had been holding her own somewhat better than Benitsubasa against Akane and Kodachi, followed on her heels, still clutching the front of her kimono with one fist, unmindful of the fact that she was kind of cutting herself with her claws very lightly, even as she turned, staring at Ranma and Akitsu. The power of their bond had only just begun to register but now she was nearly overwhelmed by its power so close to her.

"Is that what we're supposed to be like? Jealous," she muttered, racing after her friend.

However, despite being the one to almost accidentally give the others a chance to do so, Ryu couldn't quite break contact. Even as he had rolled away from the young man's latest attack, Genma had pulled the Umi-Sen-Ken technique around him, and now appeared right in front of him. A blow to the solar plexus doubled the younger man over, and then he found his head gripped with one hand before a series of sharp blows to the head from his other hand, and Ryu fell comatose to the ground.

"Not bad, Pops," Ranma said smirking as he moved towards his father, staring at the retreating trio of Disciplinary Squad members, then down to the young man unconscious on the ground. "So, I take it you had help creating the Yami-Sen-Ken?"

"Indeed. I created the Quiet Thief entirely on my own, but the Loud Thief technique I was having trouble with containing the energies of the attack. This young man's father ran a down on its luck dojo. Frankly, the entire place should've been condemned years before we even arrived there. But the man had a few ideas that helped me in finishing it."

"Now that's interesting," said Happosai mildly, from where he sat nearby on the same icicle that had previously been freezing him solid. How he'd gotten out was something of a mystery to Akitsu, who quickly moved to stand next to Ranma, growling angrily at the older man's attempt to feel her up a moment ago.

"M, Master!" Genma said, all his normal bravado disappearing instantly. "I that is I I'm so happy you survived! Where did you go!?" with that he made to leap forward his arms flung out in a hug that made Ranma twitch back in horror.

"Cut the crap Genma," the old man said mildly, his words causing Genma to stop where he was and drop to his knees in a perfect example of the Crouching Tiger technique. Happosai ignored him and the nearby Soun, who had yet to move from where he had been at the start of the fight, puffing on his pipe as he stared at Ranma, then Akitsu, a wide, almost childish grin on his face as he stared at her.

If that is, the child in question looked like a wrinkled raisin and could pull off a smile that was both completely, childishly delighted in something and about as dirty as a mountain of porn. The look made Ranma tense noticeably, his fingers twitching while Akitsu readied her power once more.

Then, with a visible effort of will, Happosai tore his eyes from her back to Genma, his smile drooping instantly into a

frown. "Heaven to hell in one easy glance," he muttered almost under his breath, before pointing at Ranma with his pipe. "This your boy, Genma?"

"He is indeed, master," Genma said, grabbing Ranma around the shoulders with both hands, and thrusting him forward. "If you're looking for someone to teach all that you can about Anything Goes to, he will do nicely. In fact, he's, it's gotten to the point where I barely have anything left to teach him."

"Except for the two techniques that you created in order to claim the title of master yourself," the Grand Master of Anything goes retorted slyly. "Those are interesting. Remarkably interesting indeed, a worthy addition to the school of anything goes. Well done."

Genma blade the sigh of relief, then found himself flung through the air, twirling like a twister in midair before he slammed down a few feet of away from where he had previously been standing. "As if! Just because you seemingly kept up your martial arts training doesn't mean I'm going to forget the fact that you and Soun over there locked me into a cave for who knows how many long years! Is that any way to treat your master!?"

"I'm sorry master!" Genma shrilled as the old man laid into him, with Soun screaming the same thing from nearby. He had broken out of his stasis near the end of the battle and had been working with Akane and Yashima to clear some of the rubble away and get at people who had been buried. Luckily, no lives had been lost to Ryu's profligate use of his technique but there were several dozen people buried.

The first people to be freed from the rubble now stared as Akane groaned, her head in her hands as her father fell to his knees, shouting out, "I'm sorry Master! We're unworthy!" as Genma said the same thing.

"It depends on what the master has done," Ranma interjected, staring at the beatdown being given out and Soun's response to it with amusement on his face. "Unless you're going to tell me that you're as white as the driven snow? After I've heard about you stealing panties and bras off of women whatever they did to try and stop you?"

The old man scowled, shaking his head. "You wouldn't begrudge an old man his fun, now would you?" he asked, actually trying to do the puppy dog eyes technique on Ranma, which was possibly the scariest thing that Ranma had ever seen.

Akitsu seemed to agree as frost began to grow across the ground towards the old man and she scowled, "Stop that! Honestly, are you the only sane one who has ever been taught this Anything Goes school, Ranma?"

"I'm kind of beginning to think so. Although maybe Miya-nee's training offsets the insanity of my original school?" Ranma said with a nod, and a bright smile for her, which she returned.

Then Ranma became serious. "However, right now we've got bigger fish to fry than whatever is going on with the old raisin and those two reprobates," he said to the old man.

Happosai broke off berating on Genma, sitting on the now-unconscious Genma's back. He puffed on his pipe again staring at Ranma. "What kind of things are we talking about? The reason for all these incredibly powerful but not all-that-skilled women around, maybe?"

Ranma smirked. "Well, they're not all unskilled. But first, before you say anything about me being my old man's successor the Aerial Style of Anything Goes, you should know I'm also the apprentice to one of those ultra-powerful women, who is frankly on an entirely different level of power, and skill to any of them. If you have a ki-sensing technique..." he paused, looking at the old man.

When he nodded, Ranma pointed back the way to the north, his face breaking out into a grin a second later as the old man's eyes seemed to bug out of his head as he stared towards the north. "Right, that's Miya-nee. That's my teacher. The old man was my teacher at one point, but he's right. What he calls the sealed techniques are the only things he's got to teach me any longer, and I've surpassed him in strength and speed thanks to her training. I won't say I'm entirely a sword user now, but I'm almost as much a student of her school as I am the Aerial style."

Genma grumbled a little, but he also looked extremely proud and nodded his head firmly. "It's true master. My boy's the finest martial artist of his age I've ever seen."

The old man continued to look at Ranma, puffing on his pipe thoughtfully, his mind going down two quite different roads. One was his perverted side, a side of his mind that was normally the one in the driver's seat. That side was going, *Woohoo I have landed in paradise, and there's someone out there even stronger than the ice user!?! I could live a thousand years of the power I'd get from one bra of this 'Miya-nee' While training this boy into the ground to be*

the next Grand Master of my school. His own ki reserve's pretty large and very potent.

The other side was his martial arts master side. Normally that part of his brain worked only to feed his perversions or simply his sense of fun, but right now, it was combined with his normally dormant sense of self-preservation. After all, if you could shrug off being buried alive or being hit by a Type-90's main gun and walk away, you didn't need much self-preservation instincts. Yet right now, that part of his mind was, while sounding somewhat groggy from disuse, screaming the message, *Tread lightly dude, tread lightly! Some bras are just not worth your death Happy old boy.*

Before this mental confusion could be resolved, Ranma had turned away, staring first after the retreating Disciplinary Squad, then out past Nerima into the rest of Tokyo. "Listen, you three can stay here, work out whatever the hell's going on here. Akitsu, Kodachi, and the rest should head over to the Kuno estate, see if they need any more help. I'm going to head out for a bit on my own. It's time to remove some players from this game."

"Ranma, I would prefer to go with you," Akitsu said, grabbing at Ranma's sleeve and speaking far bolder than she would have in her broken state.

"I know, but I can do this best myself. Don't worry. If I run into anything that is even remotely a fight I'll pull back. But I bet I can get to the southern brat easily now, and the Pretty Boy of the East has been asking to become less pretty for a while now. This was just the final straw and will have weakened his position by quite a bit. Best to strike while the iron's hot y'know?"

Akitsu continued to tug at his sleeve moving into Ranma's personal space and pouting up at him. "Sun-sama..."

"Gah, that should be illegal!" Ranma groaned looking away while Akitsu smiled slightly in victory, though the smile faded away a second later as Ranma went on. "But no. I need to do this Aki-chan, we need to start permanently removing the factions from this game. Then with them gone, we can move openly against MBI."

"So long as all the Sekirei working for us have gotten rid of their MBI cards," Kodachi cautioned. "And we make certain of a few other matters at the same time."

While a part of her was over the moon with the idea of having been given a new nickname by her Sun-sama, Akitsu still pouted until Ranma leaned down and kissed it away. The others gaped at the bond wings appearance, wings of ice and silver flashing from Akitsu's back. It was a short kiss, but Akitsu was practically glowing as much as her bond wings had a moment ago as Ranma pulled away.

"So nice," Namiji moaned, pouting herself now. "I seriously would like some more time with Takano-chan once this is all over."

Ranma kissed Akitsu on the forehead then, winking at her. "I'll be back soon, promise." To that, Akitsu could only nod, staring into his eyes before Ranma slowly moved out of her arms.

Then Ranma turned and raced away, going so fast he was out of sight within a few seconds.

"Such a hasty fellow that boy, why if I was with a woman like you, you'd have to drag me away with a fleet of ships! And as for the rest of you, ah, a veritable smorgasbord!"

With that Happosai was about to launch himself towards Akitsu and the others but a wall of ice appeared between Happy and his targets. "Let us go!" Kodachi shouted. "Leave the venerable pervert behind to deal out punishment to his former students, we must go to back up my brother and the Shadow Legion.

By the time Happy got around the ice wall, three of the five girls he had been aiming for were gone, leaping away over the rooftops as fast as they could go.

Pouting at having his first desire being so horribly taken away from him, Happosai turned back to his two minio-that is his two students, filing away the mention of the Shadow Legion for later. "Hmm, an interesting young man you've raised their Genma my boy. Very, very skilled for his age, as you said. *In fact, it became down two of the fight to the death, I'm not certain I would get away without being crippled.*" More importantly, he's got such fantastic taste in girls!"

"Feh, they aren't so hot. And neither is he. In either of his forms," Akane scowled, shaking her head. She had yet to really get over the fact that most Sekirei, even element types, were simply flat-out tougher than she was. Or that Ranma had freely offered to train a few of them.

Then she screamed as Happosai was suddenly hanging off her chest, fondling her lightly before hopping away towards Yashima's chest then back, fondling Akane's rear this time. "Oooh, you must be Akane-chan! Soun was

bragging about you the last time I was able to drag him away from home! And you don't have to be jealous my dear, you are a hidden gem, a gem I tell you. Those thighs, a gift from the gods they are!"

Genma and Soun stared at one another, then sighed. It looked as if their master had not changed all that much in his enforced hibernation. Then Soun moved forward to help his daughter only to pause as Happy hopped off Akane, dodging the smaller ki hammer Akane wielded and the far more massive one from Yashima with ease. "Wait, what did Akane-chan mean by either form?"

Realizing this could be the perfect way to get the Grand Master off their back, the two old men stumbled over one another in their haste to explain Ranma's curse, while elsewhere, nearly out of Nerima, Ranma had the sudden desire to kill his old man. Alas, he put it down to just being normal, unknowing of the horror that would await him in the near future thanks to that revelation.

OOOOOO

"W, where am I?" Pantyhose Taro muttered opening his eyes and seeing nothing but pink in front of him.

"On my fucking back," Benitsubasa growled, reaching behind with one finger to flick him in the forehead, pushing his head out of her badly ruffled hair. "After changing into some kind of giant flying minotaur thing you went nutso on us, and then we got jumped by practically all of the locals! **All** of them at once. And they weren't playing by the rules either, no one-on-one matches anything like that. I think the other attacks into Nerima got their asses kicked. We had to retreat."

Pantyhose Taro raged at that, pushing out of her arms and standing on wobbly legs. "W, what, retreat!? I had him, I had the bastard who has cursed me for my whole life right there! And you dragged me away!?"

"Better to live and fight another day than get your ass kicked today," Benitsubasa rejoined, slapping him side him upside the head. "Get over yourself! Or are you saying you could fight that many high-level enemies all at once, including that little pervert? We already lost Ryu damn it!"

Pantyhose Taro scowled but nodded agreement. The odds were certainly against them back there, even if none of the Nerimites, bar the ice user and the pigtailed one Pantyhose Taro recognized as their primary target seemed to work together. "Fine. But what do we do now? I gotta admit, I underestimated how many of them there were. And how skilled too. That Ranma fucker, he's the one who knocked me out, right?"

While her pink-haired companion nodded, Haihane spoke up, staring back over her shoulders. "I think we've waited too long, to take direct action. All told that group's a lot stronger than us. If we're supposed to enforce the rules or even just get Ranma to stop interfering in the Game, we'll need a lot more in terms of numbers and skill too."

"Agreed," Benitsubasa said with a sigh. *Unless the big boss has something else planned, I think we're going to be best served to fort up in the tower, and maybe, maybe start deactivating all those Sekirei who have joined them if we can. I don't see us regaining control of this game by playing even remotely by the rules any longer, she thought but did not say aloud. She knew that Haihane had trouble with that kind of move. But to her, it was the only way forward. Or else we're screwed!*

OOOOOO

Ranma crossed much of the city within about forty minutes to an hour of leaving the others behind. He knew that Akitsu could probably have kept up with him, but he really had wanted to send her with the others to back up Kuno at his family's mansion just in case. *Besides, after the beat down we just gave them, the Disciplinary Squad, which is now the only other real power in this 'game,' shouldn't be able to mess with us again. At least not today. And making sure of the fact that MBI and the Disciplinary Squad are the only ones left makes far too much sense for me to ignore.*

With that in mind, Ranma made his way to the south of the city, racing along the rooftops as easily as someone else would have through a forest trail, scowling angrily. *The little brat first and then the pretty boy asshole. That'll give me time at least think about how I'm going to go about dealing with him. The little brat is easier. The pretty boy might've thought up the idea of using Ashikabi as hostages against the behavior of their bonded Sekirei like he did with Uzume, but two can play that game. Hell, in this case, we could even call it protective custody instead of his being a hostage.*

To Ranma's surprise when he arrived at the Mikogami mansion, there were still two Sekirei on security duty outside of the mansion. One was a young woman, probably fourteen or so, with her green hair done to look like dog ears and a pretty svelte body in a body glove of some kind. Her feet were covered by iron boots, as were her elbows and knees.

The other was tall and tomboyish, like Akane only with a few extra feet of height, a much larger bust, but also a cold, haughty, even disdainful look on her face as she looked around the mansion grounds. That look, and the fact her hair was done up in spikes with bells on the end – something that reminded him of an anime character he saw once – made her perhaps the third or fourth Sekirei who was just genuinely not all that good looking. At least to Ranma's eyes.

No accounting for taste though he thought, launching himself forward over the gate. The two of them had already been looking in his direction even before he was in sight of the gate himself, so Ranma figured there was no point to try and be sneaky right now. *Odd, I think every one of the Sekirei, bar the DS squad, noticed me coming before I arrived. Although given how badly they were being handled by the ancient raisin I can't blame 'em. Still, it's something to think about in the future.*

The green-haired girl yelped, dodging away, while almost at the same time the other one reacted by punching forward, well before Ranma was inside arm's reach. Ranma was about to taunt her about that then her thrust out arm seemed to grow larger than was physically possible, almost as if it had been made of rubber. It only stopped growing when the Sekirei's fist was as big as her body yet somehow the blow didn't slow down despite its size.

Still, Ranma was able to dodge up and over it easily, lashing out with a kick as he passed her, which caught the Sekirei in the side of the head with bone-jarring force. Her body flew sideways, and Ranma used the impetus of that impact to launch himself sideways towards the other Sekirei, catching her with a fist to the chest before she could raise her weapon. She fell back with a cry, then Ranma grabbed her head and flipped up and over her, kicking her in the back towards the Sekirei with the arm-growing trick.

Before the two of them could untangle themselves, Ranma was on them, hands lashing out in a chop to crash down onto the back of their necks, knocking them unconscious. Both of them fell boneless to the ground, and Ranma quickly tied them up, one to another, watching in some fascination as the brunette Sekirei's arm returned to its normal size. "Huh, you see something new every day."

He knew it wouldn't hold them and eventually they would be up and about. But by that point, Mikogami would be with someone who could very easily watch over him and keep them from interfering.

Ranma moved to the front door of the mansion, debating whether or not he wanted to kick it in then deciding, yes, yes he damn well did. "After all the property damage Mutsu and the DS did, doing a little on my own sounds like a fine idea." The next second the large wooden doors flew inward, their centers cracked and warped by the force of his kick.

Moving through the mansion a second later, Ranma found it was utterly empty. No servants, no butler, no one attacking him at all. "Huh, so he really did double-down on trying to take Tsukiumi and the other un-winged ones, didn't he? Still, shouldn't there be servants or what have you around here?" Ranma was feeling a little weirded out by how empty this giant mansion was.

Quickly Ranma moved through the mansion, searching it from one end to the other. Eventually, he found Mikogami in a small escape room, the side of which Ranma smashed open after three kicks, before tearing the previously hidden metal door out of his way just in case the kid was behind it somewhere. He didn't want to hurt the kid after all... much.

"So, you're the big brat big bad brat of the South," Ranma drawled, staring at the little kid that he had last seen the night he had met Akitsu. "Well, think of this as the just deserts of your wicked ways. I mean come on kid, you had the biggest flock of them all and you didn't think that was enough? Didn't your parents ever tell you not to treat people like things?"

"My parents never taught me anything you, you pigtailed jackass!" Hayato shouted back. He had twisted the room's emergency bed onto its side and was now using it as a fort, pointing some kind of electrical weapon at Ranma. It was like a large cattle prod almost, with twin tines set as wide as Hayato's arms. "Stay away or I'll electrocute you! Mutsu will be back soon and..."

"No, he won't. Not with the concussion I gave him, and the broken ribs and the broken arm," Ranma added, counting out the three wounds on his fingers mockingly. "You overplayed kiddo, you lost this so-called game of yours. Now you got to pay the penalty."

"Hey, I was never told about any penalty!" Hayato shouted indignantly. "The only ones getting hurt are supposed to be the Sekirei, even if we don't win the ultimate prize."

"You were never told a lot of stuff evidently," Ranma shot back, before hopping up over the bed faster than the boy could track. Hayato tried to raise the cattle prod even so, but a light kick to the center of it shattered it, the thing

coming apart in the kid's hands, sparking and fizzling.

Mikogami yelped and dropped it, blowing on his hands for a second, then found himself hoisted into the air by Ranma, who dangled him in front of his face for a second. "Now don't think I'm going to hurt you or anything like that, I'm not that kind of person. But, I'm not going to let you free to keep on acting however you want either."

"T, then what are you going to do with me?" Mikogami asked hesitantly, although he was much calmer looking now that he knew his death wasn't in the near future.

"Nothing much, I'm just going to turn you over to someone who can watch over you, and make sure you don't act out any longer."

An hour and a half later, after carrying the kid like a sack of weed under his arm over the rooftops, which the kid took two with a somewhat blasé attitude thanks to how often he'd been carried like that before, Ranma arrived at Miya's house. He rang the doorbell then smiled as Miya answered it,

She smiled at him, then blinked staring down at the little boy still being held like a sack of wheat under one arm. "Ranma, I hope you know that stashing kidnap victims is forbidden in Izumo House."

Ranma laughed. "Heh, but this is a special kidnap victim."

"Help me Oba-san, he's crazy! He burst into my house and..."

"That's enough that of kiddo," Ranma said clapping his free hand over Mikogami's mouth. "You get points for quick thinking though. He then placed Hayato on his feet in front of Miya. "Miya, meet Hayato Mikogami, Ashikabi of the South."

Miya's eyes had already narrowed at the use of the word 'Oba-san.' They narrowed further now as she looked at the little boy who suddenly realized that perhaps this wasn't just a kind middle-aged woman. "I see," she said coldly, then she smirked. "And you wish me to look after him? How many of his feathers are still in the game as they would put it?"

"All the ones that attacked Nerima are still conscious, not injured enough to remove them from the game, but enough to stop them from being able to fight," Ranma reported. "There's two more down south that I just beat up and tied up outside of his mansion, but..." Ranma shrugged. "They'll probably be along eventually if they can figure out where I took him. I did knock them out rather hard."

"I see. But why here and not the Tendo place?" Miya was rather worried about what this might mean for the arrangement between her and Minaka. "You realize that if they come for him, and ask politely, I won't be able to stop them. That would be a step too far in terms of interference for my agreement with Minaka."

"Yeah, I was kind of afraid of that. But Kasumi already has to look after Kusano, and frankly, with Yashima, me, Akitsu, Pops, and the Tendos, it's already crowded there. Here, you have a lot of room left. Plus, I don't know how they'll even go about finding him, I doubt he has some kind of homing device or something on him. And when they do show up, can you honestly say most of the Sekirei from the south are smart enough to not annoy you?"

Miya's chuckle answered that, and Ranma moved on. "Besides, if anyone can set this kid on the straight and narrow after he's gone so far astray, it's you. With a little help from Kasumi, I think."

Miya smiled at the compliment already thinking about what she would have to do to make certain that Hayato realized her little Feathers were people, not trading cards. "Very well, I will do what I can to correct his attitude before one of them arrives. Ooh..." her smile turned somewhat darker as an aura of darkness appeared behind her, the faint gleam of a Hannya mask slowly coalescing. "I do hope it is Mutsu. I have so many things to speak with him about."

Having first perked up at the idea of the woman just letting him go once his Sekirei showed up for him, Hayato had quailed at the strange apparition behind the kind-seeming woman. When it disappeared though, he bounced back slightly, gaping at Miya. He had no knowledge of her other than they were somewhere in the North, Mutsu never having given a description of the Demon of the North. "That's it! You're, you're just going to, to kidnap me?"

"Take you into protective custody," Miya and Ranma said as one, then smirked at one another before Miya went on. "We wouldn't want you to suffer a mischief after all. Nor would we want you to be the cause of mischief."

"Tha, that's not fair!"

"And was it fair for you to order adult women around as if they were playthings? To make them dance to your tune in this bizarre game created by a madman?"

"But, they, they're just Sekirei, I mean, they like to fight! And the whole point of the game was to gather as many Sekirei as you could," Hayato protested.

"Does that mean they did not have feelings, could not feel pain? And if this is indeed a game, then should you not realize that you are now in an enemy's 'base' as it were. And have thus lost? Or would it become more real to you if you saw your Sekirei killed or the next best thing to it as they are taken away from you by MBI?"

The boy flinched at that, and Miya smiled slightly. There did seem to be at least some hope for him then.

"Fine," he grumbled, unable to argue with her logic. *I'm not exactly bargaining from a position of strength after all.* "But the moment some of them show up I'm going to be sending them back to the mansion to at least get me my stuff."

"That is well within your right, so long as Mutsu is not the first to arrive. If he is, he and I will be too busy having a... conversation, for him to be of much use to you," Miya replied, though she kept her Hannya mask from appearing once more.

The boy pouted but nodded after a second his attempt to use the puppy dog eyes look on her not having worked at all.

By the time the two of them had finished their minor argument, Ranma was long gone. Miya shook her head at that, then gestured the boy inside with one hand, and it suddenly struck Hayato that whatever the woman looked like, she carried herself with more poise and authority than his mother or anyone from their social circle ever had. He gulped at that but her words assuaged him a bit. "Come. Lunch will be served shortly. You can meet your fellow tenants at least the majority of them."

From the north, Ranma traversed the city heading into the east towards Higa's hospital building, deciding to put off meeting with the idiot from the west for the day. His Sekirei had been hammered a bit harder than most of the ones facing Kodachi and Akane and his parents but had also been imprisoned by Kuno and his Shadow Legion. They were not going to be in fighting trim anytime soon, and frankly, from the way they went about ambushing Tsukiumi, Ranma wasn't certain if he was going to let them do so anyway.

Beyond that incident and the fight with Ryoga though Nishi's acted if not honorably then not like a total bastard. On the other hand, the pretty boy has to be dealt with now.

Once more Ranma found himself staring up at the second tallest tower in the city, thinking about how best to break-in. Damn, they've stepped up security. *Huh, are those automated guns on the rooftop? Still, I really don't want to hurt anyone normal if I can help it, but I need to remove both the pretty boy and the glasses-wearing asshole from the game.*

Finally, he shrugged. *Everyone else seems to be going into property destruction these days, I might as well continue the trend. When ya get down to it, a single large door isn't much after all.* With that, he pulled ki into his hands, then raced forward, leaping across the intervening distance the buildings, slamming his hand into the side of the building and shouting out his attack, an attack he had made after watching Mutsu in action that day, "Bursting Flash!"

The blow crashed through the side of the building, pieces of the concrete beginning to rain down everywhere as shouts of alarm and fire alarms began to be heard from inside. From there Ranma just worked his way up around the building, destroying more of the outer wall, until large bits above began to collapse downward. Then he leaped away, watching as the top of the building collapsed downward. "So much for those automated guns. Honestly, if they can't shoot straight down the side of the building, what good are they?"

With that, Ranma dropped down and used the same technique again to shatter the entrance to the underground parking lot. No one was going to get out of the building in a vehicle. Not that way.

OOOOOO

Higa sat at his desk, staring at the computer screen in front of him. He was supposed to be going over some bookkeeping for one of his companies, there had been signs of a middle manager somehow embezzling funds from his own secret programs, yet another sign of the computer-generated attack he'd been dealing with since the Veiled Sekirei and her Ashikabi had been turned against him. But for the life of him, Higa couldn't concentrate on it right

now. No, his thoughts were away with his last two Sekirei, his allies, and this last gamble on his part.

Here I sit, once one of the strongest, most powerful players in this game, on top of my already considerable empire, ready and almost able to challenge the gamekeeper himself and now look at me. My pawns removed, my abilities sharply curtailed, and most of my allies no longer willing to obey my directives.

Yet going over his past actions, Homura couldn't decide what he should have done differently. He knew intellectually where he'd gone wrong but could not see how he could've acted in any other manner. Ranma had been a threat, he had moved to remove that threat. The game had called for the accumulation of power. He had moved to acquire that power as ruthlessly and as morally as he ever had in business. What was wrong with that? Every decision he made was logical, any other decision or choice unfathomable.

And it had been working, until Ranma. Ranma, with his strength and his desire to make the game fair. And of course, his odd alliance with the immovable object, the monstrous Demon of the North.

Even now, Higa scoffed at that very idea. As if this game had ever been 'fair' for anyone but the game master himself. It didn't take a genius like Higa was to see how rigged the game was from the very beginning.

"Ranma," he growled, "the source of all my troubles." The one who had freed the oh so useful Veil Sekirei from his control. The one who had beaten more than half of his allies, who had killed his two strongest Sekirei, and damaged the others so much that MBI had seen fit to recall them like so many cheap car pieces. The one who had personally assaulted and humiliated Higa and was almost certainly connected to the ongoing cyber-attacks on his corporation.

I wonder, have I ever hated someone like I hate Ranma? I hate Minaka of course, but that is based on the fact that he is the game master instead of myself, it is cold and calculating. It isn't personal, not like my hatred for Ranma. That is very, very personal, he thought, his eyes flicking once more to the computer screen and his reflection there.

The image of his face brought back to his mind the humiliation he had suffered at Ranma. The wig was, of course, the starting point, constantly reminding him of it whenever it itched where it was practically glued to the top of his head. The fact that his face also still contained a tinge of blue was another. Luckily all the little messages and doodles that Ranma had left on his face and upper body had long since been washed away. The blue was perhaps four more days' worth of showers away from being gone.

"All my strength, all my ability, all might vast intellect, and I was forced to roll the dice on this move into Nerima, on an all or nothing gamble, something I would never condone in business, or even in this game, but something that has become necessary due to my own weakness. And I can't even contact them, because MBI cut off their electricity and phone lines!"

Sighing Higa clenched his hands then breathed in deeply, trying to dispel his anger and, though he would never admit it, anxiety. After all, the fat was this gamble had been for all the cards. He had nothing left, no more Sekirei to call upon, no means with which to continue participating in the Sekirei Plan.

Several minutes later, his intercom buzzed. "Yes?" he asked as he flicked it on.

"Sir, our external cameras have spotted Ranma Saotome outside somewhere, he seems to be just watching our building but...crap, we just lost him!" the voice on the other side of the intercom suddenly shouted, losing his earlier controlled, if anxious tone.

The next second, there was a booming crash, and Higa sighed, letting his face fall into his hands as he propped them on his desk. "Well, I suppose that could serve as my answer," he whispered to himself, even as his advisor burst into the room.

"Sir, we have to evacuate! The entire top half of this building is coming down!"

OOOOOO

As the building was evacuated Ranma retreated a bit, putting himself in a nearby shadow and watching the main entrance to the building. *No way would Higa's ego let him escape out the back unless they were under direct attack. And look, there he is now.* Ranma watched as a group of human security guards hustled Higa out, while the glasses-wearing one, whose name Ranma hadn't heard before this followed, shouting into his phone.

Ranma waited until they were a few blocks down the street, getting away from the wrecked building and the group of MBI-paid first responders who were trying to evacuate the rest of it. Then he dropped down on top of them, crashing down onto two of the security guards bearing them to earth.

Without pausing Ranma kicked one of them up like he was a sack of rice into the face of a third bodyguard, before jumping the fourth, pushing him into the wall, then tossing him down the street. "Humans," he quipped, grabbing Higa before he could try to flee, "they don't make them like they used to."

A kick sent the glasses-wearing one to his knees, gasping in air from what he thought might well be a ruptured stomach, but was in fact just a bruised one. A knee to the face sent him sprawling backward unconscious, and Ranma looked between him and Higa who he was still holding in the air, smirking at seeing some of his earlier handiwork still visible there. He was tempted to knock the wig off Higa's head but decided against it. It could be glued on, and that meant doing so would take more effort than he was interested in using right now.

"Perhaps, I wasn't clear the last time we saw one another. Perhaps you think my earlier warning was just a suggestion. That you still had some kind of leeway when it came to deciding whether or not to follow the whole one-on-one format, not to take hostages and not gang up on or forcibly wing Sekirei. Was this in fact the case?" Ranma continued, his tone a sarcastic drawl as he dropped Higa to the sidewalk. "You can speak now," he added.

"You'll, *cough*, *cough*, never get away with this!" Higa shouted after getting his breath back.

"That is the most unoriginal line from someone in your position I have ever heard. And I have watched a hell of a lot of movies where moronic villains are cornered at last by the hero or his sidekick," Ranma said, kneeling down in front of Higa. "Next you'll say you have powerful friends in this town."

"Not just in this town, in the government of Japan! Around the world! You can't just..."

"That's enough," Ranma said with a sigh. "I was hoping for something original."

He karate chopped Higa in the center of his forehead, causing him to sprawl backward unconscious. Then with a sigh, he picked up first one, then the other onto his shoulders turning towards Nerima. "I'm pretty certain that the Kunos will have some kind of dungeon we can keep the two of you in. Hopefully with chains. You certainly deserve it after all the crap you've done."

Ranma was nearly back to Nerima and was just about to turn towards where he knew Kuno mansion to be when he suddenly shivered the air growing cold. A second later there was a blast of ice that rocketed up into the air and then spread over the ground, covering everything for several dozen miles in every direction within a few inches of ice. This included people who were outside at the time.

Several hundred people in the radius of the attack found themselves frozen to the ground, ice covering them from the feet up to their waists. Thankfully, it was a hot day. That and their own body temperature would thaw them out. It wouldn't be pleasant, but the back-blast from Akitsu's attack was survivable. Not so much for the target of this assault.

Ranma blinked, staring down at his feet, which had been caught in the explosion of ice, before reaching down with a hand and shattering it. From there he made his way forward. When he came within sight of the mansion he had to slow down, moving forward more cautiously as every step threatened to freeze the bottom of his feet to the ice beneath. When Ranma reached the mansion, he found the entire landscape still frozen, along with several dozen of what looked like...

"Are those tentacles?" Ranma asked, pointing at them in shock.

"Ranma!" Akitsu shouted, turning towards them, racing towards him in fact.

Ranma smiled at her, then his eyes widened, and he only had a second to dump his burden as she flung her arms around his shoulders and pulled him into a kiss, her bond wings blasting out of her back in thousands of ice-like feathers. Ranma returned the favor, greatly enjoying this more emotive Akitsu before pulling back reluctantly. As Akitsu nuzzled into his chest, Ranma gesturing with his head over towards the mansion, where he could now make out the forms of Kuno and the others slowly moving away from the doorway. Tsukiumi was there as well, and Kodachi's friend.

"Do I want to know what happened here?" Ranma asked. "And wasn't this kind of overkill?"

"Probably not. And no, no it was not," Akitsu said primly.

"She's right, Homura intoned, shivering a little as he leaned on Kodachi, who herself looked a little shocked. Behind them came Tsukiumi. She paused, her entire body flushing red, as her breath began to come in short gasps as her

eyes locked on Ranma. Akitsu noticed, and quickly put herself between the two of them, her eyes narrowing.

"...So, exactly what happened here?" Ranma asked, staring at the giant tentacle things pushing out from every window and doorway. "Or is this going to be one of those R-rated hentai stories?"

"Not quite," Kodachi replied, smiling wanly at Akitsu. "But it could well have been if not for our Sekirei allies..."

End Chapter

This is not quite the chapter I'd hoped to be but considering the fact that it not only did not win the small story poll for last year month but working on it is cutting into this month's works, I felt this was an appropriate place to cut off, and only a day off my Mother's Day goal. Although honestly speaking, putting out a story with as many lime/lemon goodness as this story on Mother's Day would have been a bit quixotic to me anyway. LOL.

Next chapter, we find out what happened under Kuno mansion, why Homura will never look at octopus the same way again, and where in the world have the Amazon's gone? While Minaka tries to figure out what to do now that no one is going to be playing his game. Finally, Ranma and his friends decide to launch an offensive and talk about the consequences of doing so as Nabiki and Ranma 'talk' and Tsukiumi tries to beg without actually doing so.

Chapter 15: Chapter 15

Can't draw boobies or even pigtails.

This month AGGC won the small story poll, obviously. It won out with a whopping 2,264, despite only 136 votes here on fanfic. Of the other choices, it should come as no surprise that *A Third Path to the Future* was closest, with 1,548 total votes, 244 of which came from here. I think its chances were hurt by several long time fans who always back it in the polls leaving this month. The impact of COVID continues, alas. That, and the fact AGGC is by far the story closest to completion. So much so that I am going to push on next month to finish it.

FILFy won the large story poll and will be updated by the end of the month.

This has been edited by Hiryo for Ranma know-how and me via Grammarly. Needless to say, there will be mistakes. I am not one of nature's editors. Just... can't... concentrate... RAGH.

Chapter Fifteen: Magical Horrors and Political Discussions Too

At the same time Ranma was racing out of Nerima to capture Hayato and Higa, who came with his own side order of glasses-wearing minion, Akitsu was racing over the rooftops towards Kuno's mansion. Yet for all that she acknowledged the serious nature of the threat that Kodachi had told them about, Akitsu's mind was stuck on the fact that Ranma had gone off without her again. *Still, the kiss we shared and his promise to make it up to me later at least shows that he understands my concerns.*

The Ice Sekirei felt a small smile appear on her face, and nearly paused in her roof-hopping to savor that simple fact, still getting used to the fact that she felt so much more now. There was a downside to that right now, given her body's ongoing response to that kiss and its desire for more. Riding that desire came the memory of last night, Ranma's tender words and touches rising unbidden to the front of her mind, causing a slight flush to Akitsu's cheeks even as she tried to banish them. *By all that is, but I love my Ashikabi! My Sun-sama!*

Those thoughts consumed Akitsu so much that she didn't even notice that there was something wrong with the rooftop she was about to jump to. Thankfully, Kodachi and the others were much more aware of their surroundings, and Kodachi shouted out, "Akitsu, watch where you're going."

With that warning, Akitsu returned to the here and now, just in time to dodge around a short sword that had been stuck into the rooftop, narrowly missing cutting herself. Two steps brought her up and over a body of a short green-skinned creature. Nearby another kind of even odder body lay. It was just as short, around the same height as the boy who had tried to take Akitsu away from Ranma the first time they had met. But instead of being green with a face full of teeth and large ears, this creature looked almost like its skin had sloughed off its skeleton upon death and had much the same look as an unformed lump of clay.

"My word, someone is out of it, isn't she?" Kodachi quipped as she leaped over from another rooftop, looking over the area. "But while that is rather amusing, the amount of damage my hometown has taken of late has not."

From where she was standing, Kodachi could see at least seven buildings that had been destroyed, others that had been damaged. A few she recognized as having been victims of the earlier fight she and Namiji had with the attackers trying to take away the shotacon bishounen. More important right now were the bodies that Akitsu had nearly stepped on, two of at least six that Kodachi could see. They, and the numerous weapons scattered about, were a sign that at least some of the denizens of the Labyrinth had fought their way out of it already.

Pointing the blade of her halberd at the strange, putty-like creature, Namiji asked, "What was this thing, senpai?"

"A Nuppeppo. They and the goblins are among the first denizens of the Labyrinth to break the surface. They are not overly dangerous in ones or twos but can be in larger numbers," Kodachi replied distractedly, seeing the signs of some fire damage here and there, and another group moving through the wreckage of the area. "Oh, no! Not more Sekirei," she groaned. "We do not have time for this!"

Akitsu looked in the direction Kodachi was looking, and shrugged her shoulders. "If they are, I do not know them. Nor are they looking for us."

When Akitsu pointed that out, Kodachi turned back and noticed that the women she had taken to be Sekirei were indeed not turned in their direction. Instead, they were turned in the direction of the Kuno estate. *Interesting.*

With that in mind, Kodachi raced on with Akitsu next to her, and the moment they came within shouting distance raised her voice. "Good afternoon, ladies! Can we help you?"

From where she had been leading her group of young Warriors, Shampoo turned in the direction of the shout, seeing a young woman her own age who matched the description that her grandmother had passed on of the broken Sekirei named Akitsu who she had been helping last night. The one who had apparently bonded with Ranma, the young man with the Jusenkyo curse and the sexy eyes that Shampoo had met back in her village when they had played football with the panda-man.

Darn it! She really is gorgeous. And my grandmother was very clear that trying to get between them would be a bad idea. Not, mind you, that I would anyway, Shampoo thought as Akitsu and the women with her came closer.

Shampoo had a limited ki sense. She couldn't send out a ki pulse or sense anything very far away, but when she was in the presence of someone like her grandmother, she could tell there was more than meets the eye within her. With Akitsu, she felt that she was only seeing the tip of an iceberg, perhaps. The kind that could shatter whole fleets worth of ships and not even notice.

The other girls with her looked almost like Amazons to Shampoo, save for the fact both were wearing gymnastic leotards. One of them was wielding a truly massive halberd, the kind even Shampoo would hesitate to wield given its weight. The other, a black-haired young woman, was twirling a ribbon of some kind in one hand, while in her other, she was holding a short staff of some kind. Trying to use both at once was kind of strange to Shampoo's mind, but it was quite obvious that the woman knew what she was doing.

"Hello," she shouted back, waving her hand, which was currently holding one of her maces. "Shampoo and Amazon sisters not need help. But Shampoo wonder if black-haired girl know these." She gestured to the creature's all around them, all the while annoyed by her pidgin Japanese.

Kodachi leaped daintily off the rooftop and landing easily, in front of the so-named Shampoo, wincing at the other young woman's accent. *Oh dear, I hope that is just a problem with languages rearing its head.* "Amazons?"

Landing next to the other woman, Akitsu spoke up in a way that would have been impossible for her to do as little as twenty-four hours ago, especially without Ranma around. "Elder Cologne spoke of them to us yesterday before helping Ranma, and I break the lock on my ability to bond with him."

"Well, if you are willing to vouch for them, Akitsu, I won't say anything. As for these, these are goblins," Kodachi explained disgustedly as she looked at the bodies at the feet of the band of young women. "That is not good."

"So, they really are goblins!" Exclaimed one of the others, a short spitfire of a young woman, who had been poking and prodding at the monsters at their feet. Her Japanese was far better than the first, if with a bit of a Kansai accent. "Where did they come from? Some kind of alternate dimension?"

"Something of the sort. How many of these creatures have you seen?"

"We hopping over rooftop when Cotton spot them," Shampoo explained. "They fighting ninjas at time."

"I convinced the rest of them that we should probably be fighting the goblins, after all, they're not exactly known for their good deeds in fantasy genres," the shorter girl piped up.

"If the Shadow Legion is still fighting, then the goblins and Nuppeppo no doubt snuck around my brother and the others we have sent ahead of us." Kodachi breathed a sigh of relief before turning to the foreigners, her face serious. "How good are you all in enclosed spaces? For while I realize you might not need money or anything similar, we have need of your arms, and I am more than willing to pay. I must confess that many of my own personal skills and abilities will not be very useful in such an environment."

Shampoo grinned, twirling her maces. "In space or outside, it no matter to Amazons! But you explain what we be fighting, yes?" After the battle against Mutsu, Shampoo had rather enjoyed beating down the little green and white creatures, even if the white creatures had absorbed her strikes like clay.

Kodachi nodded sharply before turning away. "Come, we must move. I will explain what I can on the way."

About two blocks behind Kodachi and the others, Akane and Yashima had just barely caught up, Akane having run the entire way to try and close the distance after having been left behind by the others and having had to dispense justice on the ancient pervert. Now she glared angrily at the Amazons as they took to the rooftops, breathing in deeply, thankful that at least all the running she did in the morning had given her good cardio. "Oh, come on! Am I the

only one who can't do that!?"

Not a block away, they reached the mansion, where they were hailed from the rooftop. "Mistress!"

"Sasuke," Kodachi breathed another sigh of relief at the family's only living combat caretaker, as she led the way over the outer wall, all of them clearing it easily bar Akane, who growled then began to punch holes in the wall for handholds until Yashima slung her weapon over her shoulder and lifted the other woman up, leaping onto the wall and then onto the mansion's roof, almost losing her balance as she landed.

While the others turned to look at the two newcomers, Kodachi crouched next to Sasuke. He was bleeding heavily from a head wound, which had been recently wrapped, and his foot had also been stabbed by something. His clothing had also been torn away from him in strips. Yet, he was still in one piece and explained what had been going on.

"The monsters pushed out of the Labyrinth initially mistress, but we reclaimed it, and as far as I know, Master Kuno is now holding down in the Labyrinth. But the Shadow Legion is losing mistress," he said formally. "I do not think it has more than ten members left before it will have to retreat. As you know, if we lose all of them, the Legion will..."

"Yes, I know," Kodachi waved him into silence. If there was not a single Shadow Warrior left, the spell that had created the Legion would die with its last member. Otherwise, given enough time, they would be able to repopulate their numbers. "Details, please."

"Master Kuno and the water user Tsukiumi arrived on the heels of the monsters' initial push and held them off before forging downwards. But the goblins and Nuppeppo and others were able to get around us. My own injury occurred then. We received more reinforcements a little while ago in the form of the fire user who is trying to woo Kasumi-sama. He helped us clear out the mansion for now and then descended downwards with one of the Shadow Legion as a guide. That was when I was injured," Sasuke finished.

Kodachi nodded slowly, staring into the interior of the mansion, which even from here she could see had been somewhat wrecked. "Very well. Stay here, Sasuke and tell any further arrivals what you just told me. I will send any of the Shadow Legion who remain out to you."

She looked around at the others, her face firming into a grim line. "What you are about to see is a secret. A secret which my family has kept at the behest of our Emperor since long before the Shogunate. As such, I must demand that you promise me that you will keep this a secret. You Amazons may tell your elder, I presume she is some kind of revered leader? Although by the end of the day I'm certain she'll have heard from other sources. But that is all. I will have your words of honor on its all of you."

Honestly, with the whole Sekirei thing occurring out in the open, I do not see the point of keeping the Labyrinth a secret any longer. But, rules are rules, and I am not a power-hungry politician or mad scientist who might think he could get away with experimenting on with what lies below. So better safe than sorry.

When everyone there, including Akane, agreed to that, she led the way inside the mansion, dropping down to a balcony outside her room and entering swiftly.

Inside the room, Kodachi's bedroom was dominated by a large four-poster bed that looked fit for a princess, something which all the Amazons had to comment on, causing Kodachi to blush a bit and huff in annoyance at their not understanding fine decor.

The rest, Akitsu could tell had at one point been tastefully displayed: some ribbons, some first-place metals, two bookshelves, a few teddy bears, and other girly things spread out across the room. But there had obviously been a fight here. A lot of the room was still wet, and the walls had there were bodies of three Nuppeppo spread around, and she used the word with feeling. The bookshelves had both been knocked off the wall, and a massive hole torn between this room and the next, which looked something like a gymnast's wet dream. Indeed, it was a miracle the bed remained untouched among this destruction.

Setting aside her annoyance at the Amazon's comments on her room, Kodachi tapped her foot down twice on two different floorboards and then moved to a portion of the wall which had just come undone, flipping the false panel open. Behind her, the others gaped through the very narrow entrance to what was a somewhat large walk-in closet. But instead of being filled with clothes or anything of that nature, this closet looked like a cross between a madwoman's botanical laboratory and a weapons locker.

Kodachi grabbed up a bandoleer, looping several vials into it as she muttered, "I never thought I would get to use

some of my concoctions like this. But I'll be darned if I use my poison lipstick on such creatures, so needs must." Beyond that, Kodachi replaced her staff with a bow and quiver, putting on the traditional armor for Kyujutsu over her combat leotard, wrapping her ribbon around the forearm and palm of her dominant hand.

She then looked over at the others, blinking at their wide-eyed looks. "What, haven't you ever seen a secret walk-in closet before?" she then gasped, holding up a hand to her mouth. "But do forgive my manners. Do any of you want anything?"

Bar Cotton all the Amazons took a few spare daggers and knives, never ones to turn down free weapons. Namiji took two daggers, which she made disappear into her tiny ki space, reveling in the trick she had finally worked out thanks to her sempai's instruction. Akitsu took nothing, nor did Yashima, content with her hammer. On the other hand, Akane picked up a club of some kind, which made Kodachi rather annoyed. "That thing should be in my brother's collection, not mine. I must tell the servants to watch out for that in the future."

Once everyone was suitably armed, the group of warrior women exited Kodachi's room and moved through the mansion, heading towards the staircase leading down to the first floor. As they went, the others looked around the interior of the mansion, seeing the amount of damage, the number of luxury goods, and the sheer number of what looks to be entrances to secret rooms, tunnels, or doorways in the ceiling, all of which were open. The mansion had apparently seen quite a lot of violence recently.

In particular, there were shadows scattered around that looked like grease stains half the size of a man. Akitsu realized after a second these would match the goblins that the Amazons had been dealing with outside.

All of them, even Akane, who had by far the least idea of what they were dealing with, was on edge by this point. So when the ambush came, it did not take the women by surprise. Kodachi spotted it almost at once and held up a hand, staring at a doorway that led down to the basement. "Hmmm, there should be at least two..."

As she spoke the two hidden doorways she had been looking for opened, one to the left, the other to the right. One was full-sized and led into a pantry of all things. The other was obviously an entrance to a crawlspace for a normal human. But like the Shadow Legion, the goblins were right at home in such a space. Seven of them rushed out from that direction, engaging the Amazons, Akane and the others in close combat.

The eight Nuppeppo on the other side, however, came out near where Akitsu was standing. She turned, her hands flicking from her sides like she was waving away birds, and suddenly the Nuppeppo on that side were being hammered by large chunks of ice. They squealed and started to fall back, but ice also started to crawl up their legs, holding them in place. In less than a minute of pouring out of their pantry hiding place, all of the Nuppeppo were pummeled to death or frozen corpsicles.

Shampoo and her sisters had finished off the goblins facing them with ease and now turned to stare at the amount of damage Akitsu had done. "Good grief, remind me to not get on her bad side," Shampoo muttered in Putonghua to Cotton.

"Agreed. I doubt even one of the elders could fight her, not unless they had a means to cancel out her ice powers," Cotton mused.

"Excellent work, ladies," Kodachi acknowledged, flicking the blood off the end of her ribbon, rewinding it around her forearm. "Now, let us move on."

Heading down the staircase, Shampoo, and the others with them found themselves in a large basement, which seemed to be split into several different rooms. One was a storage area, which seemed simple enough unless you really didn't like the idea of wine, of which there were several thousand bottles ensconced in carefully organized rows. Or knickknacks, which were not nearly as organized, spread haphazardly around half of the room. Another room, oddly enough, professed to be a hot spring. Another, an archery range.

But another room was marked out as a storage room yet held nothing. There, a revolving door lay open, which in turn led to a circular stairwell leading down. The stairwell seemed to be illuminated by glowing torches every eight feet or so.

Akane was not the only one to think that there was something extremely ominous about that, and true to their worries, the feel of the mansion changed abruptly as they began their descent. Gone was the wooden paneling and light stonework. In its place was heavy stone, massive blocks of it, as the stairwell led down deeper into the earth.

As they descended, two bits of shadow shifted in front of them, becoming small ninjas, almost carbon copies of the

very mortal ninja they had met upstairs. The shock of their sudden appearance caused the Amazons to ready themselves for trouble and Akane and Yashima to spring forward with hammer and mace raised, but Kodachi simply held up a hand from where she had fallen back into the center of the little group. "They are ours. Report."

One of the Shadow Legion moved forward and whispered in her ear, too low for anyone else to make out. Several of the Amazons were wondering aloud what the heck they were, but Shampoo growled them into silence in their native tongue. "I do not know a lot of fantasy stuff, but I know goblins are the smallest of the small, and I have no wish to meet an ogre or orc horde pouring out of this place."

Kodachi turned to them. "A quick summary. This is the Labyrinth. It is a giant magical construct essentially. It is made to trap those within, old monsters and ancient magical beasts sealed here long ago during the advent of man's supremacy over the islands of Nippon. Its outer shell is an ever-changing maze for those trapped within shifting every twenty-four hours. We all must be gone before that, or else we too will be trapped within."

Akane gulped, while everyone else just nodded, gripping their weapons firmly, some, like the Amazons, even eagerly. These were the kind of fights you could really brag about after all.

"With the amount of ki and magic being tossed about above us, they have been roused and are attempting to get out. We meet up with my brother and our other allies and hold until the enemy gets the point that they are not strong enough to reclaim access to the surface."

"If need be, I will use my norito," Akitsu declared.

Everyone looked at her, but it fell to Namiji to explain what a norito was. "Think of it as a super-special attack Sempai, like that spell Giga Slave from that anime with the redheaded sorceress. It's super powerful, but super taxing and is based on the love and connection a Sekirei has with her Ashikabi."

Moving ahead of the others, Akitsu nodded. "Yes. If these creatures threaten the world I live in with my Sun-sama, I will freeze this Labyrinth from one end to another."

"Can't argue with that," Namiji declared cheerfully, moving to walk beside the ice user as the others, sans the two Shadow Legion who Kodachi had ordered to join Sasuke above, moved after them.

OOOOOO

Homura liked to think of himself as a rational person. He enjoyed logic, believing that science could explain away much of everything that even his own people could do and that magic was simply natural phenomenon that had yet to be explained. The abilities of his people were based more on entirely different race, and having extramental capabilities to manipulate their internal biologically created energy.

That was before Ranma came along. The existence of a curse, a full-body sex change induced by a simple application of water back and forth, had made his rational world wobble. But Homura had fought his way through it. He had even fought through the idea of a human being able to fight at the level of the strongest Sekirei. Bar Miya, of course.

In comparison, Homura's current circumstances dipped his worldview in liquid nitrogen, and then took a baseball bat to it. *I know I was told that the Labyrinth held monsters from ancient times, but this is, how are some of these things even alive at all!? They don't have hearts. Some don't seem to breathe or even have stomachs! What the hell!?*

He yelped as a tentacle flashed through the space he had just been operating in, lashing out with a flame spear, which crashed into an octopus-like thing he didn't really want to look at closely to scream and pull back. The swordsman, Kuno, had called it a koromodako.

A blast of what had to be just pure magical energy raced towards Homura from a kind of shadowy thing hovering behind the rest of the monsters pressing in on the beleaguered group. That one had not been named by Kuno, but it looked like a spirit had taken over a storm cloud. Homura intercepted the attack with another flame spear, retaliating and overcoming the attack to continue to try and dissipate the cloud. But the cloud merely reformed a second later.

Nearby several giant Oni, all of them red-skinned and massive, raised their weapons and slammed them down at the last three Shadow Legion and Kuno, who was fighting at their head. Kuno leaped back, then leaped forward, landing on top of one of the ogre's clubs, shouting out, "I attack!"

His blade, no wooden sword this, took the creature eyes with two quick thrusts, before twisting around and taking another one across the throat in an abroad overhand stroke. He then leaped away, shouting ecstatically. "HAH! Yes,

yes, this is what I was borne to do! To smite evil with the might of my blade!"

Fighting at the edge of another tunnel, Tsukiumi shook her head as she sent a massive blast of water down the sloping tunnel hammering into several other attackers. Kumo Youkai – giant spiders, and Goryo, nearly-human looking noble warriors of ancient times who had been betrayed, were battered into pieces or just flung backward down the hallway and thence down the stairwell at the end of the sloping corridor that led deeper into the Labyrinth.

The pair of many-eyed wall creatures at the back seemed to be immune to this low-level attack. That just meant they were sliced into pieces by water slicers Tsukiumi sent down the hallway a second later once the others had been taken out of her line of sight. "Less talking, more slaying, braggart!"

"WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH MY LIFE!" Homura nearly screamed at the top of his lungs even as he and Kuno continued to fight. One of the Shadow Legion was down, though, and it was not the first that had fallen since this latest round of attacks had begun. And each attack had been larger than the last.

The last Oni died from a blast from Tsukiumi, and the three living defenders breathed in, glad for the small break. But a second later, a new attack began, heralded by a quaking all around them. "What in the..." Homura shouted.

"It is one of the Namazu. They are large catfish-like creatures that swim through the earth. They habitually caused earthquakes until they were hunted down, and the last of them were sealed in here," Kuno explained in what he thought was a helpful action.

For Homura, it was not. "Oh, I see, aha, aha, I finally understand. This is a dream, right? I will wake up, and I won't be stuck down here in a battle against imaginary creatures from ancient Japanese myths. There won't be a shape-changing arrogant ass who can fight and nearly beat Karasuba and who likes Miya as if she was his big sister figure. No, everything will be nice and normal."

"Wouldst that also include not having met Kasumi Tendo, who I know hast made you react when none before did?" Tsukiumi questioned archly.

Homura scowled but slowly nodded. "You've got a point, I suppose."

That was all they had the time to say to one another before the next attack was on them. This came first in the form of a series of white serpents swimming up through the watery expanse of the hallway Tsukiumi had been defending. They seemed immune to her water-powers, even her strongest slicing attack coming to naught against their skin. At the same time, Oni and worse came from the other directions into the intersection where they had found themselves. The 'worse' in this equation were a group of giant Omukade, monstrously huge centipedes who ate humans in mythological times. Thankfully they were too large to come up the stairs or even the sloped corridor easily. Their way forward was also barred by dozens of lesser Youkai.

"Switch off!" Tsukiumi ordered. Somehow she had come to command the others once it became clear that Kuno had no clear idea of what to do beyond protecting the path leading further up out of this subterranean creation. "Homura, take those serpents! I will deal with the Omukade, Kuno, you and your creatures are on close protection!"

"Bahahaha, truly you're are nearly as fiery as the beauteous Akane Tendo, and as overbearing as her detestable sister. Yet you speak good sense! And for that, I will do as you bid!" Kuno shouted, striding forward to engage the Oni, holding them in the passage with Tsukiumi falling back into the center of the crossway, Homura moving forward to take her place. "I attack!" he shouted once more, lashing out with air pressure attacks.

This attack cut through two of the Oni and a very odd-looking creature which had accompanied them forward, large spinning wheel type demons that seemed to send off fire every time they twisted round. Three more such fell quickly to Tsukiumi's long-range attacks, but they drew her ire away from the Oni, who charged forward.

Behind the Oni were other creatures, tiny imp-like things with huge flaming feet that hung below their tiny hovering forms. As they closed, they changed shape, their hands becoming larger, their fingers seeming to excrete something.

Another of these took a strike from Tsukiumi, its fires put out as it fell dead to the ground of the catacombs beneath them. But the second closed with Kuno, his air pressure attacks feeding their flames in a way the spinning wheel type demons hadn't been able to use. A dodge brought it around Kuno's wild swing at his back, and Kuno cried out in pain at its touch, his shoulder smoking as the creature tried to latch onto his neck, its flaming feet digging into his shoulders for purchase.

Then Tsukiumi was on it, slicing a water sword across its body, cutting it in half before she began to combat the Oni

directly, dodging around their slow if powerful attacks, putting into practice some of the training she had been given by Ranma and Genma. "First rules of Anything Goes if you can help it don't get hit," she muttered.

Reaching Kuno, she grabbed at Kuno's uninjured shoulder and hurling him backward. At the same time, she saw that the last of the Shadow Legion with them were down, both of them no longer reforming. They had taken another Oni with them, though.

She kept on attacking with her water sword, until she regained the place where Kuno had been a moment ago, at the top of another winding staircase leading down. There, she began to gather water, pulling it up out of the very rocks and then forming in midair before she gestured downwards, hoping to wipe away the feet of anything coming up. *Those of these Youkai that have feet at any rate* she thought half hysterically. The Omukade were too sure-footed and just started to walk over their fellows, skittering up towards her.

Tsukiumi backed away, giving ground now quickly while she sent water attacks down the sloped corridor, smashing into the head of the first giant centipede. It halted in place, its facemask shattering, causing it to start to flail wildly in place, getting in the way of the other monstrous centipedes.

As the attack hit, some of the water splashed back onto her feet, and she flinched from the cold of it. But that cold gave her an idea. She instantly began to pour even more of her willpower into the creation of water, as she shouted over her shoulder, "Homura, steam explosion!"

Jerking his eyes in that direction, Homura saw the amount of water that Tsukiumi was creating and then shooting down into the tunnel. Having caused the two white serpents to fall back for now, and instantly understanding what Tsukiumi wanted him to do. He concentrated, creating two large fireballs of the hottest, most potent kind of flame he could. Once he was satisfied, he twisted around entirely hurling one down the tunnel Tsukiumi was protecting. He then raced after it before ducking aside into the corridor leading back the way they came, tossing the other back down the corridor he had just been protecting as he shouted, "Fire in the hole!"

Having already made the water so deep it lapped at her feet where she stood at the top of the incline, Tsukiumi had already begun to fall back, while the lead Omukade tangled up its fellows. She raced towards Kuno, who had just gotten to his wobbly feet from where she had hurled him earlier before she hit him, putting an arm around his waist, and hoisting him up onto one shoulder.

The two of them barely joined Homura in retreating up the hall leading back to the stairs before the spheres of white-hot fire hit the ice-cold water leading down both sloping corridors. The one Homura had just been guarding was a bit less explosive, but even so, the duo of explosions sent superheated steam in every direction, with enough heat to cook anything within it touched alive. It was not the kind of death that Homura, not a generally squeamish person, would have wanted on anything that could be called human. *But humanity seems to be in scant supply down here.*

That attack should have dealt with anything in its range.

Yet as Tsukiumi and Homura began dragging Kuno away congratulating one another on their impromptu attack, the steam down the pathway where the white serpents had been attacking was suddenly sucked away, drawn into a creature that looked like a giant toad with humanlike arms holding a massive spear.

It snorted, and then over its shoulders, came more creatures. These were horse demons, horse-headed, flame-maned, standing on their back feet with forelimbs ending in claws with which they tossed fireballs of their own towards the defenders.

From the other direction, the one that Tsukiumi had been defending came dozens of tentacles, its owner apparently having come forward over the corpses of the cooked Omukade. These were tiny tentacles, about two fingers in length, but they were extremely long and moved across the floor of the Labyrinth as the defenders were concentrating on the charging horse demons.

The horse demons fell to air pressure and water attacks, but Homura found himself grabbed and pulled off his feet, the tentacles crawling up his legs then grabbing at his arms. "Oh, crap! Just because I'm pretty doesn't mean I'm a girl dammit!" Homura shouted the only thing he could think to say right now after Matsu had forced him to read some of her doujinshi. "I've seen enough hentai to know where this goes!"

If someone's brain made a sound when it broke, Homura's mind would have sounded like *TWGNGNG* just then.

Despite his sanity now clearly draining away, Homura tried to cut at the tentacles holding him with his fire. But before he could, the toad demon an ogama, leaped forward, battering aside both his fellows. He had to switch targets,

sending up a lance of fire that hit the toad dead center. But even as he did, Homura found himself being dragged down the corridor.

Luckily, Tsukiumi was there. Once more, she leaped to the rescue, slicing down and around Homura's legs in a way to make him flinch, but bisecting the various tentacles there.

Another tentacle lashed out, this time like a whip, cracking into the side of her head and sending her skidding sideways. She slumped against the wall, raising one hand groggily to her head as if she was seeing double. And Kuno had yet to get up from where he had been flung into a wall by the ogama.

For just a second as he scrambled to his feet, Homura thought that they were doomed. But then, a woman bolted past them on some kind of polearm before flinging it around with abandon, both ends ending in sharp, curved blades like a raptor's claws. Homura had a moment to realize that she wasn't any Sekirei he had ever seen before. She was followed by several others, all of whom shouted a battle cry in what sounded like Chinese, before attacking in turn.

They were followed by Kodachi, Akane Tendo and several Sekirei he had fought alongside today once already, including Akitsu, who quickly began to launch large chunks of ice at the most dangerous opponent as Kodachi pointed them out from beside her, launching arrows from her quiver into the horde of Oni and other, faster monsters as they tried to press forward.

To their dismay, the Amazons found that most of them lacked the strength to be able to chop through the tentacles that had nearly taken Homura down into the depths of the Labyrinth. Worse still, many of the Youkai, particularly the ones that were more spiritual than physical in nature, were immune to their weapons as well. This forced the grumbling Amazons, Yashima and Namiji into a secondary role, defending the others as they made the more offensive attacks.

Akane didn't bother grumbling. Instead, she grabbed at Kuno and began to drag him back down the corridor, ignoring his attempts to flirt with her all the while.

In sharp contrast to the others, Akitsu's powers were such that she was able to deal with anything that came at them. She could either freeze attackers or hurl giant chunks of ice at them or create temporary ice walls, slaying the Youkai in large numbers.

But Kodachi could tell that even with Akitsu, this battlefield was not going to go their way if they stayed here overlong. With that in mind, she tossed nearly all of her baldrick's supplies down in the way of the attacking monsters. "We will fight them from a better position on the next floor up rather than sweat and bleed to reclaim this one!"

Thanks to the poisons and sleeping gas in those vials, the monsters fell in droves, getting in the way of one another, something that Akitsu took advantage of, freezing them all, poisoned or sleeping, into one large wall, creating a temporary berm between her and her allies and the remaining attackers. The humans and the Sekirei instantly took advantage of this lull, retreating up the passageway.

While this made good tactical sense, it did not take into account the abilities of the creatures within the Labyrinth to tunnel through it to a certain extent. While they could not breach the outer shell of the magical well, everything within that shell was fair game. Or at least, that was the consensus later. Regardless of how they had done it, the monsters of the Labyrinth had been able to somehow figure out a way around the bottleneck that Tsukiumi and the two men had created to get above the retreating humans and their allies.

No sooner had they come out of the stairwell leading down to the third floor of the Labyrinth that they were attacked by an overwhelming number of Youkai and other monsters. Nothing large at this point, thankfully, just a lot of them. And from every direction leading into the crossway, which, in turn, led further downwards into the Labyrinth.

The Amazons leaped forward, spreading out quickly gleeful to fight these youkai, who they could actually hurt with their merely mortal weapons, as Tsukiumi and Homura prepared themselves wearily. But a new avenue of attack was added this time. Crow Youkai, or Karasu, began to attack from on high, the core doors on this level being large enough to be almost two stories in size. With them came smaller things, which looked like a villainous cross between a bat and each as they fell. Dealing with them broke the formation, just as the goblins and Oni reached them.

Kuno, as battered as he had already been, was the first to fall. He stabbed his sword deep into the hip of an Oni before it could claim the life of one of the Amazons who had turned her back on it accidentally in the melee. But his blade stuck against the bone of the Oni. This left him open for its backhand, which caught Kuno full in the face, flinging him almost into his sister, who ducked underneath, sending an arrow into the eye of the Oni in the next moment.

But Tsukiumi, Homura and Akitsu remained of the dealbreakers. Their element attacks made short work of the spirit-based Youkai, while the Amazons fought off the goblins and Oni, gleefully cutting them down to size.

In the frenzied fight, Akane was nearly cut into, her weapon smashed out of her hand the next instant. All that seeped her was a wild yell, a duck, and her family's ability to create ki weapons. Without even thinking about it, she brought her hands up over her head then down, and her hands were suddenly filled with a massive metal bat the same size as the mace she had previously been wielding. The goryu she had been fighting had barely a moment to look surprised before the ki weapon smashed its head to pieces.

The next second, Akane fell to the ground, unconscious. The sudden strain on her ki network had been too much. Nor was she the only one. One of the Amazons, Rin Ser fell, forcing Yashima to grab up both of them, one on either shoulder.

"Namiji, Tsukiumi, forge us a path! We must retreat entirely to the entrance and hold there!" Kodachi ordered. She glanced over at Akitsu. "Unless that is, you believe you would be able to spread out your norito in every direction but where we stand?"

Akitsu grunted as she sent out a massive golf ball of ice that smashed into the head of a giant centipede just peaked over the edge of the stairwell. The blow shattered it and was joined by several other even larger chunks, blocking the way deeper into the Labyrinth for a moment. "I do not believe that I will have that much control over my norito."

"Why?" Kodachi barked out as she sent another arrow towards a rather elusive flying creature.

"Because this will be the first time I use it," Akitsu answered simply.

Kodachi paused, then shrugged. While it might've been the height of folly to put all the eggs in one basket, especially one so untried, it wasn't as if they had much of a choice. The way the creatures were pressing, they surely were not going to stop at the edge of the Labyrinth for anything less than this so-called 'superpowered attack.' "Very well. I had hoped to hold them here, retreating does dishonor to my ancestors, but Sun Tzu himself wrote that retreat is not to admit defeat but to seek victory another day."

Tsukiumi paused, almost getting beheaded for her trouble even as she killed two more Oni with precision sword strikes from her Water Blade. "I truly doubt that you are quoting the great general accurately there."

The running fight up to the entrance to the Labyrinth was harrowing in the extreme. Everyone in their party, from Akitsu on down to Yashima, stumbled at least once. The wounded were nearly lost several times, with another Amazon, Panther, joining them. Cuts and bruises abounded, with Namiji nearly breaking her arm at one point to block a blow from an Oni. Shampoo lost both of her maces down the maw of a giant centipede, although the creature did choke on them as she had shouted it should at the time. Kodachi fired her last arrow and was forced to use her with until it became entirely to clogged with blood to retain its cloth edge.

Finally, they saw the entrance to the Labyrinth ahead of them, the long flight of spiral stairs that would lead up to the entrance. But as they reached it, another attack came after them, this one not slowing down at all but from Akitsu's continued use of her power or either of the other element users. Because it came from directly below them. There was a deep rumble underneath their feet, and suddenly massive tentacles began to press upwards, shattering the ground of the Labyrinth underneath them.

Looking as if they were parchment with billions of written lines covering their surface in something like blood merged with the tentacles of an octopus. They continued upwards rather than directly attacking the humans and Sekirei. Instead, these creatures were trying to block them from escaping. Still others and dozens of giant centipedes also burst through the ground all around them, coming towards them eagerly, their mandibles chattering hungrily, making a sound like two swords sliding along one another.

"By the power of my pledge, let my weapon cut down the enemies of my Ashikabi! Drilling halberd!" Namiji shouted, instantly taking action before any of one of the others could wallow in sudden despair or shock at this last obstacle. Everyone there who had even the vaguest ki sense felt the buildup within the happy-go-lucky gymnast as she pulled her halberd back over the shoulder and hurled it forward.

The halberd created a shockwave in front of it in the form of a drill, which sliced and battered through the parchment tentacles blocking their path, opening the way out. Everyone took it, racing forward into the hole and up and out into the basement of the Kuno mansion.

Even as more parchment-tentacles burst out after him, spreading out quickly, and upwards, bursting out through the

ceiling of the basement up into the rest of the mansion, Akitsu paused, twisting around as everyone else raced past her, Namiji being carried by Kodachi who had grabbed up her kohai a moment before. She spared a glance for Akitsu before racing on, followed by everyone else, as power began to emanate from the ice user so much so that even the Amazons who didn't have any ki sense could feel something in the air.

The tentacles paused. The centipedes paused. The white serpents who had been following at their heels paused and then began to retreat quickly. Deep in the bowels of the Labyrinth, the owner of the parchment-tentacles, the creature the Labyrinth had been created to contain shivered, then commanded its tentacles forward once more, trying to grab at every one of the humans and Sekirei they could find.

"For the love I share with my Ashikabi and for the bond forged over the broken remnants of what had gone before, I make this pledge. May the enemies of my Sun-sama freeze and shatter beneath my power," Akitsu intoned, her voice not a shout, yet a clarion call, like a crystal clear bell, heard despite all the tumult caused by falling masonry, wildly flailing tentacles and the stampede of her retreating allies. "Ice Age!"

For a moment, all was still, and then, there was ice. Ice flowing out from her, not in streams or chunks, not even in waves. But in a massive, all-encompassing blast that froze the world around her, covering it with ice meters thick in places. And that was just the blowback. The real attack, the focus of her assault, was down into the Labyrinth, where the condensed power of ice and cold, so strong that it made even the Earth's Ice Age would have looked mild in comparison came for everything it touched within.

As the attack continued, Akitsu pushed it out further, pushing more of what she knew as her ki reserves out into the attack. She only paused when the tentacle, which had been within an inch of grabbing at her, shattered. Seeing that, she finally stopped powering the assault, and straightened, staring ahead of her into the depths of the now frozen Labyrinth, as her breath came out in long plumes in the frigid air. Then, without another word, she turned away, heading upwards into the light where she would find her Sun-sama.

OOOOOO

"...And that's what happened," Akitsu finished, reveling in Ranma's arms around her waist, as he listened intently to her and the others telling their tale. Or, rather, most of the others. Tsukiumi had been convinced to head back to her apartment for a change of clothes – and to get away from Ranma – which forced Homura to do the talking about their aspect of the battle. Now she was back, but unlike her normal attitude, Tsukiumi was silent, staring at Ranma even as she tried desperately to control herself.

Nearby, most of the Amazons were just as silent as they tried to warm themselves up with cups of tea, cocoa or just laying out in the sun. They had been inside the mansion when Ranma first arrived, making certain that Akitsu's Ice Age had caught all of the monsters, which might have made up into the mansion behind their group.

It had been Shampoo, Kodachi and Homura who had most helped Akitsu tell the tale, or more accurately told most of it for her. Even after having properly bonded with Ranma, she was not exactly verbose.

Namiji had not. She had instead left promptly to head out to find her Ashikabi. For some fun, or to bring him back to the mansion, none of the others had figured out. Nor had Akane knocked out early on in the fighting, or Yashima. She was even more silent around Ranma than Akitsu had been before they had bonded. Now Yashima was staring at Ranma, then to Akane, then away constantly, her hands clenching and unclenching around the shaft of her huge hammer. She wasn't blushing, but Yashima certainly looked distressed.

Ranma, knowing what this meant, was more than a little annoyed to remember that she too hadn't been winged yet, although she had never indicated a desire to become so either. *Crud, I hope little Kusano doesn't react to being around me! That would be freaking awkward. And Kasumi might just try to neuter me if Kusano tries to kiss me.*

Beyond thinking about that possible future problem, Ranma had done the only thing he could think of to protect himself from Yashima and Tsukiumi's attention: he had worked with Akitsu to keep her between him and them, facing the two of them. Looking at the two girls. Now, he reaffirmed his plan if they actually tried to come closer. *Remember, if they both start for you, grab Aki-chan and run the hell away!*

"Indeed. I think, despite the fact that the spirit of Emperor Sutokunearly broke out, I am exceedingly pleased with this day's work. Even just looking at what we accomplished here against the creatures of the Labyrinth, we have succeeded beyond my expectations," Kodachi said, as she stared at the ruins of her mansion with something approaching joy despite the amount of damage the building had taken. "If the blowback from Akitsu's power is like this up here, then it must be even worst in the Labyrinth itself. A most excellent defense. I imagine that it will hold until the creatures within subside once more, and the Labyrinth changes formations again at the end of the week. And

even if it does not, would you be willing to use that power again, Akitsu?"

"If Ranma says I should," Akitsu concurred, feeling Ranma's arms tighten a little around her waist, shivering with rising desire at his touch.

The serious talk was interrupted at that point by several of the Amazons' stomachs grumbling, followed by an even louder grumbled from Homura. The bishounen had only barely begun to blush and cover his stomach with one hand, when Tsukiumi, then Akitsu and finally Akane and Yashima's stomachs all joined in. It was like a chorus of growling lions.

The sheer sound made Ranma laugh, shaking his head. "Damn, you all sounded like my Old Man at his worst there!"

"Verily, after this work, the need for food is not to be wondered about," Kuno exclaimed, pushing himself onto his wobbly feet. Despite the battering he had taken, Kuno seemed to already be recovering, something that impressed Ranma somewhat. Despite the guy having several screws loose, he did have durability to spare. "Let's see if the kitchen is still in one piece. If so, perhaps we can at least give you a repast in lieu of the true hospitality those who have aided us in our family's duty deserve."

Surprisingly enough, Ranma wasn't all that hungry. Oh, he could eat, obviously. He still had a pulse, and Ranma couldn't remember a time when he wouldn't eat any food put in front of him. But there were other things to think about, alas. "Can I take a rain check on that? Only..." he jerked his head towards the two still unconscious prisoners he had dragged there from his days work, having dumped them to the side the instant Akitsu had made for him. "I'd like to get those two somewhere where they can't make any mischief and then check-in at the Tendo house."

"Of course, and you should speak with the young boy who is also there. His name is Shiina, and he is a free Sekirei who was looking for young Kusano. I gave him directions to it after we saved him from a few Sekirei and their master who wanted to wing him," Kodach intoned regally even as the thought of the young bishounen brought a happy flush to her cheeks. "Besides, I rather doubt the kitchen is intact as my brother hopes. We will have to go out to some restaurant." She frowned, turning her head to look up past the outer wall of the Kuno estate, thinking of the damage Nerima had taken today, as well as the ongoing issues with MBI putting pressure on the area in various ways. "If any of them are still intact and have water, electricity and supplies."

She then smirked like a shark, pointing at his two prisoners. "Ask for those two, you have a choice. We can stick them into one of the rooms in the mansion, one that has an intact door if nothing else. Or we can stick them into my garden. Which still seems to be standing despite everything. Mr. Turtle might like some new playmates."

"Couldn't happen to a nicer pair of assholes," Ranma replied gleefully, hefting them up. With Akitsu following, always being very clear on standing between Ranma and Tsukiumi or Yashima Ranma dumped the two of them into the greenhouse, while Kodachi headed off to help her brother discover whether or not the kitchen still had any supplies they could use.

Coming back, Ranma smirked at Shampoo. "So, how do ya like being out of your village so far? More adventurous than a soccer game, right?"

Remembering how they met, Shampoo laughed, shaking her head as she tried not to stare longingly at Ranma. In person, he was even more impressive than she had remembered and having been told what Ranma had been up to, while they had been fighting the creatures of the Labyrinth, as well as the fact that he had beaten the sword user who had beat Shampoo and her fellow Amazons, made him all the more attractive in her eyes. But he and Akitsu were practically joined at the hip, and from what her grandmother had passed on, Shampoo knew this was not exactly an un-consummated relationship any longer.

That, and the two of them are just too cute together, thought a small portion of Shampoo's mind, which she always labeled as the voice of her inner little girl, who was most decidedly a romantic. This was joined by another portion of her mind making a cool-headed observation. *Besides, looking at Tsukiumi, it looks as if there's at least one other girl already waiting in the... wings. Oh, that was just wrong.* Despite her mind's horrible sense of humor, Shampoo knew she would probably be fine with Ranma's female curse but also knew that she'd never be fine with sharing with one other girl, let alone possibly two.

"Is too too true. Shampoo not expect fight myth creatures when come here, but Shampoo can't say be sorry for it. Although Shampoo still wondering about Sekirei Game. Powerful women be fighting due some mad man's design?" Her voice ended in a growl that oddly did not clash horribly with her ditzy-sounding Japanese. None of the Amazons were happy with the idea of so many women with such powers dancing to the tune of a man, even if Elder Cologne had passed on the fact, they might not be human.

"We're already seeing what we can do about that. At this point, MBI and one other powerful Ashikabi are the only ones that have any real power left in the game, and Nishi lost two of his Sekirei today, or was it three?" Ranma paused then shrugged. 'Regardless, he's lost a lot of power and has always seemed reasonable before this. If we can get him on side, that only leaves the game master and his own few remaining pieces.'

With that, Ranma slowly detached his arms from around Akitsu, for the first time since Akitsu and the others had begun their tale. The reluctance of his limbs to obey his commands at the moment was annoying, but Ranma knew they had other things they had to do today other than cuddle, despite how good cuddling really sounded at the moment. "I'll be back in a bit, but like I do want to head to the Tendos. And maybe send a phone call to Izumo House, get Cologne over here to explain what she can about the Sekirei Plan," he added, nodding to Shampoo.

"Ranma not bother. Shampoo already call grandmother. She be on her way here," Shampoo replied, before twisting around quickly and grabbing the shortest Amazon, who had apparently been about to head into the greenhouse where Ranma had just tossed his two prisoners. She spoke to the little girl quickly, in Chinese, which Ranma didn't understand all that well. He heard the word for 'pretty boy' and 'dress up,' and that was enough.

"Cool. But I still want to talk to Nabiki, make certain Kasumi is okay, and talk to the old man about that Ryu guy and the old pervert. Do you want to come with me, Aki-chan? Unless Kodachi, you want Akitsu to stay here just in case?" Ranma asked.

"Ahh..." Even as she flushed in pleasure at once more hearing Ranma's nickname for her, Akitsu hesitated, something that was unusual now, a memory of the time before she truly bonded with her Sun-sama last night. But the mention of the pervert and the way that Tsukiumi was staring at Ranma, even now sidling closer, told her that she still had something to do here, and that going with Ranma would probably needlessly complicate what would happen with the others back at the Tendo home. "I will stay here, Sun-sama. So long as you are certain you will be coming back here?" she finished, her heart in her eyes as she looked up at him, her chest barely an inch away from his.

"Yep, although I don't know how long those talks will take. Still, it makes sense to use the mansion as a center for cleaning up the garbage around Nerima," Ranma quipped, meaning the various unconscious Sekirei and Ashikabi that had been left scattered around during the day, hidden in houses or tied up waiting to be retrieved.

The Shadow Legion would have already begun doing that if ordered but for the losses they had sustained in the battle in the Labyrinth. And besides having more space to store their prisoners, the mansion also was a more centralized location within Nerima than the Tendo house.

Ranma then smirked at Akitsu, leaning down slightly to press his forehead into hers, staring into her eyes. "But how much of that reluctance has to do with the old pervert?"

"Quite a bit," she replied easily, although her eyes did flick to the side to where Tsukiumi was watching them, her breath once more coming in gasps as her self-control began to crumble once more. Even Yashima was looking like she was a step away from losing it, although she was noticeably not reacting as powerfully as Tsukiumi. "Among other things."

Ranma's eyes flicked in that direction, and Akitsu watched his gullet move up and down in a very obvious gulp, before he shook his head, leaning a little back from her. "Well, I can handle the pervert if you can handle the... other things. How you do so is up to you. Just nothing too permanent" Akitsu knew that was the way that Ranma was basically telling her that he would follow whatever she decided to do when it came to Tsukiumi except terminating her, and she smiled.

In reality, Ranma liked the blonde. Beyond Akitsu and Nabiki, she was one of his better friends, up there with Kasumi and Miya. *Man, I need more male friends, don't I?* He found her attractive too, but that was easy to say when you were talking about Sekirei. That was a far cry from wanting to be in a similar relationship with her that he already had with Akitsu, especially with Nabiki already waiting her turn. *After all, I only have two arms,* he thought with some amusement.

"Thank you, Sun-sama," Akitsu replied. "But hurry back, please?" Despite her decision to stay and have a stern talk with Tsukiumi, Akitsu did **not** like being away from Ranma for the second time that day.

Sensing this, Ranma nodded his head quickly, then leaned in, lightly kissing her on the lips. It wasn't a very long kiss, but it was heartfelt, and Ranma again reveled in the feel and taste of Akitsu's lips on his. It was such a strange dichotomy, summer softness almost with a kind of heat building up inside of them, coupled with a hint of winter ice on her lips. Then he was pulling away, smiling at her as all around them, her bond wings slowly began to dissipate while everyone there stared in shock at the display. "Love you, Aki-chan."

Akitsu practically melted, smiling at him widely, an expression that would never have been able to cross her features before their bond had been created, love in her eyes, which Ranma reveled in even as she seemed a little too out of it to respond verbally. With a final wink, Ranma turned, leaped up on to the nearest wall, and away.

OOOOOO

"Lucky bitch," Shampoo grumbled in Putonghua, a statement that many of her fellow Amazons agreed with, with Rinser muttering about perhaps dragging Mutsu back home now rather than waiting for Cologne's okay to go husband-hunting. After all, Ranma had already knocked him out, right?

"Oh my, yes." Nearby, Kodachi sighed, fanning her head with her hand before turning to head back inside to bring out another tray of food. Most of it was snacks, cut meats ready-made meals, along with a lot of fruit. As she had feared, the actual kitchen area had been damaged quite severely, as well as the pantry. Every bit of equipment within had been ruined, victims of the fight Tsukiumi and Kuno led to push the initial monsters back into the Labyrinth. So, if they didn't eat this food, it would probably go bad.

This was nothing to Tsukiumi's response. The bright red denoting Tsukiumi's arousal had disappeared from her face under a wave of darker red, as her hands clenched at her sides in a sign of near frothing fury. But the instant Ranma left this too disappeared instantly, as her initial instinctual response to someone else kissing her prospective Ashikabi disappeared under the reality of the fact that she rather liked Akitsu and had no prior romantic connection with Ranma upon which to base that sense of ownership on.

But despite that, it was all Tsukiumi could do to keep from racing after Ranma and demanding that he wing her.

The few steps she took in that direction was enough to break Akitsu out of her own, far happier fugue. She moved over to Tsukiumi, taking her hand, as she began to emit a sense of cold, jerking Tsukiumi's attention away from Ranma's retreating back. "Stop. Control yourself."

As she did this, Akitsu twitched her head sideways toward Yashima but was pleased to see that she was already controlling herself. Indeed, she seemed somewhat revolted with her recent emotions and had dropped her hammer to the ground, moving over to nearly curl up against the side of a surprised Akane.

In contrast, Tsukiumi seemed to be losing the battle despite her best efforts, until Akitsu literally froze her legs to the ground. This caused several of the others in the large garden to turn to stare at them, before Akitsu just shook her head at them, waving them off. With that, the Amazons and the others shrugged and moved to where Kodachi, Sasuke, and Kuno were laying out the food on the grass. Food first, was the consensus, everything else afterward.

The ice user, on the other hand, had something much more important in her mind at the moment than food. "You are reacting to Ranma," she intoned bluntly. "Reacting **very** powerfully."

"I, yes. I have always enjoyed training with Ranma, being around him before this in either form. Although if pressed, I think I would've said that I was more comfortable when Ranma was in his female body. But, ever since, well, I didn't believe the fact that an Ashikabi's signal became stronger once he wings his first Sekirei. But I do now." Tsukiumi shuddered, getting control of herself now that Ranma's signal was now slowly receding into the distance.

"Stop it. I have no problem encasing your entire body in ice," Akitsu warned.

Tsukiumi nodded, closing her eyes and taking several deep hard breaths, waiting until Ranma was far enough away that she could no longer feel him at all. "I am well enough now, thank you. But after reacting to him thrice today, I cannot deny reality. My reaction to him is too strong. And even my intellectual side doesn't have much of a problem with Ranma. He is like no other hairless monkey I've yet met."

"I do have a problem with it," Akitsu said firmly, putting herself forward in a manner that again, before being bonded to Ranma, she would never have been able to. "I like you, Tsukiumi, but I do not want to share Ranma's affection with you. I already have to consider Nabiki, a human, who is already involved with Ranma. I have no desire or willingness to share with someone else."

Tsukiumi nodded, understanding Akitsu's point all too well. After all, if she was the one in a relationship, Tsukiumi wouldn't want to share her man with anyone. But she could not deny her body's reaction, nor the fact fighting the effect just now had nearly stripped her of her sense of self. "I have never even heard of anything that like this before. Being in Ranma's presence, it makes my body sing, makes my body heat up like I was standing on the surface of the sun, and turns my mind and will to mush. Unless there is some way to stop my reacting to them, I might have to wing myself on them just to keep my sanity," she admitted.

"I am fully capable of sealing you away in ice," Akitsu warned once more, her tone turning even frostier.

"While I realize I am no Sekirei, are you not being rather unfair, Akitsu?" Kodachi interposed herself between the two Sekirei, having come over to invite them to come and eat. "Is it not common in your society that one man has multiple partners? And you cannot deny the impact that Ranma's presence has on Tsukiumi, everyone here saw it. If Ranma is Tsukiumi's destined one, can you truly deny her the happiness you have finally found for yourself?"

Akitsu scowled but said nothing, unable to refute some of Kodachi's points. That didn't mean she liked them. Looking back at Tsukiumi, she demanded, "No one else has ever made you react at all?"

"No, no one. Nor had I reacted to Ranma's presence. I'll admit that I had a valued Ranma's friendship before this beyond much else in mine life, but I thought it was simply because I was so much more comfortable with Ranma in his female form. Not once have I met an overinvolved monkey that is, a human being," she corrected herself guiltily, twitching her eyes towards Kodachi. "Who made me react even the slightest bit. There is literally nothing I can compare this to."

Scowling somewhat, Akitsu looked away. "Can I at least have a week or two with him on my own?" she whispered, now looking somewhat distraught, not happy in the slightest, but knowing that Kodachi had been right. She couldn't deny Tsukiumi the chance to be happy, even if, from Tsukiumi's own admission, the woman hadn't realized she had been missing that happiness before this. "Please? I have been beside Sun-sama for so long, only receiving a bare shadow of the warmth that he gives me now. I want to enjoy that feeling without sharing it for as long as I can. Do you think you can hold out that long?"

"I will try my best. That is all I can promise," Tsukiumi replied with a nod of her proud head, knowing even as she did, that it would take her utmost to keep to that bare minimum.

Akitsu sighed but nodded, then turned to follow Kodachi back to where she had laid out the food. The others were already digging in, even Kuno foregoing flirting with Akane in order to eat, showing impeccable table manners despite the picnic-like atmosphere.

As the two of them sat down, they put aside their private drama to wonder what was going to happen from now on. Long-term thinking was not any of their strongest suits, not even Kodachi, for all that she had created the Nerima Alliance and attempted to think about what kind of threats MBI could come up with if they kept on refusing to play Minaka's game. Still, the group of them worked on a map of where the battles today had taken place, counting out the prisoners they would need to round up.

Halfway through the meal, Cologne arrived, shaking her head as she hopped over the outer wall to land on the tree limb, where she pounced on the end of her crooked staff as if it was a pogo stick, before landing in front of Shampoo and the others. "This area has certainly seen better days. I take it we were correct in that your enemies in this game decided to push things today?" she guessed, looking at Akitsu.

Akitsu simply nodded, concentrating on her food, and still inwardly not happy about the need to share with Tsukiumi in the future, remaining silent as she continued to struggle with her new, far more powerful emotions. *Jealousy and possessiveness are not fun.*

The others filled Cologne in on everything that had occurred, starting with the Labyrinth as she stared at the ice sticking out of the mansion and in every which direction. *It has to be as thick as forty feet in place. And Akitsu did this only as a byproduct of the attack she launched down into this Labyrinth place? Blessed Athena, these Sekirei truly are daughters of the goddess.*

Cologne shook her head, resolutely turning her back on the mansion, pivoting on her staff to face the others once more. *It is the rest of what has been going on that we need to deal with. The Labyrinth, I believe we can consider that sealed off for now.*

"Very well. Let's get organized then. Shampoo, you and your fellows split up into groups of two, head out to these battlefields of yours. I will go with you to find this Mutsu fellow. He seems to be the most dangerous of our opponents and thus must be the first to be gathered here. But we must also find a means to keep them imprisoned once they are gathered" She snorted then, glancing at her granddaughter in amusement. "I rather wish Mousse was here. He would no doubt have enough chains on hand to bury all of them."

Shampoo shivered at that, but Kodachi saved her, saying they had enough rooms to put the Ashikabi in, and could certainly raid the local police precinct for chains for the Sekirei. "This is Nerima, after all. I know they have chains capable of keeping a powerful panda in check, at the very least, Elder."

With that aspect seen to and the first four Amazons already moving to do her bidding, Cologne continued to ask questions about the battles that had been occurring, learning about the Minotaur-creature that had fought alongside the Disciplinary Squad from Kodachi and the others who had taken part in that battle. This was information that was most concerning to the Amazon matriarch, knowing where such a form could have come from. "Strange. MBI was able to find such a person who was willing to help them? Very strange indeed, considering that most martial artists don't care much about monetary wealth. None of the good ones anyway. And any who willingly went to Jusenkyo would have to be considered good."

"Yes well, despite his perverseness, the little garden gnome who apparently is the Grand Master of Anything Goes, was strong enough to keep most of the minotaur's attention on him," Kodachi muttered, picking at her plate now trying not to be sick by the sheer amount of food the others were still putting away, in particular the four Sekirei. *Good grief, does Namiji-chan eat like this too? I worry for her and her boyfriend's future, I truly do.*

"I kind of thought that the Minotaur was concentrating on Haposai because he wanted something from them or something. That kind of single-mindedness looked way personal to me," Akane murmured aloud.

"Did you say Haposai?" Cologne spat out harshly, twisting on her staff to stare at Akane.

"Yeah. He's a real pervert for sure, but according to my Dad and Genma, Haposai really is the Grand Master of our families' martial arts style. I'm just worried about what he'll demand in return for trai..."

Akane's voice slid to a halt as Cologne began to cackle. This was not a pleasant, 'oh ho oh I'm so ancient I'm going to scare you because I find you amusing' cackle. No, this was a full-blown evil witch's cackle, with an added dose of murderous intent to make it even more terrifying. "OOHOHOHO, OOHOHOHO, OOHOHOHO Haposai is it? Still alive, is he? OOHOHOHOHOHO.... We will have to do something to rectify that OOHOHOHOHOHH!"

Even Kodachi, a connoisseur of using a laugh to get under an opponent's skin, was frightened by that laugh. And Akitsu in Tsukiumi, who moments ago hadn't been able to even look at one another, were now hugging one another fiercely as they cowered away from the apparition that began to grow around Cologne reminding both of them very starkly of Miya, if not quite as insanelly powerful.

OOOOOO

Despite the moment he'd had with Akitsu a moment ago, Ranma's mind was all business as he raced across the rooftops to the Tendo's place. The phrase going through his mind at the moment was 'momentum.' They couldn't allow Minaka to get used to the current way of things, couldn't allow him to build up more forces or somehow convince the remaining Sekirei/Ashikabi pairs or groups to follow him. They had to keep the pressure on, had to find Nishi get him on board, or remove him, then move on MBI in force.

Yet everyone is already tired, and most of them have been fighting all day practically. I don't know if we have enough endurance to keep on going today. Regardless, by tomorrow at the latest, Ranma wanted them to be in a position to attack MBI tower itself, force Minaka off his high horse, and out of any position where he could make demands or issue commands to the surviving Sekirei.

He wasn't looking forward to that. Ranma didn't like the idea of fighting his way through people just doing their job, even if that job was for a seeming-madman who liked to play with people's lives, and who should really have been poisoned by this point by someone within the company. And Ranma **really** didn't like the idea of putting Haihane down permanently. But he would do it if she and her partner decided to back their master to the bitter end, who apparently worked for Mr. Madman willingly.

His thoughts were interrupted at that point by someone shouting at him from below. "Oy, are you that Ranma fella who's staying with the Tendo's?"

Ranma's paused in his roof-hopping, squatting down to the edge of the rooftop he was currently on, nodding to the man who had just shouted up at him, noticing as he did so that the man was not alone. Several others had come out of their houses with him. All of them were armed with various weapons. Many of those were real weapons too, not just the ladles, gardening equipment or other stuff. To carried halberds, another carried an ancient-looking officer's sword of some kind.

"Yeah, that's me. Do you folks need help digging someone out?" Ranma asked what he thought was the obvious reason for someone wanting to stop them. After all, this was the area where Mutsu and the others had their running battle against Kodachi and the others who were defending the Tendo place.

"No, we're all right, we just wanted to make sure that Kasumi and that young girl she took in are okay. She's a real gem that girl, and the idea of someone coming in from out of town, trying to take that little girl away, maybe even hurting Kasumi..." There was a growl from the people around them, and Ranma blinked in surprise. "Well, that doesn't sit well with us."

"As far as I know, the fighting's over with for now. We seem to have done for every group that wanted to attack them," Ranma answered with a shrug. "I can't say that Kasumi'll be safe until the big bad is removed, but we're getting to that."

That seems to do the trick, and all the people below breathed sighs of relief, laying down weapons, some of them even heading inside. The man who had initially held Ranma thanked him, then told him to remind Kasumi that she always had a discount waiting at his fish store, which sort of explained the giant billhook that the man had been wielding.

Ranma replied in the affirmative that he would certainly pass that on, before leaping away, shaking his head. *Kasumi sure is popular around here.*

Soon after that, Ranma reached the street containing the Tendo home, where he leaped from one rooftop directly onto the Tendo's, before flipping himself down onto the small balcony outside of Nabiki's window. He tapped the window, causing Nabiki to look up from where she had been doing some work at her desk for something. The next instant, she had moved almost as fast as Ranma could to the window, wrenching it open.

"Hi," Ranma began, before finding his mouth closed by Nabiki's her arms went around him. The next thing Ranma knew, he found himself underneath Nabiki on the bed, her tongue looping around his own in Ranma's mouth.

While Ranma knew that he still had a lot of things to learn about women, he understood that now was not the time to question things. He simply went with it, kissing Nabiki back just as hard, his arms going around her. One fell to Nabiki's rear, which he knew Nabiki was quite proud of and had every right to be. Her butt was perfect, in his opinion: small, pert, toned, but still very squeezable, which Ranma proceeded to do, causing her to moan. This allowed Ranma to start controlling the kiss, their tongues dueling for a moment before Ranma gained the upper hand and began to explore Nabiki's mouth once again.

How long this went on, Ranma had no idea of knowing. But eventually, Nabiki seemed to regain control of herself and pulled away, rolling to lay on the bed next to Ranma rather than on top of him.

"Hey yourself," she exclaimed, smiling brightly. A smile that would've made many of her acquaintances at school, indeed many of her factors, who were also her friends, stare in shock.

Ranma chuckled, running one hand through her short hair, watching as Nabiki's eyes closed at the sensation, before moving a finger down to gently trace along the back of her ear, then down her neck and back up. "I would've thought that you would've learned that I was fine already from the old men at the very least. So, what brought that on?"

Nabiki shrugged, looking a little self-conscious, and unwilling to meet his eyes, even as she practically hummed under his attention. "I might not be able to fight next to you. I might not be able to cook and clean and do all those normal wifely things. But I can look after the books, like figuring out a way to keep the food flowing into Nerima even with MBI now turning away delivery trucks and everything else, my own way of fighting back, you know?"

"And I can always be ready with a warm reception when you come home," she finished, finally meeting his eyes, letting him see the smoldering look in them. "With how much time you and Akitsu spend together I don't want you to forget I'm around. And I understand she is no longer 'Broken?'" She inquired, holding up her fingers to make the quote marks in the air as she spoke the last word.

"Erm, no," Ranma replied, somewhat embarrassed now by how that had come about, even though he had loved every minute of it. It had been the most demanding, challenging, and above all **intensely** rewarding trial in ki control than he'd ever imagined. To say nothing of the physical exertions that went along with it.

Sheepishly Ranma explained how that came about, about the Amazons and Elder Cologne explaining what the mark looked like, and the Tantric ritual that was necessary to break the mark. How it had worked to allow Akitsu full access to her emotions and power and how she had winged herself on Ranma at that moment.

Listening to all this, Nabiki could only shake her head. "I had heard that Akitsu didn't have a mark on her forehead any longer from several people around town, but you're not making me any less jealous, you know?"

She said it teasingly, but Ranma got the impression that there was more than a kernel of truth there and promised Nabiki with his hands clapped in front of them that he would take her out on the best date that Nabiki possibly could imagine. "Just the moment MBI is dealt with, and this whole Plan crap is finished."

"I'll hold you to that. And I have to tell you if we do go on this date and it's interrupted by martial arts style madness of any type like the last one, I am going to blow a fuse," Nabiki answered, even as her dark brown eyes began to gleam in excitement. The one date they'd been on already had been amazing, right up until it had been interrupted by Higa's Sekirei. She was honestly wondering how Ranma would top having a picnic on the very top of Tokyo Tower and getting excited at the ideas that came to mind.

"Yeah, I can see that." Ranma frowned, scratching at his pigtail before admitting. "And in the interest of you, you know, knowing everything going on, something weird has been going on with Tsukiumi and Yashima, although I think Yashima's more of a minor case..." He explained the looks and the physical reaction he had seen from Tsukiumi to his presence, and then went on to explain how it was probably coming about: that having winged Akitsu formally, Ranma was now broadcasting like other Ashikabi did, causing unwinged Sekirei near him to respond. "I'd bet the effect is multiplied by our inner ki to make the impact that all the stronger too."

"Huh," Nabiki muttered, her lips quirking as she leaned back in her seat, having sat there halfway through Ranma's explanation of how he had broken the lock on Akitsu's ki. That had not been a story she wanted to be laying down next to Ranma for.

"That's it, just, huh?" Ranma questioned, surprised.

Nabiki pushed herself to her feet, stretching luxuriously, cracking her back and shoulders, biting her lip in delight at the low groan of enjoyment at the sight that she heard from Ranma. *I might not be Sekirei material, but who cares so long as Ranma still likes what he sees.*

Turning back to him, Nabiki answered Ranma's question. "It's kind of weird that she's responding so overpoweringly to you, but I like Tsukiumi well enough. She's got an acerbic sense of humor just like me and, honestly, a very good head for numbers. We've played a few math games and other stuff on rainy days while she was waiting for her turn to train with you and your father. Just so long as you give us all equal time, and don't expect us to all be in your bed at the same time," she teased, "I can deal with it."

"I think," she added, her tone shifting into a much more uncertain one. "At least I'm going to try to make the attempt. So long as you make an honest attempt to make certain you don't play favorites from here on."

"I promised you I take you out on a date, didn't I?" Ranma retorted, before nodding his head seriously. He understood where Nabiki was coming from, but Akitsu's circumstances, and moreover the way the so-called game had turned out, had forced him to sort of spend more time with Akitsu than Nabiki.

Nabiki seemed to take that as enough of an answer and moved to the door. She wasn't the most at home with the whole emotional talk thing anyway, and the earlier moment between them had been enough of an answer to some of her more personal concerns coupled with Ranma's reaction to her when he'd come home after the battle with Karasuba. Now, it was time to set personal stuff aside to deal first with family and then everything else.

Down below, Kasumi had sensed Ranma's arrival but had decided not to interrupt him and Nabiki, despite everything else going on. Personal moments like that were important, after all. *And I would be lying if I hadn't considered similarly rewarding Homura*, she reflected as she felt the door to Nabiki's room open.

As they came down, she turned from where she had just laid out a few snacks and some Sake for the two patriarchs and smiled at Ranma, while Ranma smiled back, before cocking an eyebrow at the young boy, who looked to be around fifteen if that, holding Kusano. He ignored the young man for a moment, though, to pat Kusano on the head, winking at the little girl. "And here's the last line of defense. Did you have to defend the house?"

Kusano shook her head, blushing slightly. But that was the only response she gave to Ranma even now that he had winged Akitsu, which made Ranma breathe an internal sigh of relief. *Great! Now we'll see if geek girl or gamer girl will react to me either. That could be embarrassing as all hell, although I'll have Akitsu there to help me protect myself.*

With that possible crisis averted, Ranma turned his attention to Shiina. The younger boy had somewhat messy light green hair, with blue-grey eyes and looks Ranma could easily see could be described as Bishounen, shota-style. The clothing was why he thought the boy could pass as a shota despite being of average height for his age, being shorts, a good shirt and suspenders.

Ranma nodded to him in a friendly manner. After all, he was a guy and didn't seem to be reacting to Ranma, so that was all to the good. "You'd be Shiina, right? Kodachi told me about you."

"Ah, yes. Kodachi-sama was very helpful," Shiina stuttered, looking away with a faint blush on her face. "Erm, I, I wouldn't mind spending time with her in the future."

"Rigggght," Ranma drawled, wondering if he should warn Shiina about what he might be getting into with Kodachi. Though they got along, Ranma knew with a brother like Kuno, there was no way Kodachi was altogether sane. But he decided against it. He didn't have much evidence to back up that opinion bar her laugh and apparent delight in knockout lipstick after all.

Instead, Ranma looked at Kasumi, pushing her shoulder gently with one hand with a smile. "By the way, Miss Popular, you have a lot of people out there willing to fight for you, you know. Apparently, they were giving the Sekirei grief even before Akane and Yashima attacked them."

"Yes, well, it pays to be nice to people. I have always tried to treat other people, as I would like to be treated. And I do know quite a few of the food sellers and others," Kasumi said with a faint smile, looking away

"Playing it cool, huh?" Ranma said, squeezing her shoulders with a sideways hug. "Sure, be that way."

Kasumi flushed fetchingly at that, smiling a little wider. She rather enjoyed having a family member who was so emotive with her, even if it wasn't a traditional Japanese thing. Even in their homes, traditional Japanese would not be as touchy-feely as Ranma seemed to have gotten used to with Akitsu. *Although the fact that he is a boy does add to the embarrassment.*

Almost as if summoned by her thoughts, a bucket of cold water was dumped over on Ranma's head, catching him even as he tried to step back in a sudden evasion, splashing both Ranma and Kasumi. A second later, Happosai stood on the nearby table, looking at them all as he cackled. "My, what a bevy of beauties Soun has acquired! Hotcha!"

Ranma quickly shifted so that she was in front of Kasumi and Nabiki, offhandedly noting that Kasumi had quite a bit more up top than you would think given the clothing she wore. *She's pretty darn good-looking, but Nabiki is way more my type of gorgeous,* she reflected, even as she thrust out a punch.

The punch should've connected. Happosai was in midair, his attention fully on Nabiki, having twisted already to one side from his initial charge towards Kasumi and Ranma. He shouldn't have even been able to see the punch at all, leaving him wide open. But somehow he did, reaching to the side and back to tap a small hand against Ranma's fist, flipping himself up and around back towards Ranma. The next second, the little creature was grappling with Ranma's chest, rubbing his head against it. "Sweeto!"

"GRAH!" Ranma shrieked, bringing both hands down on it in a hammer blow on to the little creature's head, only for him to dodge aside the last instant. A kick lashed out faster than Happosai had anticipated, but he was still able to block it. Then Ranma was on him, fists and feet moving as one.

For a moment, Happosai just dodged through them, analyzing the redhead's style even as he shouted out, "Oh yes, make that chest bounce, baby! But how can you do that without a bra! That's a travesty! I know, later on, you can have a bit of a fashion show with some of the goodies I've already acquired. While few of the bras I've gotten from Sekirei would fit you, I'm certain there's something in my collection that will."

The redhead was good, Happosai decided. There were absolutely no tells that any normal person would have been able to see, and indeed even Happosai was having trouble figuring out how Ranma would press her attack next. Ranma's use of legs and arms was also extremely good, and he seemed at home in the air as on the ground. Happosai could also tell that his ki reserves were simply monstrous for someone Ranma's age, or any age really. *Her speed is also well above where it should be. In fact, I think she's faster than I was when I first discovered my ki sapping technique. Amazing!*

However, so caught up in fighting against Ranma was he that Happosai didn't notice little Kusano glaring at him. A second later, the small potted plant in her hand grew into a large hand of vines, which shot towards Happosai.

Before Happosai could realize his danger, he was caught, and pulled away from Ranma, to be held up in midair by the vines. "Oh ho, what is this, another woman with supernatural powers? And this time a little girl? I am so happy I escaped that cave, what an amazing world we live in now!"

As Kusano looked torn between scowling and smiling at the bit of praise, Ranma glanced at Shiina, wondering why he hadn't taken part in the little fight. Shiina had been splashed a bit by the bucket of water too, but only a little bit. He had not moved from his spot, simply staring at Ranma, a blush suffusing his features as Shiina stared at the redhead.

Oh crap! Ranma thought, before putting Nabiki and Kasumi between herself and the young boy. Luckily for Ranma, Shiina seemed more frozen from the feelings rushing through him than manic to act on them. Taking no chances, Ranma ducked into the kitchen, intent on some hot water.

"Grandfather, are you done having fun now?" Kasumi inquired tartly as she wrung out her skirt as best she could, looking more than a little annoyed. She had been introduced to Happosai earlier and had not been impressed by anything about him except his ability to toss Genma and her father around the backyard like they were two-bit street thugs. "Only, it is time for serious talk, and if you're not able to do so, I'm afraid I might have to penalize you by withholding dinner."

"I'll be good, Kasumi dear," Happosai replied happily. "Your food is something no one in their right mind would willingly miss."

Silent to this point – and nursing many bumps and bruises - Genma spoke up now, gesturing to Ranma as the redhead muttered to herself and headed towards the kitchen for the teakettle. "As you can see master, we were telling the truth earlier. At this point, there is very little I can teach my son, and Soun is in no shape to teach him anything."

Soun whimpered at that but didn't respond to that, not just because it was the truth, but because if he did, he might draw Happosai's attention to him. This let Genma continue, his tone becoming more sententious as he went along. "As such, Ranma is the only real candidate left to become the heir to the original school of Anything Goes. Neither Soun nor I am young any longer, and truthfully, neither of us have shown in the sheer brilliance Ranma has when it comes to learning new techniques and abilities."

"True enough," Happosai said, pulling out his pipe from somewhere, and lighting it even as he continued to sit on the vines that Kusano had grown, somehow having freed himself when no one was watching. Only Kusano had noticed, and she was busy chewing on a sweet Happosai had tossed her way. "And I can see a lot of upsides to training her, oh yes I can!"

"Now, hold on!" Ranma said, coming back from the kitchen, and pouring the hot water over her head, before setting the kettle, still full down next to him just in case as he handed Kasumi a towel. "I don't just learn Anything Goes old man. In fact, Anything Goes is more of a sideline to my training with Miya-nee. She still has a lot to teach me, and I still have a long way to go to match Miya's physical abilities. Let alone her combat skills."

Genma seemed to swell himself up in anger. "Now see here, boy, I didn't raise you to be so ungrateful!"

At that, Ranma was in his face instantly, hurling him outside into the backyard and proceeding to beat him down for a few moments as he shouted, "That's rich coming from you, Pops!"

Happosai 's cackle interrupted the Saotome Style familial bonding moment. "Boy, it's called Anything Goes for a reason! If you think that simply learning another style is enough to take you out of the running for becoming my heir, you have another think coming. I'm perfectly fine with you continuing to train with that goddess come to earth that lives in the north of the city. All it will mean is I won't have to cover the basics. And that you will always be more at home with a sword in your hand than most of us are, which is also fine by me."

Ranma frowned, then pulled away from his father, who scowled back, and eventually, Ranma simply nodded, not seeing the point of arguing about this right now. "Well, so long as you're all right with that and the fact I'm not going to be able to concentrate on training at all until the Sekirei Plan is dealt with, that's fine, I suppose. But I reserve the right to kick you to the curve old man. Grand Master or no, I have very short shrift for perverts."

"Strange coming from a boy who's living a pervert's dream," Happosai replied dryly.

To that, Nabiki could only chuckle in amusement. It was true, after all. Ranma was like a harem protagonist from one of those old animes, except he was actually doing something with the girls, rather than all of them fighting one another and ruining it for everyone involved. *Something to remember there, old girl. Be territorial, be jealous, sure, and make sure that Ranma realizes whenever he's spending too much time with one of us or the other. But don't let it come to blows between you and Akitsu... or Tsukiumi if she ends up joining us. And not only because both of them could kill you, but also because doing so would take away from fun time.*

While Nabiki was having her introspective moment, the others had moved on, with Ranma explaining about Higa and Hayato before gesturing to the young man in the camouflage pants. "So, you want to explain more about that guy, Pops?"

Genma sighed but nodded. "You have a right to know, I suppose. And I want to make this plain: The boy is delusional. I am many things..."

"Ain't that the truth," Ranma drawled, shoving his shoulder against his father's.

Genma took it good-naturedly, shaking his head admonishingly at his son before gesturing with his head towards the man they were currently talking about. "But I am not a killer. As far as I know, Ryu Kumon's father was alive and well when we left. As to what happened..."

From there, Genma explained how he had met Ryu's father, who knew some interesting ki techniques, and ways to move Ki through the body or to even remove it entirely. With that and what Genma had already learned, they put together the two different thieving techniques.

"Despite his skills, RinKumon had made a few bad choices in his life. And this is **me** saying it," Genma emphasized, knowing precisely how many bad decisions he'd made in his inability to think things through. "He'd lost a lot of money to the Yakuza, nearly destroyed his own dojo and run off every student they'd had in his pride and unwillingness to train down to their level. I honestly thought he would use the Yama-Sen-ken to become a bandit to gather enough money to repair the dojo that way. But instead, it seems he used it too often and eventually brought the dojo down on himself."

"You're lying!" Ryu shouted, standing up from where he had been playing possum for the last few minutes, his face red with anger as he tore apart his rope bindings. "You killed my old man! Or as near did. You broke his spine and left him a cripple! He told me why told me about the two unstoppable techniques the two of you had created together, and that you stole the Umi-Sen-Ken scroll from him. But he remembered enough about the Yama-Sen-Ken to teach it to me, to have our revenge!"

With that, he launched himself forward, but Kusano reacted much faster this time to the breach of the house's peace, sending her thoughts into her tiny plant again. The fines spread instantly from under Happosai, grabbing at Ryu, and holding him in place.

"I do apologize for that," Kasumi spoke up, her voice implying anything but. "However, I do not appreciate violence in my home, in particular at the dining table. Kusano-chan understands that if you do not and is more than willing to hold you to the same standards, I try to hold everyone to."

Ryu finally pulled his eyes away from Genma and Ranma, taking in everything else around him, staring at Nabiki and Kasumi. "Damn baby, if you wanted me to sit down and play nice, all you'd have to do is ask nicely." He japed, almost leering at her, then staring Nabiki up and down. Since Nabiki was dressed in her normal around the house cloths of tight exercise pants and a t-shirt, there was a lot to see.

Kasumi recoiled from his coarseness, while Nabiki rolled her eyes and crossed her head arms in front of her chest, glaring back at the young man. The leering wasn't exactly over-the-top, but it certainly wasn't welcome. And Kasumi certainly wasn't used to it as Nabiki was, still going to school with a lot of hormonal buffoons.

"Right," Not liking the way Ryu had looked at either Tendo daughter Ranma stood up abruptly, moving to the other young man. "He ain't staying here. I'll drop him off with the rest of the prisoners and make damn certain to tie his hands in a way he can't use that freaking technique."

The young man growled, and a second later was free, as small void blades appeared from his hands, slicing into the plants and causing Kusano to yip in surprise. "If you think I'll go quietly I-"

At that point, Happosai, who had been silently listening to Genma explain how the two techniques been created, made himself known once more. He flashed through the air going past Ryu's shoulder, his pipe flashing out. The next second, Ryu collapsed, his ki having been cut off somehow from the neck down. "That young fool is way too trigger-happy with that technique Genma. I'll expect you to handle this in time," Happosai said firmly. *He could have hurt Kusano!*

Say what you would about Happosai, and indeed, he had nearly as many faults as his two students combined and multiplied twice over. But he had a soft spot for children. Young girls in particular, of course, but children, nonetheless. The idea that this brat had almost harmed Kusano made him a little angry, especially after seeing him

tossing around that strange technique earlier in the day. *Luckily, he doesn't seem to have trained himself as well as he should outside of using that technique.*

Unused to seeing his old Grand Master in full Martial Arts Master mode, Genma could only nod his head. "I had already assumed I would have to master. Ranma or I will give him his match, smack the brat down and then beat some reality into him."

"Until then, we'll store him with the prisoners over at the Kuno mansion. They have more than enough space even now. I'll take him over there right away. But after that, I think we need to all meet up at Miya's place to plan our next move," Ranma added.

Happosai frowned, thinking. He rather would like to meet the goddess whose ki he felt in the north, but he certainly wasn't about to do anything right now. And he'd had enough seriousness for the day. "You youngsters go on," he said, turning back to Genma and Soun. "I'm certain these two know the way to the nearest watering hole."

Nabiki rolled her eyes. "You do realize that it's only pushing four o'clock in the afternoon?"

"Bah, it's 5 o'clock somewhere," Happosai laughed, hopping over to Soun's shoulder. "Now come on you too. I hope you have a lot of money because I'm going to drink it all!"

"Martial artists and odd personalities seem to go hand in hand," Nabiki drawled, looking over at Ranma. "If you could send Tsukiumi or Homura here to escort us, I think Kasumi and I will join you at this meeting. I'll call ahead to make certain that Miya-san's willing to put us all up first, though."

"Wait, what? Nabiki going with you I can understand as she is your fiancée. But why would Kasumi be invited to this?" Soun questioned, speaking up for the first time. Not that his silence was unusual. Even when he wasn't bruised and battered, the so-called Tendo patriarch tended to fade into the background since Genma had started to whip him back into shape.

"Because Miya likes her and is treating her as an apprentice in some ways that she isn't treating me," Ranma pouted dramatically. It didn't have the same effect in his male body, though. Instead of looking cute it just looked silly, shown by Kasumi and the others laughing at him. He got her back by saying, "And it's only a matter of time before Homura wears down her walls anyway, which means she'll be an Ashikabi at that point."

At that, Soun scowled and looked almost as if he was going to start weeping. But before he could, Ranma hefted the unconscious Ryu onto his shoulder, giving Nabiki a lingering kiss on the cheek before leaving once more.

OOOOOO

By the time Ranma got back to the mansion with Ryu in tow, many of the other prisoners had been brought in. This included two Ashikabi who had come into Nerima to try their luck. Hotaru, who had tried to capture Shiina, had been joined by another solo Ashikabi who had attempted to sneak in, only to run into Genma and Soun. He was found tied back to back with his Sekirei at the top of Furinkan High's flagpole.

The two groups of prisoners had been separated, of course. With the mansion still mostly frozen, the Ashikabi had all been stored in a nearby house, whose owners had rightly fled from the battle occurring against the goblins and other beasts. They were watched over by a few of the Amazons and two other Sekirei from the Nerima Alliance who had arrived with Namiji a few moments before, along with Namiji's Ashikabi, Takano Kouji. There they would remain until plans were made to deal with them more permanently in some fashion.

With chains brought in from the police precinct, the Sekirei who looked to the captured Ashikabi were placed in the mansion, in a cleared room on the second floor which hadn't been all that damaged from Akitsu's norito. It was cold, and the rooms on both sides were solid blocks of ice containing frozen things within, but it would keep them out of the way and under wraps. They were out of the game now and were not important enough to care about going forward. This included the Sekirei, who looked to Higa, considering their plans for him did not include anything so soft as letting him ever see the light of day free again.

It did not include the prisoners from the south or the four that looked to Nishi Sanada. Mutsu's skill made the first group too important to treat like that, and since they hoped to reach out to Nishi, keeping his Sekirei separate made good sense. These groups had been dumped in the greenhouse for now, and a few of them were already awake and moving around, trying to break out of the seemingly glass greenhouse with no success.

Seeing them awake, Ranma and Kodachi decided to explain to them what was going to happen from now on. Akitsu

accompanied them. Homura and Tsukiumi did not.

Given the option of heading back to the Tendo House to accompany the two Tendo girls to Miya's place, Tsukiumi grasped onto it eagerly and was moving off before Ranma even finished asking. Despite her liking Ranma, Tsukiumi was a very proud woman and refused to allow her body's instincts to control her. Especially since she could see it wrecking the friendship she had with Ranma and drive a wedge between his relationship with Akitsu at the same time. She would control herself and hope it went away in the next week. If it didn't...then, they would have to see.

Homura, despite his desire to see Kasumi being almost as strong as Tsukiumi's desire to not give in to her base needs, did not follow her right away, nor did he move to join Ranma and Kodachi in talking to their former enemies. "Unfortunately, I am still needed here, clearing what I can from the mansion." He gestured and sent a tongue of flame at one of the ice protrusions sticking out of a second-story window. "It's going to take me a while to melt away what I can of this. Especially as we'll have to make certain none of those things are still alive."

Having seen them coming through the glass walls, one of the blonde twins was waiting by the door hidden among a few plants. She threw a punch at the side of Ranma's head, only to find her fist slamming into a wall of ice.

Her sister leaped down from where she had been clinging to the ceiling, but Ranma leaped upwards, smacking her fists out of the way, flipping himself up and over her, to where he got her into a chokehold, rode her body down to the ground where she slammed chest and face-first into the ground of the greenhouse. "Trying to face an Aerial Style user in the air? That's a paddlin'!" Ranma smirked as he faked an American accent again for the second time today.

Kodachi called him on this as she stepped demurely into her greenhouse, flicking a tiny switch on an equally tiny, very ladylike looking remote control, done in tasteful pink and purple. A grate at the end of the greenhouse which led out to the large pond outside opened at that touch as she spoke to Ranma. "Might I inquire as to why you are attempting to speak in voices today, Ranma?"

Ranma shrugged. "Kocho and Matsu over at Izumo House are hugely into these meme things. A few of them caught my attention." He looked down at the blonde, he held in a wrestler's lock with one arm, pressing her face down into the dirt with his weight on her back, while his other hand was poised at her lower back. "Now, are you going to play nice, or am I going to have to release the tickle monster on you?"

"Excuse me!" she barked, then spasmed as Ranma began to, yes, tickle her. His free hand disappeared to the sight of everyone bar the now awake Mutsu as he jabbed a finger into her sides and lowers back a tickle attack at woodpecker speed. The blond underneath him bucked and tried to heave him off, but Ranma held on easily, keeping control of her trapped arm and neck even as he tickled her into submission.

"Enough, please! We give up," the other one muttered, wringing out her fist. Akitsu hadn't done anything more to her, but smashing her hand into unyielding ice without expecting it might have sprained her wrist to go along with all her other bruises. "I think we've been humiliated enough today, sister."

"Sorry, but not really," Ranma smirked. "You all started this, after all."

Both girls scowled, as did a few of the others. This included the four that had been captured after attempting to fight Tsukiumi: Hatae, Chiyo and the two tanned girls. While the other two were still unconscious, both Hatae and Chiyo looked like they wanted nothing more than to charge forward and fight all three of their captors. A few of the others were also looking belligerent, and the silver-haired Sekirei from the south began to create the fog that was her power, spreading it out around her legs.

This ended abruptly when there was a loud splash behind them. Everyone there who was currently awake and aware of their surroundings turned in that direction bar Kodachi, who simply smiled in welcome. "Hello, Mr. Turtle."

The alligator that beached itself a second later on the small Rocky garden that was right by the entrance to the waterway through the botanical garden was monstrous. It was at least twice the size of Mutsu lying down and had jaws larger than his outstretched arms.

"You call that thing Mr. Turtle?!" shouted more than one voice.

Mutsu spoke up now rather than continuing to play dead, the place where he'd been laid out being a little too close to where the alligator had just plopped itself down. He jumped up, taking several steps to the side as he stared at the monster that this crazy woman was treating as if it was a housepet. "...You're not thinking of feeding us to it, are you?"

Even unharmed, Mutsu figured he could probably take the thing. Or at least he hoped he could. The others, even the two from the East, were looking more than a little worried about it right now.

"Nah, we're just messing with you," Ranma snarked, hopping to his feet and then politely holding out a hand to his former victim. "Although it should be obvious by now that you lot are our prisoners."

The smirk on his face did take away from the politeness quite a bit, but she still took his hand and allowed him to pull her to her feet, flushing somewhat. Although she was already winged, the feeling of Ranma and his bond to Akitsu was, well, it was making her think about several hundred things she wanted to do to her master the instant she saw him again. *Age be damned, Hayato-sama really needs to start giving us more attention than just taking care of us!*

Mutsu raised an eyebrow in query. "And what precisely does being your prisoner entail?"

"First, obviously, you're not going to be able to fight this game any longer," Kodachi explained. "Beyond that, you will be kept here for the time being. Until events elsewhere play out as they should, shall we say."

"What about our master?" questioned one of the blondes. Ranma still hadn't figured out which was named what yet.

Several of the other Sekirei from the South also clambered about that, showing that despite his treating them like playing cards, the Sekirei that looked to Hayato still acted as if they liked him. Ranma wasn't certain how much of that was honest affection and how much of it was their indoctrination, but Ranma also knew that he wasn't qualified to tell that. "The brat of the South is in our protective custody now," he said again.

"That's against the rules!" Juusa shouted.

Even her fellow Sekirei turned to look at her, causing her to blush in embarrassment while Ranma drawled, "Really?"

At that point, Kodachi finished setting out tea for them all, gesturing to it. None of the Sekirei came close, and she shrugged her shoulders, sipping at each teacup personally. "It isn't poisoned if that is what you were worried about.

At that, the others finally moved over, led by Taki and Mutsu, who took up their teacups, staring at the tiny teacakes that Kodachi had scrounged somehow. The plate of them wasn't going to be enough for even one of them to have a snack, let alone regular meal, certainly not after all the exertions of the day.

"What exactly does protective custody mean?" Mutsu inquired as he sipped at the tea.

"At the moment, nothing much. The brat's not going to be mistreated, and we're not going to use our control of Hayato to force you all to fight with us. Although you might see a change in his attitude after a while. Miya-nee has a way of smacking the sense into people that..."

Ranma was interrupted as Mutsu seemed to choke on his tea, spluttering and coughing. Taki obligingly smacked him on the back a few times, and he slowly gained control to shout out, "Hayato's with Miya?!"

"That's right," Ranma grinned. "I dropped him off personally. The Hannya of the North is no doubt going to give the Brat of the South a much-needed reality readjustment during their time together."

Mutsu stared at Ranma, then around at his fellows who are looking at him quizzically, very few of them aware of what Miya really was. He then turned back to the two humans. "We surrender. Seriously, I surrender. I have been hoping to surrender like this is for a long time since I was actually winged. So long as it wasn't to MBI, and I didn't have to worry about going back under that asshole's thumb. Or having anything to do with Karasuba, or with Miya! If playing nice can keep me away from her, I am all for it."

While Ranma grumbled about the comment about Miya, Kodachi was focused on something else entirely. "Accidentally winged? Then you are not a shota-loving bishounen?"

"Good God, no! It was completely accidental. The little brat fell down a flight of stairs, crashed into me just as I took a step up them and before I knew it, his lips were on mine. The only funny thing about it was his face when he realized it," Mutsu recalled.

Kodachi allowed a small smile to appear on her face. "So, you are straight then?". *After all, while Shiina is quite nice, an older man might be a little more interesting in the bedroom department.*

"I'm nothing. I don't really find men or women at all interesting and have never understood the obsession all my fellow Sekirei seem to have towards it," Mutsu announced with a shrug.

Pouting, Kodachi shook her head as she looked him up and down. "Well, that is a great pity."

. More than one of the other Sekirei around them, those that didn't like yaoi fantasies, all nodded in agreement while Kodachi thought, *Well, there goes that idea. Ah, well, that just makes Shiina all the more alluring. And unlike Hayato, I know he at least has some interest in the female form, if the way he couldn't keep his eyes off my legs as I showed him to the Tendo House was any indication.*

The two awake Sekirei from the East had recovered from the surprise of Mr. Turtle by this point, and Hatae barked out, "Give us our weapons, and we'll see if you humans are so cocky then!"

Ranma smirked, cracking his knuckles as he held out his fist towards the two of them. "Really?"

Both of them leaped to their feet, something like bloodlust in their eyes almost as they stared at him. But before either of them could take a single step, their feet froze underneath them to the ground. With a full meal in her, Akitsu was now back to nearly a hundred percent even after using her superpower and had very little restraint when it came to defending her Sun-sama. "You will not attack Ranma," she intoned coldly. "Any further incidents, and I will not hesitate to terminate you."

"Akitsu," Ranma sent her a look, both affectionate and warning, "not like that."

She scowled but subsided slightly, and he turned back to the still-frozen twosome. It hadn't been their being frozen he had objected to, after all, just the talk about termination.

"Maybe if your master decides to join us, we'll release you. But the game is over by this point. There's not to be any more fighting for whatever freaking prize Mutsu hang out in front of you like so steak in front of a dog. Right now, he's not our enemy, and he's not her friend. What happens next is up to him. Regardless, your part of this battle is over."

Ranma wouldn't be taking that message personally, since he had no idea where the guy could be found, but he was sure Matsu could figure out a way to send him something, no matter how off the grid Nishi seemed to be.

"Now hold on a minute. I know this Hannya of the North is super-strong or whatever, but Hayato's still our Ashikabi. We still need to protect him. If you're keeping him from us, we must try to break out to free him," Mitsuha objected.

"Well then, we can take one of you with us to meet Miya-nee. After that, I doubt the idea of breaking him out of Izumo House will have any appeal, and you can make certain we're not mistreating him."

"Miya won't mistreat Hayato, that's all I need to know," Mutsu interjected, shaking his head rapidly.

Whatever was between them, Ranma could tell that Mutsu was well aware of it and had no desire to poke a sleeping bear.

The others joined in agreeing with Mitsuha that they at least wanted to know their Ashikabi wasn't being mistreated, but with Kodachi helping, Ranma got them to agree to send a representative. Taki, the most level-headed of them all, volunteered, all the while the two from the East were gnashing their teeth, glaring hatefully at Ranma and Kodachi.

OOOOOO

With the Amazons volunteering to help guard the prisoners along with Namiji and a few other members of the Nerima Alliance, Ranma and Akitsu felt certain enough that none of the prisoners would escape to leave them there that evening, heading back to Miya's place for the meeting. Arriving before the group from the Tendo place, the first thing Akitsu, Ranma and Kodachi heard as they walked from the back garden's patio into the inn was clapping.

As one, the group of four turned to look at Kazehana, who was doing the clapping, sitting next to Minato as they sat at the table, staying out of the way mainly of Miya and her new helper as he flounced from the kitchen out to the patio laden with food. "Woohoo! You go, girl! Last night was an inspiration, I swear!"

Minato's frantic headshaking gave the lie to that one. The fact that he still looked like he had just gone six rounds with a sumo wrestler hopped up on caffeine while Kazehana was glowing made it all the more obvious that he did not agree with her statement.

Unsure what the wind user was referring to, Ranma cocked his head at that, while Akitsu blushed, realizing the couple had heard of them last night. Kodachi joined her in blushing as well, knowing what the more mature-looking woman was talking about, while Cologne cackled.

Setting that minor mystery aside, Ranma asked, "So you two are going to be taking part in this little powwow as well?"

Kazehana nodded. "Yep, we're involved, after all." Indeed, despite not having been involved in any of the battles yet, with her skills, Kazehana was the strongest surviving Sekirei not tied directly into the Nerima Alliance. "We also reached out to Seo, who I suppose you could say could represent the few remaining other small-time Ashikabi out there who haven't moved into Nerima. Whether or not he shows up is anyone's guess, as we didn't speak directly to him, just left a message on his phone. That still leaves Nishi, but I understand that we have a plan in place for that?"

At that reminder, Ranma tensed, looking over to Matsu, worried about what he would see from the computer expert. Unlike Tsukiumi, who was a friend he at least got along with, he and Matsu were like oil and water, and dealing with her attraction to him would have been annoying at best, terrifying at worst.

Next to him, Akitsu had already turned to stare at the other single-number Sekirei.

But to their surprise, Matsu laughed, waving her hand in front of her face. "I can see what you're worried about, but don't be. I was winged by Dr. Tofu this morning." She giggled a little, shaking her head. "I sold it to him as a way to stop me from being stolen away against my will, but after that, he did get into it quite nicely. Who knew that being a doctor was that good for..."

"Yes, thank you, that is enough of such talk. Any more, and you will be infringing upon the rules of Izumo House," Miya warned as she bustled in from the kitchen, smiling at Ranma as she handed another plate to the sullenly waiting Hayato, who was staring in shock at Cologne who had just passed by the other direction.

"How, wh, what is that thing!?" he finally gasped, pointing at Cologne.

"That is an Amazon Elder who could probably turn you and all your Sekirei into a shish-kebab," Uzume quipped from where she was laid out on the floor nearby. She'd been involved in a single clash earlier that day against another Ashikabi/Sekirei pair, but it hadn't been a tough contest, and she had spent much of the day with Chiho-baby at Tofu's place. She was only there because she wanted to be in on the kill with MBI.

"Indeed. If you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything at all. Honestly, your so-called parents and these expensive tutors. None of them taught you basic manners?" Miya sighed sadly, shaking her head like Hayato was a little puppy who hadn't been house-trained yet. "Now, take this out to the patio."

Miya turned away from the young boy and his Sekirei, who followed after him for a moment, along with Uzume to make certain they didn't make a run for it. "As you might have noticed, we will be eating outside. I'm afraid there're going to be too many of us to fit into the dining room. If you could put up some lights, please?"

Ranma nodded and turned to head out into the back garden and the shed where he would find enough material for paper lanterns. But before he could make it all the way out of the house, Kocho came down the steps carrying her laptop. "You realize Miya, that I am only allowing Matsu access to my computer on sufferance? I could read...ily... Oh..."

Turning his head slightly, Ranma could see Kocho stopping several steps up to stare at him. Normally, whatever she was wearing, Kocho always looked like she was under control unless it had to do with her gaming, an aloofness that rarely left her entirely. Now that attitude seemed to be disappearing like ice cream in the sun as Ranma watched.

Her laptop slowly started to slide out of her suddenly loose grip as she stared at Ranma, a blush suffused in her features, her chest heaving as she gasped for air, while two little points made themselves known on her chest, showing that she had forgotten to wear a bra today.

The laptop was saved by Matsu. She had come out after Ranma, having heard Kocho's voice. Now, Matsu dove around Ranma to grab at the laptop before it could crash into the stairs, and as Kocho dove towards Ranma, the two of them got tumbled together, with Matsu holding out the laptop shouting, "Spare the laptop! It's an innocent bystander in this madness!"

Shaking himself out of his momentary shock, Ranma raced away, heading outside quickly.

Akitsu stayed for just a moment, staring at the two women and waiting until they got themselves untangled, and the still blushing Kocho made to stand up. Then, Akitsu calmly froze her to the ground of the walkway there, the ice covering her entire body within seconds. She then looked over at the laughing Kazehana, gesturing with a twitch of her neck. "Help me pick her up?"

The two of them dumped her up in her room, and very firmly locked the door, before heading out the window, they would send Homura up to help release Kocho when Ranma and Akitsu left.

Outside, with Akitsu helping, Ranma started to put up paper lanterns in the various trees and on the pillars of the patio. Cologne remained inside to help in the kitchen.

Following a peremptory hand twitch from Kodachi, Taki hadn't even entered the inn yet. Not that she would have tried. Taki felt too much like a mouse among cats right now with the sheer number of fighters already here, including Kazehana, whose power would easily eliminate her own fog ability. So she sat, staring at her master as he moved to and from the kitchen to the backyard patio.

Soon after Ranma began on his fifth paper lantern, Homura and Tsukiumi arrived escorting Nabiki and Kasumi. They had come over the rooftops to the delight of Kasumi, who had rarely traveled that way before. The fact Homura was quite handsome and very hunky just made it better.

At the sight of Ranma, though, it was obvious that Tsukiumi still felt the heat and burning desire to wing herself on Ranma. She stared at him like a man in the desert would a drink of water, her breath coming in gasps, her hands clenching and unclenching at her side as her face turned red.

But unlike Kocho, she didn't take a step towards them. Instead, she closed her eyes tightly and turned away. "I will master this, I will not be, be a simple animal, controlled by my instincts!"

"That's the way," Ranma encouraged. "Although you don't have to be here for this conversation, Tsukiumi."

"I do not have to be, but I wish to be. I might have something to contribute after all. And, and this is a test. A test of myself. While even a portion of my rational mind would rather like to be your wife Ranma, I realize that it would be most churlish of me to leap from friendship to that so quickly, and moreover, that Akitsu yes, and even Nabiki, deserve more of your time than myself at the present time. I will not act upon this, this instinctual response if I can help it," Tsukiumi replied.

"Stay by Miya when we sit down to eat," Kasumi suggested staring at the distraught girl and moving over to give her a light hug before taking her hand and gently tugging her towards one of the four corners of the garden well away from Ranma. "Until then, you and I can talk. I understand that you had a very different modifier than most?"

"Erm, yes, my modifier was a woman, the only one other than Takami. And she left early on, though I don't know why. She was quite a character, I will admit," Tsukiumi replied, smiling at Kasumi in thanks for her support even as her entire body was screaming at her to turn around and attack Ranma's lips with her own.

Nabiki watch them go, then turned to Akitsu, stating bluntly, "I give her a week before she cracks."

Akitsu sighed in reply but nodded her head once. "That is the minimum I requested. Tsukiumi agreed, and Kodachi mentioned something about it being like a honeymoon period."

"I understood the point of honeymoons. I mean, if you're marrying someone, should you already have gotten to know them? So what is the point of honeymoons other than having a break from routine just to you know, have a lot more romance than you would while working or whatever?" Ranma questioned the word 'working', sounding almost as if it was a foreign term. Considering that he would never agree to do anything that interfered with the rest of his life - his martial arts, Akitsu, Nabiki and having fun - what normal people called 'work' was barely on his radar at all.

"That, and it's supposed to allow you to get the passion out of the way of the relationship. So that you can settle into a more normal kind of living arrangement afterward," Nabiki answered with a shrug.

Ranma scoffed, shaking his head and speaking before his brain could catch up with his tongue. "As if that'd ever happen between Akitsu and me."

Blushing, Akitsu smiled brightly as she looked down at the ground while Nabiki laughed. "Seriously looking forward to those dates, stud."

"Why do I have to do this," Hayato groaned, as he left the kitchen with another, thankfully final, tray of food.

"If paying for your own continued stay here is not enough, think of it as a small step towards paying for your bad deeds," Miya stated firmly. "You treated your Sekirei like servants, now get used to working on your own."

Now seeing that they were almost ready to sit down, Kodachi allowed Taki to approach the young boy, and the silver-

haired Sekirei stood up, smiling as she moved towards him. "Master, are you well?"

The boy frowned, then slowly nodded. "They're not mistreating me or anything, I suppose. They're making me do chores, though. They even had me clean my new room and beat out my own futon! Who uses those things anymore anyway!?" He then turned to Miya, jerking a thumb towards Taki. "Speaking of chores, I don't suppose I could have her do..."

A single bit of Miya's mask appeared behind her shoulder, along with its accompanying darkness, terrifying both boy and Taki. "I'm sorry, perhaps I was mistaken, you couldn't have just simply forgotten what I was talking about a moment ago could you?"

Hayato rapidly shook his head, waving his hands in front of him frantically as the rest of the inn's guests and tenants quailed. "It was a joke, a joke! I'm sorry!"

"Very good then." The mask disappeared, and Miya gestured the boy into a seat. "Please, everyone have a seat."

Ranma turned from where he had been busy setting up some paper lanterns in the surrounding trees to allow the light, pouting outrageously at Miya. "I still want to learn that you know."

Smiling at him, Kasumi allowed a faint flicker of her own aura to appear much to the chagrin of Homura, who skidded away from where he had been about to sit next to her, before allowing it to disappear. Miya chuckled, winking at the younger girl, as they both said, "I don't know what you mean."

"... That was just cruel," Uzume observed as Ranma began to pout even more. She then held up a thumb, grinning. "I approve!"

As everyone else began to take some food, Matsu was busy with Kocho's laptop. She laid it to one side, then plugged two cell phones into it, explaining that one was a burner phone, which would bounce the signal off of every single communications network in the city, and the other was a real phone, which they could use to call the Master at the East, adding another layer of defense. And thanks to Matsu, the computer would allow them to track the location of the phone that received the message, just in case. "Whether or not he wants to talk to us, Nishi is going to get this message for sure."

"You don't think he'll want to listen?" Ranma asked, leaning back and smiling at Miya as she handed him a plate, passing it over to Akitsu, before taking another for himself. Akitsu then leaned against him as Ranma leaned against one of the pillars on the patio. "He's struck me as an easy-going guy with a decent brain. And you don't need to be a genius to see that we've got most of the advantages in this game now."

"I don't know about that, or about Nishi's personality either." Matsu shrugged. "I honestly don't have a good read on his personality at all. He seems to be a laid-back sort, but he's got two of the worst combat junkies under his command, and he seems to hate being on the grid at all. I mean, I found more mention of you in the government's various databases than I have him. That's a little strange, isn't it?"

Maybe, maybe not. Maybe Hatae and the other gal realized they needed a master to achieve their full potential. Hell, Akitsu was magnificent before she and I were able to break through that damn lock but look at her now. Completely different," Ranma answered. He didn't know enough about the rest of what Matsu had mentioned to comment.

After a few minutes of trying to get through to Nishi for a direct call, Matsu gave up on that and settled for sending a message to Nishi's phone and every place in the city he was known to have stayed. She had been dead serious about him getting the message one way or another. "What do we want to say to him?"

The consensus at that point was to tell Nishi the bare truth: Higa and Hayato were out of the game, a statement that caused the young man to scowl but which he didn't argue with. That the Disciplinary squad was done, and to dispose of the MBI cards because they could work to activate a kill switch on the Sekirei around them. And that Ranma and company, who were now the powers in the game, were going to remove MBI.

"After that, it will be up to him to join us or get out of the way. Just like Seo and the rest of the unaffiliated Sekirei," Kazehana finished with a sigh. "I met the guy, and even I can't tell you which way he's going to jump, sorry."

With that message sent off and not anticipating a reply, the discussion moved to the next thing on their agenda: what to do with Higa and his accomplice, the bifocaled moron whose name Ranma hadn't learned yet, and couldn't bother to learn now.

"Him and the other Ashikabi. Some of them aren't really guilty of anything beyond assault, but even so, they are

Ashikabi, and I believe they should be held accountable for what they have ordered their Sekirei to do. The whip, after all, is not the only thing at fault. It is the mind which wields it we must punish," Kodachi declared.

Uzume, who had come close to being manipulated by bastard's plans, spoke first, remembering the bastard holding Chiho's continued health over her head. "I say execute the pretty boy. He hasn't murdered anyone to the best of my knowledge or at least hasn't used his Sekirei to do it. But I would wager most of the wax tales bonded to it would say he raped them. And he certainly ordered them to assault normal people a lot of times, and I'm not talking martial artist types either."

While Kasumi looked as if she wanted to protest, Nabiki was a little more hardheaded while Matsu indicated there was indeed evidence of at least the assaults he had ordered. "If we want to do something like that either of them, we have to do it now. There is no way a court would be that harsh."

"What do you think, Ranma?" Kasumi coaxed, turning to him as she noticed that Miya was not going to weigh in on this decision just yet, sitting serenely while sipping at a cup of tea.

Ranma held up his hands, shaking his head. "No way. I am not going to make that decision. If the Sekirei who attacked us on our date had hurt Nabiki, I'd have already squished his head like a melon the first time I attacked his tower. Now? I want them out of the way, and his business empire in ruins. Beyond that, I don't care."

At that, Matsu smiled like a shark, albeit one with heavy coke-bottle glasses. "His business empire is already coming apart at the seams. Higa Pharmaceuticals doesn't have the experience in cyber-warfare against Sekirei like Kocho or me that MBI has. We've been everything in position for the appropriate time to cut his business empire into pieces beyond the spam type attacks he and his techs could follow. The only thing we can't touch are slush funds, places where he's hidden cash physically that aren't mentioned somewhere within his computer systems. But with Higa in custody, that doesn't matter."

"In that case, without his monetary base of operations and with all of his Sekirei already prisoners or killed, I do think there is a need to execute him," Kasumi declared firmly. While somewhat hesitant about being involved in this discussion at all, having been invited to it, she was going to take part fully. And she did not like the idea of them taking the law into their own hands.

Miya spoke up now, her voice firm. "I agree. Remember that we still have two of his Sekirei prisoner. Neither were his primary enforcers and while all of them may be of dubious moral fiber, they are not irredeemable."

"Dubious moral fiber? Is that a fancy way of saying they are a bunch of narcissistic bits..." Hayato began, before wailing as Miya turned to him.

"Cursing like that is forbidden in Izumo House," she intoned warningly.

"How about we just neuter him then?" Ranma suggested, before pointing at Matsu. "I would wager Dr. Tofu knows a way to do something like that with pressure points, or Cologne," he added, looking over at the ancient prune.

"There are pressure points for that kind of thing. Indeed, there are for both males and females," Cologne replied with a cackle. "Back in our village, if one person pursued another a little too much, they would be subjected to it for a time. You could then remove them later on." *And I have had hundreds of years to perfect their use. Happy, just you wait!*

"I still want the guy dead," Uzume grouched but realizing she wasn't going to win this argument with both Miya and Kasumi on the other side, decided to give up. "But, since I wasn't the one who captured them, I suppose the final decision has to be yours, Ranma."

"What did I just say about not wanting to make that decision?" Ranma scowled, before nodding. "Neuter him. That's my call."

Miya chuckled, then pretended to smack her ladle down on the patio next to her as if she was a judge. "The motion is carried."

"While I still do not like the idea of taking the law into our own hands, in this instance, I believe that is a fair and just compromise," Kasumi agreed.

"You forget my dear that this city was declared a separate nation near to the start of this game. If MBI is unable to or unwilling to create its own laws and enforce them, then it falls on us," Kodachi retorted.

"Exactly. But the only thing MBI has been doing lately trying to screw Nerima over any way they can," Nabiki growled.

"Trust me, I know, I've been busy all day with making certain food is still coming in despite that. But right now, we need to think about the future. Come over here, kid," she directed Hayato.

Hayato looked at her from where he had been sitting quietly next to Taki, very thankful that they hadn't been talking that way it with him. He had never touched his Sekirei beyond the initial kiss, and a single accidental fondle of, ironically, the silver-haired Sekirei that was sitting next to him. And he had never used them against common citizens, only against other Sekirei. And even then, he had done so, mostly to simply gather other Sekirei into his flock.

He looked at Nabiki quizzically then showed the brain that his parents taking such pains to train up. "You have technical ability, you have physical strength and judging by what the girl with the coke bottle glasses said, you can play the Internet like a string, which means you'll be able to gather money. That means you're only missing influence, or to put it another way, political power."

He shrugged. "But I'm not certain how much help that'll be. My parents have always handled that aspect, I have nothing to do with it, even here in Japan. I can give you a decent overview of how the DIET works, who are the movers and shakers, and who I think signed off willingly or unwillingly on the whole idea of separating Shin-Teito from the rest of the nation, but if you want to actually influence them, I don't have access to anything like that."

Smiling at the youngster's perspicacity, Nabiki asked shrewdly, "But would the computers in your mansion have some of that information stored on them?"

"...They might yes. And I did just say that you had technical ability," Hayato answered with a slow nod, twitching his eyes over to Matsu once more.

"And are those computers set up for remote access?" the girl in question queried.

To that, Hayato could only shrug ignorance, and Miya resumed control of the discussion. "In that case, let us set that aside for now. If we have to go to your mansion physically, we can do so tomorrow. We should work with what we already know and have access to." She looked pointedly over at Homura. "To that end, I believe Homura here has something he wants to say."

Homura slowly nodded, pulling out a phone and setting it down in front of them. It was another extremely well-protected cellphone that Matsu had made for his 'business' as a club post. "Through one of the clubs I work at, I've been in contact with Takami for several months now..."

"Wait, what!" Minato spoke up, startled while Kazehana began to giggle. She had kept this a secret from her husband, just for this moment. Oh, not the fact that Takami works for MBI or that Kazehana knew her, that would've been silly. She had even told Minato that she was almost certain the president of the company was his father and had been impressed by the young man's response at the time.

"A father is someone who is there for you when you're growing up. A father is someone who stands as a role model as you age. A father is someone who is, at the very least, around and involved in your life in some fashion! Minaka might have been my mother's sperm donor, but that does not mean he is my father!" Minato had practically shouted in the hotel room the two of them had been sharing at the moment of that revelation.

Yes, Kazehana reflected as she watched Minato started to point a wildly vibrating hand at Homura, *while I might not have gotten the father, comparing the two I think the son is a far better catch.*

"Does that mean, does that mean my mother is one of your clients!"

"What no! I mean, she might have dressed up for our meetings, and always picked me up in her personal limo... but that was only to act the part at the club. It was all business, I swear!" Homura defended himself.

"Is that supposed to make me calmer considering what kind of business goes on at host clubs!?" Minato practically snarled, showing more spine than Ranma had seen from him before this.

"Not that kind of business! I never, that is, while I had clients, I've never gone beyond dating them! I'm not that kind of guy!" Homura shouted, looking over at Kasumi, who was giggling at his discomfiture. *Well, I already knew she has a wicked sense of humor at times. I just wish she didn't turn it on me.*

Getting control of herself, Kasumi patted his knee. "I believe you, but perhaps you had best explain what you meant. Quickly."

Staring at the still furious face of Minato, Homura agreed and continued on hurriedly. "I've been acting as a defender

for unwinged Sekirei for some time, trying to defend freed Sekirei, so they were not simply gobbled up by a few powerful Ashikabi. Whether or not I succeeded in that is up in the air, although I'll admit right now that I probably would not have succeeded to the extent we did without Ranma, Akitsu, and their growing aid to my endeavors. But before that, Takami was my eyes on the inside of MBI. She helped me track down newly released Sekirei so I could watch over them until they began to react to their chosen Ashikabi."

He held up the phone again as Minato finally began to calm down. "I can contact her tonight if you want. But I can already tell you what she's going to say. Takami will be more than willing to back us in some kind of hostile takeover of MBI. So long as she is convinced that we'll be able to protect the Sekirei from government influence."

"By which you mean nonmilitary influence, I suppose. Special agents designed and trained to kidnap, exterior shutdowns of bringing in food and such, like what Nerima is already being faced with, that kind of thing," Nabiki replied.

"Exactly," Miya let loose a long drawn out sigh. "If it was just military force, I would have been able to see to it myself. But even with the first Disciplinary squad, there was a limit to what we could do to protect our younger feathers."

For a moment, there was silence at that admission, an admission of guilt as well as a statement of strength from Miya, while Kazehana and Matsu, who had been part of that group, scowled, looking away. Then Ranma reached over and touched her shoulder gently, causing Miya to turn to him. "Well, you don't have to face that alone now, right? You'll have all of us around to help, and we'll only call you in when we need oh an aircraft carrier cut in half or something."

Matsu twitched at that, staring between the two of them, while Miya simply laughed, nodding. *He knows?! He knows she's that strong and still asks her to train him? I am so glad I didn't react to Ranma! Ranma is too crazy for me!*

However, she had to say something at this point. "That's nice and all, but you know that Miya can't join in your attack on the tower, right?"

"I know she made a promise not to interfere with MBI and the game. Not that we need the help at this point. But I would like to know why," Ranma questioned, turning first to address Matsu then back to Miya.

That worthy sighed, shaking her head sadly. "One reason why Takami will be such a massive asset to us is that Minaka has long boasted about the fact that he controls a 'kill switch' of some kind which will murder all of my young feathers. At first, I hoped that this was connected to the devices in the MBI card designed to cut off the bond between Sekirei and Ashikabi. But I fear instead that he has somehow discovered another means, a means based off our ship's technology, specifically the Jinki."

"Jinki?" More than one person mouthed, not having heard the term before.

"Jinki are the center of my people's technology, or at least the various technological abilities of the ship we arrived in from space," Miya answered calmly, despite discussing something that was among her most closely guarded secrets. *The time has come to set aside all secrets to forge forward. Takehito would not want me to stand aside at this change of the tide.* "They can interact with an individual's DNA, connect to the ship itself and it's damaged systems, and far, far more.

"Huh, I still say that a more mystical origin for you lot make more sense than aliens who look so much like humans," Ranma mused, winking at Miya, who laughed, while Cologne nodded firmly in agreement with his statement. "But let me guess, you think that one of these things can, what, send out a signal that can shut down the minds of anyone with Sekirei ... erm, what's the word..."

"Genes, or powers maybe," Nabiki mused. "Huh... I've heard of noise that can be used to know people out, but kill?"

"High technology remember? And do recall that even we humans have come up with scents or stimuli that can cause someone to pass out. Why, I have personally created such, HOHOHOHOHO," Kodachi laughed, more out of nerves than actual humor. This talk of alien technology bothered her, despite all she knew about the Labyrinth and magic.

"Indeed. Yet even in that, I think we can counter Minaka's machinations. You see, I took one Jinki with me when I married Takehito. And Uzume," Miya waved a hand toward the Veiled Sekirei who looked smug, "escaped MBI with another. With those, I will be able to counter anything that Minaka does, so long as he cannot bring all five to bear against my own commands."

Ranma grinned. "Then if Minaka can't just shut everything down like that, we're back to just smashing his front doors

in. I like that."

"But before that, we need to talk more about what might happen if Minaka somehow wipes MBI's computers or if the governments of the world decide to move against us regardless," Nabiki interjected repressively. "So, politics first, and how to influence them."

For the next 20 minutes, most of the conversation went right over Ranma and Akitsu's heads. Instead, they just enjoyed one another's company, with Akitsu leaning into her Sun-sama's side while Nabiki leaned against his other, one hand gently stroking up and down her side, while his other hand gripped Akitsu's chains where they wound around her waist. Names and numbers, mentions of businesses and scandals flew quickly, with Hayato taking part in some of it, but with Nabiki, Kodachi and Matsu dominating most of it.

But when the conversation turned to the physical defense of the city from exterior elements, Ranma joined in quickly. Kazehana and Tsukiumi also spoke up for the first time in this discussion, with Tsukiumi talking normally despite being literally frozen to her seat on the patio. Both of them had been around the city several times, and indeed in many places that Ranma hadn't seen yet.

Cologne spoke up as well on this point, showing an intimate knowledge of the kind of weapons and equipment a modern army would have and how best to defend against such. *I suppose I will put off the pleasure of hunting down Happy for now. I suppose there are more important things occurring. And getting my tribe access to the Sekirei, let alone Miya is far more important than hunting that pervert down. Perhaps not as satisfying, but certainly far more important.*

The defense of the city would be a paramount concern going forward. If they couldn't simply take MBI, and all its influence and manpower, over, The Nerima Alliance would have to show the powers of the world that they couldn't simply come in and take over. If they could just remove Minaka, though, they would have access to all of the things that Minaka had access to, but no one was willing to make a decision going forward based on just one plan.

This conversation took the rest of the evening and well into the night, but with plans in place for the future to deal with the political and influential side of things, the working dinner eventually broke up, with all of the disparate groups heading home. Ranma carried Nabiki in his arms while Akitsu kept pace with them, as Homura did the same for Kasumi, and Cologne joined Matsu, Uzume, Tsukiumi and Kodachi heading home, including a reluctant Taki.

Tomorrow was going to be a very, very busy day, even in comparison to today, if, hopefully, not as fraught, and everyone was eager to get a good night's sleep.

OOOOOO

High up in MBI Tower Minaka, as Higa before him, was wondering how his plans had escaped his grasp. *I suppose that there is a difference between chaos that you cause, and the chaos other people create. I had thought to ride the chaos of the game, to control the outcome, and eventually have all the Jinki activated and under my control with everything that comes with it.*

But then Ranma came in, creating further chaos, my attempts to ride it failed horribly. And I could not contain or control it, because simply because I was simply wrong about Ranma's skill and ability to gather allies. Now I stand having lost my most powerful piece, and one of my newly acquired pieces in this latest debacle.

And yet, I have still profited, still become more than merely human. An Ashura in truth. Even should Miya herself come against me, I am not without recourse. And I can plan a defense that will test Ranma and all his allies to the utmost before I move in for the kill. My dream is still possible, nothing has changed that, only the time it will take to achieve.

He looked over at the desk, studying the two heavily padded valet cases there. One held large crystals, seven inches long, thicker around the middle than Minaka's two hands, with a tiny bead of some kind embedded within them. These were the Jinki, the ultimate creation of the Sekirei's original society. Part key, part computer, part DNA sequencer, the Jinki were amazing examples of the technology of the Sekirei. Examples that Miya had locked up behind her as she stepped down from the control chair for the last time.

There were three of them, just as there were two of them under control of Miya. But unlike those two, he was certain, two of these were not activated just yet. Once all of them were activated, the individual who held them could then use them to re-create his own body, to become like Miya was, a goddess in terms of her raw power. But she had stepped down from that pillar, locking the Jinki behind her in such a way that no one individual would ever hold that power again.

Yet Minaka had found a means to do that. The Sekirei Plan, which would eventually have involved the Jinki as prizes. They would have been taken and initially activated by the winners. Then, when that winner lost to another player, or to his own Disciplinary Squad, they would be repurposed by MBI along with the activating Sekirei. With a sample of the activating Sekirei's DNA, much of the Jinki's abilities could be unlocked simply by letting it have access to that sample, even if the orders came from someone else. Reclaimed by him. And with enough of them, Minaka would be able to reconstruct his own DNA, giving himself all the powers the Sekirei race possessed.

Even the two in Miya's possession would have eventually come to him through the machinations of the game. Indeed, he had set it up so that his son, Minato, would be the one to eventually meet her. The spineless boy Takami had raised up being a perfect foil to force Miya and the others under her protection to take part in the game in some small fashion.

None of that happened, thanks to Ranma and his interference. *But that interference also forced me to look beyond Shin-Teito for aid.*

He began to laugh then, a not entirely sane sound as he looked at the other small case settled his desk. Within, samples of the various water of Jusenkyo rested. *If they come against me thinking to bear this God in his lair, then they should be prepared to be struck down for their hubris...*

End Chapter

As everyone who has seen the original can tell, I am messing with the numbers of Jinki again, and what they can do. I have never liked how all-powerful they are as a unit, and I have always preferred a more sci-fi origin story for the Sekirei rather than mystical. And no, Miya did not mention the Jinki. Not with Hayato and Taki, or even Kodachi and Cologne there. They will show up again next chapter.

Once more, I will be pushing to finish this story next month, bar the need to write out a separate epilogue. If I do need an epilogue, it won't affect the September stories. Till next time.

Chapter 16: Chapter 16

I can't draw boobies, nor am I a Japanese lady.

Here it is. The big one, the grand finale. Like I mentioned last month, with this story so close to its natural conclusion I wanted to push on and finish it off this month. My patrons decided I should simply prioritize doing so over the trio of winners from the other polls (Large Story, Patron Only, and Small Story) this month, so I began work on it almost as soon as the last chapter was posted.

This chapter has been edited by myself without Grammarly – for some reason it wasn't accepting my changes and wouldn't show the number of mistakes going down which was quite frustrating - and *Hiryu* for his Ranma know-how and names usage. Hopefully the small mistakes we have no doubt missed will not hinder your enjoyment of this last wild ride in Anything Goes Game Changing LOL.

Chapter 16: Climbing to Heaven Implies You Can Also Fall

The next day dawned bright and cheery all across Tokyo, bright with promise. Of course, most of the people in the city didn't realize what exactly that promise entailed. Those that did on the MBI side, greeted it with a certain amount of grim anticipation as they began their preparations. But this did not stop them from questioning things.

"Is the boss serious about this?" One soldier working for MBI asked another as they stared at their new weapons. He was one of many Special Operations troops that had been brought in from elsewhere in the city, while outside MBI tower other preparations going on. Three full companies of infantry, several APCs and even two tanks had been brought in to create a defense around the tower, complete with snipers and spotters on the surrounding buildings, lots of sandbags, and at least the second story of every building around them sprouting guns.

The second floor of the tower was where this particular soldier had been assigned. He was fine with that. He was even fine with the idea of waiting until the Sekirei enemy was fully engaged. He had seen the Sekirei in action and was not sanguine about the idea of using rifles against people who could shatter buildings or toss cars around or had honest-to-Jesus fucking magic! *What the hell is wrong with my life? Is a seven-figure yearly income worth this madness?*

Even that though was an old complaint, an old strain on his sanity. What lay on the table in front of him was something new. It was, perhaps, the most magnificent example of super-soaker technology in existence. Looking like a regular shotgun in general build and size, the rifle had larger than average pump-action handle, a small, underslung bottle to hold the water in question and a sniper scope. The soldier didn't know what to make of either the weapons at all, although when he had tried them out, the range of the things was well beyond any super soaker he'd ever seen and more accurate too.

"They're serious, the water, supposed to help us even the odds against Sekirei," another man grunted. "Some kind of voodoo, y'know?"

"Magic. Magic and aliens and those martial artist freaks," a third soldier spoke up, shaking his head. "Man, I don't know about you lot, but if I ever find that recruiter again, I might just blow his brains out. No check is worth this madness."

"Shut up and load your super soaker. We all need to get used to these things before we use them for real," yet a fourth soldier barked in a commanding tone of voice.

Elsewhere in the tower, Takami sighed, having once again been turned away from Minaka by the simple expedient of the elevator refusing to take her up to the top floor. He wasn't answering her phone calls either. The one time she'd tried to take the stairs up, she'd found a metal doorway there that refused to acknowledge her presence, let alone her security codes.

Damn it, I knew I wasn't doing a good job of controlling him, but this? He's shut me out entirely and I've spotted his fucking tattletales watching me too. FUCK. For a moment, Takami scowled, thinking about Minaka, about their relationship, and what might have been before shaking her head. *Becoming maudlin or self-delusional won't serve anyone. Minaka's always been as crazy as a barrel of monkeys, I can't blame myself for that, only for falling for him in the first place. Now I need to prepare for the future, need to be ready if Homura and his allies win through. Hmm... I wonder if I can get that Ranma guy to agree to some tests... should be fascinating on many levels.*

Well below where Takami had run into her present issues, Haihane slumped down next to Taro. "Yo."

Pantyhose Taro nodded to her, then twitched his head to the nearby doorway, where two voices could be heard. "So, is Pinky having any luck with Pretty Boy?"

"Nope. Natsuo is gay and as flat as Beni is, she still lacks in the equipment department," Haihane giggled. "He's already kissed us both and thinks that's enough for now." She paused, tapping her chin with one steel claw, wearing her gauntlets even here in the Disciplinary Squad's room just in case. "That was kind of hot, but... not enough, really."

"Hmm... Pinky isn't as pretty as some others around here, but if she played the whole 'I don't want to die a virgin' line on any straight man, they'd fall for it," Taro agreed.

"Doubt we're going to die. Ranma isn't the type to kill unless he can help it, and he feels sorry for us Sekirei. Thinks we're all programmed." Haihane knew in many ways that was the case, but she didn't care. All she cared about was getting a good fight, the bloodier, the better. And this looked to be a very big, very bloody fight indeed. "What about you? Surprised you're still here, really."

Taro grunted, cracking the knuckles of both hands deliberately. "Happosai's here. I need him to get my name changed, no way I'm leaving. I just hope he's involved in this fight."

Haihane shivered since that was one of the last things she wanted. Fighting Ranma and the others would be hard enough without the perverted little gnome getting involved. "Masochist. And fucking stupid too."

Taro spluttered at that, and a moment later, a second argument joined the one already occurring in the Disciplinary Squad's quarters.

OOOOOO

Despite all the anxiety and hurried preparation being done around the tower for their arrival, though, the Nerima Alliance members woke up much more leisurely.

Ranma woke up curled around Akitsu, hugging the Sekirei of ice to him, his head nuzzled into the top of her own, even as outside, he felt the rest of the house stirring. Fully awake, he sighed, then shook Akitsu gently, luxuriating in her nakedness, her chest against his, two hard nubs raking across his pecs as she shifted. But now was not the time for that. *Now is the time to take in fuel, talk Nabiki out of joining us at the front right off the bat, and then head out to the rallying point.*

The group had decided last night that they wouldn't use Miya's inn as a starting point for their assault. They didn't want to give the impression that Miya was part of their attack, since that surely would have forced Minaka's hand, which was the last thing any of them wanted.

"Come on, Aki-chan," Ranma said, as he slowly tried to shift out from under Akitsu. "We need to go."

"Mnnnn...no. Want more cuddling, Sun-sama," Akitsu mewled, rubbing her face, and other bits, against Ranma's chest and stomach.

Shivering at the sensation and the way that phrase could be taken, Ranma put his arms around Akitsu and shifted the two of them on the sides. "Come on, Akitsu, we talked about this last night. We don't want to be rude to Nabiki and the other Tendos, right?"

Akitsu, and indeed a rather large part of Ranma, had wanted to continue their activities from Izumo house last night, but Ranma was convinced that doing so in the Tendo house, in the room he shared with his father moreover, would be a very bad idea, even if Happosai was running the old man ragged still by the time Ranma and Akitsu returned with the two older Tendo sisters. The walls were very thin, as thin as they were at Miya's inn, and the last thing either of them wanted to do was to rub it in Nabiki's face that Ranma was sleeping with Akitsu or seem rude to Kasumi.

Like last night, that argument got through to Akitsu. No one wanted to be rude to Kasumi, even if a part of Akitsu did kind of want to revel in being Ranma's first. Eventually, after a few moments more of cuddling, Ranma and Akitsu exited the room, which oddly enough had not included Genma last night. Asking Akitsu once more to wait for Nabiki with her coffee, Ranma went in search of his father, and found him and the Tendo patriarch both unconscious in the dojo, completely insensible.

As he entered the dojo, Ranma heard a swishing sound from the side and ducked, rolling forward, twisting around to stare at where a large jug of water had just passed through where his head had been. His eyes tracked to the side to

see Haposai cackling from where he had been sitting on a mountain of... something. Some kind of large bag filled with something soft apparently. "Good morning, my boy," he greeted Ranma as if he hadn't tried to change Ranma's gender a moment ago. "It's a lovely day, isn't it?"

"It's a lovely day to stay male, old man," Ranma growled repressively, his hands clenching and unclenching.

Haposai simply chuckled, shaking his head and gesturing towards the Tendo's house. "Have you seen that young boy who is so sweet on young Kusano in action?"

Ranma blinked at the sudden conversation change, and Haposai went on. "Apparently, their powers are exact opposites. Her power is some kind of bioenergy, whereas he is the exact opposite."

Frowning Ranma worked that through. "You said that deliberately, bioenergy," he said at last. "Kusano's power isn't just controlling plants?"

"Oh," Haposai said with a laugh waving his hand. "I have no doubt that is the only way young Kusano can use her powers now, but I don't think that's the total extent of them, not from what I'm sensing whenever she gets close to Kasumi or the others. It should be fascinating to see her growth. As well as his." He scowled then, looking angry. "I'm not certain how a living person can have such a connection to the power of decay, but again, it will be exciting to learn more. You're not taking either of them along with you today, I take it?"

"Where would I be taking them?" Ranma asked one eyebrow rising.

"My boy, I am old, perverted, short, and often times lazy. When you get to be as good as I am, you can afford to be, after all. But one thing I am not, is blind."

"He's right, boy," Genma said, groaning in agony as he pushed himself upright, or attempted to anyway. His legs refused to obey him and Ranma sighed as he moved over to help his father lean up against one of the walls.

As he did, Genma continued to speak as if he wasn't being manhandled by his son. "We weren't part of the discussions last night, but it's clear that you all would have decided to push this to the endgame. It's the only thing that makes sense."

"I've never liked how everyone tosses around the word 'game' for everything that's gone on with the Sekirei. It's never been a game to them, it's been about their happiness, their lives, their continued well-being. I've not talked to a single one, bar Tsukiumi, who had any desires out of life other than to find their destined one and live with him or her. This whole game, this whole idea of 'playing' for something greater, some power that could make all their dreams come true? It's all bullshit," Ranma began mildly, but his voice hardened noticeably as he continued before become almost vicious at the end. "Simply a way to work on the greed of the Ashikabi in question. Well, I say it's time to end this game!"

Haposai stared at Ranma for a moment then looked over at Genma, his tone incredulous and his face shocked. "How the hell did you of all people breed someone with a code of honor like that?"

Genma played along with it shaking his head mock-dolefully. "I don't know master, all I tried to instill in him was a love of the Art."

"Which you did in spades, Old Man!" Ranma said with a grin, stepping back and raising his hand arms in the air, clenching and unclenching his hands. "You just didn't know how high that particular mountain could go. Miya-nee gave me that and is still doing it too. Even with the way I learn and grow, it'll be years before I'm able to say with confidence that I'm as fast or as strong as she is, to say nothing of the sheer level of Miya-nee's ki, but I'll get there eventually."

Haposai chuckled at that, wagging his pipe at him. "Just so long as you don't forget that there are other things in life been training my boy. Like silky darlings!" With that, he crossed the distance before Ranma could blink, bouncing off Genma's head and flipping around Ranma, before returning to his former position.

Dropping into a stance, Ranma frowned, not having felt any hit, although he was feeling something off right now. "What did you..."

He then looked down at himself, blinking as he stared at the bra that had somehow appeared underneath his clothing. Reaching behind his back, Ranma worked to put an arm under his shirt to unclasp the darn thing. "Okay, that was freaky!"

"It would have worked much better if you were in female form," Happosai complained before winking at the boy as he sent a circle of smoke up into the air. "Just a show to remind you that I'll be training your ass into the ground too you know. I also wanted to tell you that I'll be taking sending these two out on a little trip soon enough,"

Ranma and Genma both blinked at him, and Happosai shrugged her shoulders. "Before you two ingrates sealed me away, do you remember what I was doing?"

"Drinking and stealing women's underwear," Genma answered promptly and very dryly. "While forcing us to carry your silky darlings and run away from the crowd."

Happosai rolled his eyes. "Before that!"

"There was a before that?" Genma asked, honestly confused. "I'm sorry master, that's about all you did ever since you took us on as students..."

After Genma picked himself up off the floor of the dojo grumbling as he touched the bruise on his noggin, Happosai shook his head. "Yes, there was a before that, you dolt. About a week before you and Soun drugged my wine, left you for a bit to head into the mountains, and I came upon two children who had been stealing from the locals. I watched them for a few days, helping to point out edible and inedible mushrooms, helped them fish at one point. I was forced to introduce myself after killing a bear to save them and taught them a few moves."

Happosai shrugged. "But knowing my reputation, I wasn't about to stay with them. But I told them about Soun here, since he was always going on about his desire to have a dojo. Still, that was more than a decade ago, and I want to make certain they are still doing okay for themselves. Your mission, whether or not you choose to accept it, is to find those two girls and bring them here. And Soun, if they prove to be more adaptable to the Anything Goes style than your younger sibling court, one of them may become your heir."

Soun had woken up at some point and now protested vehemently. "Master, how can you say that!? Akane is my heir, she's strong, powerfully motivated, and in excellent physical shape. Any shortcomings in her training comes from me, not Akane!"

The way Soun spoke made Ranma wonder if the guy had forgotten that he had two other daughters. Both of whom were in very good shape, even if neither of them seemed to have much interest in the martial arts itself for its own benefit. Akane? Well, Ranma to really get along with her very well, but she did seem to at least enjoy the Art. It was her temper that really made him hesitate and worry about giving her any more training.

Happosai shook his head at both of his students "You don't understand at all! I warned you both. I warned you strenuously about breaking up the styles as you did. Since then, Genma at least has made it work, even if up until arriving here he'd only produced one excellent student. But you Soun? I've yet to see anything special from you in terms of your personal school or in the number of students. This is a magnificent dojo, but it's not been used well in a long time. Well, now you're both here, and you will do your duty to spread The Art! If that means opening up the position of heir to your 'school' Soun," he taunted Soun by making quote marks around the word school, "then so be it."

"You mean taking more pupils," Genma slowly nodded as Soun stammered. "I've already begun that with the Sekirei. I have to admit it was... interesting. That one girl with the Disciplinary Squad, the shorthaired one who used claws, she was quite good. It'll be a pity if anything happened to her..." he went on looking over at his son.

"I'll try not to do anything to Haihane if I can help it," Ranma said with another sigh, moving over to Soun. "I like her too, Pops, even if I'm not as close to her as I am to Tsukiumi or anyone else. Speaking of, let's get some breakfast in us. Some of us have a long day ahead of us."

"Oh, one more thing!" That yell was the only warning Ranma got before Happosai pulled another pitcher of water from behind him.

This time Ranma didn't dodge the water fast enough, taking a face full of it and squawking in annoyance, Ranma's voice noticeably rising as she did so. The next second, Happosai had once more crossed the intervening distance. The bra in Ranma's hands had been replaced by a flag, and the bra itself was once more in place on her body, again underneath her shirt as Happy cuddled into Ranma's chest. "Oh yes! Oh yes! That perfect blend of softness and firmness that can only be found on a martial artist! So lovely!"

"Die!" Ranma shrieked, but before she could hit the old man, Happosai was already bouncing away, and a blur flashed through the area he had just occupied. Ranma nearly hit the blur instead, but she halted her blow as Cologne

stopped moving, pulling back her staff and sitting on the top of it, standing in front of Ranma far too close into Ranma's personal space. The redhead jumping back in shock, looking around. *How the heck did she sneak up on me!*

"And who are you to get in the way of an old man's fun, you old crone!?" Happosai shouted angrily.

"I see your fun hasn't changed at all in the past three hundred years! Although you're no taller than you were the back then. What's the matter Happy, did you never actually go through puberty, instead just going right straight to senility?"

Happosai barked a laugh. "That's rich coming from a wrinkled old crone, which looks as if someone made love to a crow and monkey!"

"Ah but my age and my shrinking into this form happened naturally, I was initially quite pretty if I do say so myself. Does the name Cologne mean something to you?" Cologne hissed.

Happy stared, nearly dropping his pipe. "Y, you can't be Cologne! She was tall and pretty and you're... you're..."

"Old!" Cologne cackled. "Just like you!"

Scowling, Happosai bounced away slightly, putting more distance between the two of them. "You might be as old as me, but I doubt you're as spry! Perhaps a beating will teach you to not get in the way of an old man and his fun."

"Okay..." Ranma muttered, shaking her head, hefting Soun onto his shoulder, as Genma moved to the doorway as silently and as quickly as his feet could carry him. "I'm just going to leave the two of you alone to work out your differences, I think. I've got more than enough on my plate for me to want to play peacemaker for the senile brigade."

"You'll find Shampoo and Cotton waiting for you at the inn. They are the only two with me I'm sanguine about sending against soldiers armed with guns." With that Cologne's battle aura began to flare, her hair rising as if under the command of a wind all its own.

"Go on Ranma, my girl," Happosai said fully focused, causing Ranma to twitch angrily. But Happy didn't look at the redhead, staring back at Cologne as his own aura started to seep out of him.

Ranma got while the getting was good at that point much to the stammered thanks of Soun, who the redhead still had on her shoulder.

With Akitsu helping her, Kasumi had outdone herself, creating a smorgasbord of a breakfast for all of them, and Ranma had to smile at the older girl, leaning over and giving Kasumi a kiss on the cheek and a thank you as she stared at the food. "Is it just me, or do you seem happier with the house as full as it is despite all the added work?" she teased.

"Oh my, that's no secret at all," Kasumi answered with a laugh, showing no shock at receiving a kiss from a short redhead instead of a taller black-haired man. "There's always something going on wrong, and," Kasumi leaned down, putting an arm around Kuno's shoulders, hugging the little girl to her, who happily returned the gesture, "there's this little one."

Nabiki shook her head, sipping at her coffee as she muttered something about fruits baskets for some reason that Ranma didn't quite get, as nearby, Yashima tried not to look at Ranma and Shiina, just stared, a blush suffusing his face. Shiina was reacting to him once more, and uncertain how to deal with it since he knew that Ranma was a man with a curse that turned him into a girl but Ranma didn't want to rely on his self-control as his only defense.

In contrast, Yashima seemed to remember how she had responded to Ranma in his male form. She seemed to want to disappear in embarrassment and no little amount of confusion clinging to Akane.

The youngest Tendo was oblivious to her fellow hammer-wielder's distress. Instead, she was staring at Ranma, her face angry and determined.

Ranma sighed, sitting down and asking her, "Okay, what do you want to say?"

"Kasumi was telling us a second ago about what you were all going to be doing today. I want in. I'm a martial artist too, and I'm just as pissed at MBI for what they been doing to the Sekirei as anyone! Besides, they threatened my family with this latest stunt!"

"They did," Ranma said slowly, "but this isn't your fight, and I don't think you're up to it."

The redhead held up a hand, quickly shaking her head as Shiina twitched, his blush now becoming even redder. "Wait, it's nothing personal. But we're going to be fighting soldiers, soldiers armed with guns, just as much as we're going to be fighting other Sekirei. Can you say honestly that you could stop a bullet, or dodge one, or bring yourself to even put down the soldier permanently if you had to because anything else would take too long?"

Akane grimaced at that, drumming her fingers on the table. Soun spoke up now, and, for the first time or perhaps second, no more than three at best, he said something that Ranma agreed with. "Akane, Ranma is right. You are not up for this kind of fight. In fact, I don't think that even Yashima should come with you."

"I wasn't going to bring her along in the first place," Ranma said, sitting so that Akitsu was in front of her. She blinked and was about to move so that she was sitting behind and to the side of Ranma as was proper, but Ranma wrapped her arms around Akitsu, holding her still and between Ranma and where Shiina was sitting. "Mobile shield," he muttered into her ear.

Akitsu blinked, then stared across at Shiina, only realizing now that he was once more reacting to Ranma. *I was too focused on Tsukiumi and her threat I suppose to remember he reacted to Ranma yesterday in this form*, she thought to herself, then all thought left Akitsu head as Ranma's hands unconsciously began to rub her tummy with the tips of her fingers gently. This coupled with her Sun-sama's chest pressing into her back, completely distracted Akitsu from any attempt to think.

"Speaking of," Ranma continued, not noticing how flustered her automatic action was making Akitsu, or the pleased smile on her face as Ranma addressed Nabiki. "I'm not taking you along either."

Nabiki opened her mouth to protest, but Soun rode in on Ranma's words. "You're not a fighter, and I don't want you anywhere near the actual combat!"

"Your Dad's right. At Izumo House, waiting for a call to be brought in so that you and the two computer geeks can get to work getting the word out about the change of management sure but you can't really expect me to bring you even close to a battlefield?"

Nabiki frowned, then nodded. "Time **is** going to be of the essence, hence our initial plan, but you're right, my thinking about being close to the action so that we could start the broadcast right away, really is kind of silly." She mock-glared at him. "That'll teach me not to make plans so late at night."

Rolling her eyes, Ranma turned to the others, noticing Shiina's frown of concern and confusion. "And we're not taking either of you along either don't worry. No offense Shiina. From what I understand from Kodachi, you can handle yourself, but I want you and this one here just in case. It would be just like Minaka to try to take hostages."

"Oh my, that would be most rude of them," Kasumi said airily, but there was nothing airy about the glare in her eyes.

"No one is going to harm my darling Kasumi as long as I live!" Soun exclaimed. "Don't worry, Kasumi, Daddy and your uncle Genma will protect you."

As Akitsu helped Kasumi clean up after breakfast, Ranma, once more male, and Nabiki got on the phone calling Miya and the others for a conference call. Nishi had not gotten contact with them over the night, but there had been some sightings of him on public highways. Nearby security cameras hacked by the two computer-savvy Sekirei, had seen him driving a motorbike around with a young girl on his back. So he had at least one more Sekirei to his name that they hadn't captured.

Seo hadn't contacted anyone yet either, not even Miya. The Ashikabi of the Lightning Twins didn't seem in any rush to do anything despite his professed hate of Minaka. That was annoying, but Miya was philosophical about it. "Trash will always be trash, but occasionally it can surprise you. Though more often it won't."

On the home front, Kodachi reported that all of the remaining Sekirei prisoners had woken up, and she had been forced to knock more than a few of them out again via food laced with sedatives. While the two combat junkies didn't seem to be very attached to him, the same could not be said for the other two, the Tanned Twins as Kodachi called them. "Hopefully that goes both ways, and Nishi is simply reluctant to talk to us because he would be forced to admit that he had not only lost but waited too long to join the side that will be replacing MBI as overall control," she mused aloud to Ranma.

"I do have some good news however. The silver-haired girl, Taki? She and I talked to the others who are bonded to the little boy and all of them, including Mutsu have agreed to work with us in a limited fashion. They won't be part of the direct assault on MBI tower, but they are willing to cut off any reinforcements from elsewhere in the city."

At that point Matsu took over the discussion, reporting that MBI seemed to know that the next step was going to be a direct assault on the tower and had begun pulling in those troops already. "Armored personnel carriers, several dozen squads of armed troops, it's hard to get a read on their numbers and two tanks are stationed at the tower now." Matsu scoffed. "Kocho tells me that's a horrible way to use tanks. Heck, having tanks in the city at all is stupid. But I suppose too few people realized the range advantage that modern tanks had, or the fact that they were best used on the move and Minaka is definitely the one to think bigger is always better."

The two of them were waiting for Nabiki to join them at the Izumo house, where Matsu had already set up quite a lot of tech to both watch the battle and start the prerecorded parts of the announcement that they would put on.

Homura had also talked to Takami and she was fully on board with helping them to take over MBI. As long as Minaka was still around however, there wasn't much she could do. She, and several other people who would follow Takami over Minaka, were under constant surveillance from internal security and she had been unable to see Minaka in days.

When they met up at the inn in-person, Homura was somewhat philosophical about that, speaking to the large group that would be assaulting MBI Tower from several dozen blocks away from the tower itself, sitting in a café that had been closed due to the damage it's back area had taken in an earlier fight between Sekirei. "I think deep down Takami might have felt that Minaka could possibly be redeemed or had some redeeming qualities, that there was some goal he was trying to reach with this game. Or perhaps that the Sekirei really were just that violent and their violence had to be somehow guided.

"I don't think she thinks that anymore," he finished dryly. "Luckily, she is hardheaded enough to set aside her personal feelings. Whatever they were. Honestly, I'm still wondering how they got together at all."

All eyes turned to Minato, who hunched his shoulders defensively. "Don't look at me. I never even met the man, how my supposed to know how my parents got together when one of them was never around!"

"Oh, don't worry darling," Kazehana cooed. "I honestly don't know either and I was there at the time. I think it was a spur of the moment, 'I don't know what I'm doing but let's make it work anyway' thing coupled with a lifelong acquaintance."

Ranma however was serious as he looked at Minato. "Are you really okay with this? I mean, if all goes according to plan, um... your father might be jailed for life or..."

"He's not my father," Minato interrupted the younger man, his tone fierce. "I told Kazehana this before, but to be a father you actually have to fucking be around! Otherwise you're just a damn sperm donor. Whatever happens to him, I don't care. Would I prefer we take him alive, sure. But I won't lose sleep over it."

While sensing Minato was putting on something of a brave front, Ranma decided not to argue. During the conversation last night when Kasumi had argued in favor of trying to capture Minaka instead of killing him, some of the things that MBI had done to get as large as it was and as free of governmental oversight came out. While the government certainly wasn't guilt-free when it came to the Sekirei and how they had attempted to capture one for vivisection, kidnapping, murder, extortion and other such things could be laid at Minaka's feet too. To say nothing of the crimes committed against the Sekirei themselves.

Feeling a familiar presence coming out of the inn, Ranma turned to look at Miya. When the group from Nerima had shown up, she had greeted them, then went inside, saying she had to get something. When she came out, she was holding three things. In a small picnic basket, she was holding the two Jinki the Izumo House possessed.

Ranma took a look at them, one eyebrow quirking as he realized the energy within them was more ki than normal electricity. *Weird. But sooo not important right now.* Indeed, the Jinki barely registered in his mind as he stared at the sword in Miya's other hand.

It was not her normal sword, a slim, single-bladed sword that you could hide within a thin sheathe. This sword was massive, the same sort of curve and blade width as a katana, but longer, about five feet in length, marking it out as a nodachi. But it's hilt too was large, big enough for Ranma to stack his hands on at least nine times, maybe more, throwing off that label.

Matsu hissed as did Kazehana, staring at it in shock as did Tatewaki, his mouth hanging open as he stared at something that he recognized as a historical treasure of Japan. But it was Kazehana who spoke first. "I thought you got rid of that thing, Miya."

"Indeed. And, while I mean no offense good woman, but however did you, a foreigner, come to wield a blade with

such a pedigree? One which is intertwined most deeply with the history of Japan?" Tatewaki asked harshly.

"That you will have to ask Minaka. It was he who first found this blade for me. As to your question Kazehana, when I was married to Takehito and then acting as a landlady, I had no need of it. That does not mean I threw it away. There is now a need. But not for me to wield it." With that, Miya held the sword out to Ranma, a wry quirk on her lips. "This is Totsuka no Tsurugi. I am giving it to you to wield today."

As Ranma's eyes narrowed, Miya's smirk widened ever so slightly. "This is not a sign that I think your training has reached the point that you are worthy of wielding this blade full-time. Say rather that you have long since proved your potential to eventually do so. And that in this fight, you will need a weapon suitable of the stage you might find yourself fighting on. I know not what final plans or tricks Minaka will have in place but I know he will have more than we know to counter. Totsuka no Tsurugi can help you face the unexpected."

Ranma took the sheathed blade in both hands and knew without needing to see it that the blade was of incredible quality. Just sending a bit of his ki into it he could tell the blade was attuned to react to ki, somehow aiding the process of making the blade stronger and sharper, and perhaps a bit more.

He bowed deeply, showing for once that he did know something about manners and propriety. "I promise to return this treasure to you in the same condition that you have bestowed it upon me, Miya-sama."

"See that you do," Miya replied bowing her head just as formally. Then she ruined it by reaching over to ruffle Ranma's hair, smiling affectionately. "And yourself too. I would hate to have to come to your rescue once more, or worse, search for a new student. Where could I find one with your unique mix of irreverence, lack of manners and dedication after all?"

Ranma laughed, then turned around, gazing at the rest of the attack force. Kodachi, Namiji, Tatewaki, Akitsu, Tsukiumi from Nerima, the latter currently as far away from Ranma as she could be, staring fixedly at a tree, her face flushed and her breath coming out in gasps. But she was still there, still more than eager to do her part. With them also was Taki, who had volunteered to help a bit more directly than the other Sekirei from the South at the behest of her Ashikabi, convinced he had to do something to ingratiate himself with Miya and the others.

Beside them were the group from Izumo House, although Mutsu, like Kocho – once more locked in her room – would stay here, along with Dr. Tofu and Nabiki. Kazehana, Homura and Uzume would be joining them in the attack, as would Shampoo and Cotton, having arrived with Taki on orders from Cologne.

"Let's do this then," Ranma said simply, before turning and without another word leaping up to the nearest rooftop. Akitsu was beside him almost instantly, with the others following as quickly as they could, moving west at first, as if they were going to start searching for Nishi. Then Ranma paused on a rooftop, well away from MBI tower. There he pulled out the cellphone Matsu had given him. "We're in position Matsu. Are you certain you can do this though? After all, if any group knows what you can do, MBI does. They'll be ready for you to try something."

The alternative was just to go in all guns blazing. That way they'd probably have to kill a lot more of the enemy soldiers though instead of just knocking them out. Ki attacks were a lot harder to control than punches or kicks, especially at range. And Homura and Kazehana at least, could not exactly pull their punches beyond aiming for non-vital body parts.

Ranma's question about needing the Internet echoed in her ears as Matsu smirked, flexing her fingers and looking over to Dr. Tofu, who smiled back at her encouragingly. "Heh, don't worry about it Ranma. Ready or not, no computer's going to deny her once Matsu-sama sings her siren song!" With that, she threw her head back, and activated her Norito. "By the power of my mind, let the eyes and fingers of my Ashikabi's enemies become mine!Ethereal Pwnage!"

From Matsu's body white and yellow light blazed out, heading upwards, passing intangibly through the ceiling above and up through the air into the stratosphere as more lights flashed out, connecting her to her computers. Her eyes disappeared behind her glasses, replaced by a series of numbers flashing across them as they flicked this way and that.

Under Matsu's will, the computer assets of MBI stopped responding. Large and small anything that was electronic came under her command. Every single security camera, every computer, everything beyond the size of an elevator switch up to and including the satellites in the sky above. All of it came under Matsu's control, including the quartet of laser-armed satellites. She made a note of those for later, before concentrating on the various cameras around MBI Tower. When she was done with them and the programming linking them to the security grid, no one in MBI Tower was going to be getting them back under control without weeks of concentrated effort.

"They're blind," Matsu reported a second later. "But I got to return your earlier warning back to you, Ranma. They know they're blind now. They'll be ready."

"Maybe, but I doubt they'll be ready for what direction we're coming from. The thing about fighting in a city is there's so much more hiding places to think about." With that, Ranma put the phone back in his pocket and moved over to a piece of the roof, and flicked out Miya's sword in a circle, smiling at the perfect heft and balance of the blade. As easily as someone would slicing a cake, he sliced a neat hole in the top of the building they were on and dropped within.

OOOOOO

With their cameras and everything else out, MBI lost its outer security for the next fifteen minutes at the very least. Even after that, MBI wasn't going to get those cameras back online anytime soon thanks to Matsu and her powers. During that time, every sniper and spotter set up on the rooftops around the Tower had been taken out by Ranma, Kodachi and Uzume, the best of the Alliance members when it came to moving around silently.

Of course, losing communication with these men did nothing for the nerves of the defenders, although the tower did respond by sending out a quartet of helicopters to patrol the area instead. Armed with machine guns, they could be a formidable threat.

Instead of taking the helicopters out themselves – something that Kodachi would have had a lot of trouble with - the trio retreated to meet up with everyone else at a small café that Tsukiumi had told them about. It was a tiny place, without any internal cameras that he could see, and which, according to the water-user, had the best scones in the city.

It wasn't open now. The owners had retreated to the upstairs apartment for the day. Nearly everyone in the city of 'Shin-Teito' had decided to stay inside today, certainly everyone within a mile radius of MBI tower. It didn't take a genius to know that something was going to happen soon, not with the troop movement and the rumors going around after the various battles that had occurred yesterday in Nerima.

Almost immediately upon seeing Ranma enter, Tsukiumi began to react. Indeed, it looked to Ranma that she had begun to react before he had even opened the door. Tsukiumi's eyes were dilating, her breath coming in gasps as she gripped the edge of the table in front of her, shifting in her seat.

He instantly began to issue orders. Somehow, Ranma had found himself in overall command, not just leading from the front. He didn't know why, but he was going to run with it. "Right, onto step two."

"Have we not waited overlong? As I understand it, the computer-inclined young woman with the rather frumpy taste in clothing will have only been able to silence MBI's various electronics for only so long. If we are going to be sneaking around like ninjas, it does not behoove a scion of the House of Kuno to fail at it," Tatewaki orated.

A late addition to the mission, Ranma had been astonished that Kuno hadn't even seemed bothered by the injuries he had taken the day before. At first, Ranma had been a bit concerned about it, remembering his fixation on Akitsu, but that seemed to have faded thanks to watching Ranma and her interactions the day before.

"Actually, Matsu should have shut them down permanently. It's her control of the rest of the Tower's electronics that she probably won't be able to maintain for more than a quarter of an hour," Uzume corrected for Ranma before looking at her best bud. "Seriously though, we should be moving in. We don't want them to get over the surprise of having their snipers taken out."

"Right, but that still doesn't mean we need to come from a direction that they'll expect. Kodachi, you, Uzume, Shampoo, Cotton and Tsukiumi head out now, wait around two blocks away on a roof somewhere. They might send some of their helicopters out after you, take them out but wait there. The rest of us will need about ten minutes to get into position, Taki, Kazehana. At that point you two do your thing." Ranma said, looking over at the group, catching each of their eyes in turn.

When he looked into Tsukiumi's eyes she stiffened, her body going rigid as her self-control started to lose the battle with her Sekirei instincts and he hurriedly looked away. When he broke eye contact, Namiji and Uzume helped Tsukiumi to her feet, and gently directed the girl out the door. "Come on Tsu-chan, we'll need your long-range skills."

That call to her ego helped the water-user come back to herself a bit. "In, indeed! I will do my part of course, never fear."

Soon they were out the door and away, leaving Akitsu, Ranma, Homura and Tatewaki. "As for us, we're going to close with the tower in the one direction that even most trained soldiers forget they have to worry about." Leading the way out of the café, Ranma had them exit out into a tiny, almost hidden alleyway, the buildings around them having been built up almost to the extent of blocking this area from overhead cover.

There were hundreds of places like this throughout Tokyo, much like the place where the local idiots had tangled with the Amazons a few days ago. This one however, had a manhole cover in the center of the alleyway, which Ranma flipped up, tossing to the side.

"...you have got to be kidding me," Homura grumped.

"Hey, you look me in the eye and tell me you can take the kind of punishment an APC-mounted machine gun can lay out or a lucky tank round, and we can go straight in. Otherwise, prepare to get stinky pretty boy," Ranma retorted, snickering at the expression of the other men. Even Akitsu though was looking a little ill, but game, and Ranma rubbed her back lightly working his hand up and down her back causing her to stiffen in determination.

Sighing, Tatewaki moved forward, leaping down into the dark of the sewers below. "Let us just get this over with then. If a samurai such as I must sneak around like a rat in order to close with his enemy, then so be it."

"I hate everything so much right now." Homura followed him with a scowl.

Ranma made to follow them, but paused, looking at Akitsu. "Wait a sec." Akitsu paused in turn, then gasped lightly as Ranma reached forward, working his hands underneath the chains that were a part of her combat dress.

Akitsu had been asked last night if she wanted to change her dress now that she was no longer 'Broken' by Uzume, but Akitsu had refused. She still rather liked the chains and what they hinted at, something that had caused Ranma to blush when he heard that.

"I just remembered we haven't kissed today. You might need to use your Norito, after all." Ranma smiled, the expression somehow both shy and heartfelt at once. "Not that I need a reason to kiss you or anything." His fingers having worked their way underneath her chains, Ranma used that grip to pull Akitsu into his chest pressing his forehead against hers. "I love you Aki-chan. That's never going to change. No matter what happens today, no matter what happens in the future. Okay?"

"I love you too, my Ranma," Akitsu whimpered in turn, her heart in her eyes and a small but infinitely happy smile on her face as she reveled once more in the warmth of her personal sun.

Then Ranma turned his head slightly and leaned in just a bit more, and all thoughts and awareness left her and Akitsu simply **felt** her Ashikabi's love and desire for her, returning it a hundred-fold. There was nothing tentative or slow about this kiss as so many of their previous kisses had been. This was needy, forceful, demanding almost, and very, very loving. As her bond wings formed, blasting out her back in every direction, the ice of them gleaming as they phased through the physical matter of the world around them.

Below, Tatewaki and Homura stared, the pair using a bit of flame held in Homura's hands to see in the dark of the sewers, which glimmered over the thin veneer of ice that now covered everything Akitsu's bond wings had touched as they phased through the ground and the sewers behind them. "Damn..." Homura whispered.

"Verily." Tatewaki coughed uncomfortably. He had seen such the day before but being told what had caused such was a different story. Then he seemed to smirk in the gloom of the sewer, gesturing down to the frozen stream of offal. "But at least with Akitsu along, we need not fear for our shoes. Merely our footing."

OOOOOO

Around MBI Tower all of the guards stood tensely, staring out around them, watching every building, every rooftop, every street, sweat and nerves visible on all of them in equal measure. Behind them Taro, Haihane and a still-quietly fuming Benitsubasa, waited by the main entrance. And yet they still were not prepared for the attack when it came.

First came the fog. Taki created it from within one of the buildings several streets away. She was there with Kazehana. Minato having been left behind to return to Izumo House on his own.

The fog boiled out of the building, then Kazehana took over, thrusting out her hands directing the fog toward the square around MBI tower. At first this was a gentle wind, simply pushing the fog down the street, the fog quickly becoming so thick that none of the defenders could see. Then with a little giggle, she kissed her fingers, as she intoned her Norito. "By the Four Winds of the contract, my Ashikabi's dark clouds will be blown away. Flower

Whirlwind!"

Around the tower men had hunkered down further in reaction to the fog, while the tanks and APCs moved around, heading into the fog to use their infrared systems to find the attackers. Then the hurricane hit. Men, APCs, and both tanks found in way of the massive wings Kazehana had conjured into being. The tanks smashed into buildings and through them tossed like toys, while the men found themselves plastered against the buildings all around. But they were spared the majority of the attack simply because Kazehana was several blocks away when she launched it and her target had been the armored units.

The fog too had been blown away, so there were more than a few among the defenders who were trying to use that as a silver lining, when Ranma was on them, leaping up out of the sewers right into their faces.

Several of them still got off shots, but Ranma was too fast, swinging the nodachi this way and that way, blocking what bullets he couldn't dodge. Soon he was ducking and dodging underneath and around their fellows, so much so that not a single bullet found a home in his body.

"Fierce Dragon Wave! From the edge of Ranma's borrowed blade, a ki attack of gold and white lanced out, slicing through one of the three remaining APCs.

Then the others were there. Kodachi leaped down from on high, leading Namiji and the others. Homura and Akitsu came out of the sewers behind him followed by Kuno who paused just a moment to pontificate. "Verily, while the journey to here has been most rank, the time has come to end the evil of MBI once and for all!"

From down the street Kazehana rushed through the fog, lashing out in front of her with blasts of wind that smashed into every bullet sent her way, sending them every which way as she came.

Benitsubasa, Haihane and Pantyhose moved to meet them. Pantyhose instantly splashed himself with water, turning into his minotaur form while launching himself towards Ranma. "Your mine, girly man!" he roared right before transforming.

Ranma laughed, sprinting towards the minotaur, then flipping up over a punch, the sword in his hand disappearing as he landed on Taro's shoulder, then bounced upwards and into a second story window, his feet and arms flashing out, smashing men out of the window or down to the ground. He knew his job in this fight, and it wasn't to get bogged down fighting the Disciplinary Squad. It was to find and remove the King.

Again, Ranma didn't really like how much people seemed to put stock in this 'whole compare everything to a game' thing, but even he understood that this one was actually pretty accurate. Remove the King, put him in check, whatever euphemism you wanted to do to use, it was Minaka who mattered most. With him out of the way, Takami would have enough seniority, and force of will, to take over MBI.

"I'd love to play with you pantyhose he taunted, but I have to go see your puppet master, have fun now," he taunted, before turning back to the room he'd found himself in as more soldiers raced to meet him.

Pantyhose flapped his wings, rising into the air to go after Ranma, only to find a bolt of ice flashing towards him from one direction. At the same time the wind around his wings died, sucked away by Kazehana, upending the giant minotaur back on the concrete of the square surrounding MBI Tower.

"Sorry big boy," Kazehana said hopping to one side, as a soldier flailed past her, tossed by one of the arena alliance group, either Shampoo or Cotton, it was hard to tell at this point given the melee all around her. "But your fight is with us."

Akitsu, annoyed by needing to stay behind, was mostly on crowd control, moving around the outskirts of the fight, freezing soldiers and tossing the occasional attack into the melee. But she couldn't use her powers fully just yet. First, because her friends were mixed up with her enemies right now. And second, because Ranma had told her to hold her power, including her Norito, in reserve, just in case.

At first she concentrated most of her attention on Pantyhose, knowing he was the most durable and perhaps the most dangerous of their enemies. But then Tsukiumi was there, having dealt with the last two APCs, charging in to meet the large minotaur in close combat, shouting over her shoulder, "Target the riflemen in their redoubts above! Tis their fire which is most dangerous!"

Nearby, Benitsubasa was not having fun, trying to tag the fire user, who kept on hurling fireballs at her retreating, while Namiji closed, only to twitch away so that Beni had to deal with the fire user. Then one of the two women she

didn't know would sidle up to her out of the melee, lashing out with punishing hits with chui or steel staff. "Fuck all of you bitches!"

With that Benitsubasa leaped upward and back, putting some distance between them and while in midair the pink-haired Sekirei began her Norito. "By the strength of my fists, let the enemies of my Ashikabi be drowned in the earth. World Breaking Crusher!"

Her fist smashed into the ground and the ground heaved upwards in every direction, cracking and straining, massive rips opening in places as others shot up towards the sky. These effects reverberated in a circle around Benitsubasa's landing point and were so strong MBI tower shuddered and one of the nearby buildings, obviously not built to proper guidelines lost one entire wall, the wall sloughing off it into the shattered remnants of the square around MBI's tower.

Shampoo cried out in shock as she fell down into the sewers below, as Cotton was flung through the air gasping in agony around the pillar of stone that had caught her full in the solar plexus, but Namiji had leaped up at just the right moment, and now came downwards with a slash that nearly caught Benitsubasa while she was recovering, cutting down from her shoulder along her side. It was a shallow cut thanks to an instinctual last-minute dodge backwards, but still put Benitsubasa on the backfoot.

Having been able to duck around a spear of earth that had nearly decapitated him, Homura capitalized, a fireball searing towards the pink-haired fist type. She ducked and rolled forward into the sewers along with Shampoo, who, in close combat smashed her chui over Benitsubasa's head, but fell to a blow to the stomach that almost felt like she ruptured something. Then Benitsubasa was up and moving, racing towards Akitsu as she tossed a flashbang at Homura, a little surprise she, Taro and Haihane had been given to try and even the odds.

At the same time, Kodachi and Uzume found themselves hard pressed by the shining claws of Haihane, which neatly chopped Kodachi's ribbons into pieces as she closed, cutting even Uzume's veils. Both had more than enough ribbons and veils to go around though, and they were slowly overcoming the other Sekirei's defense, thanks in part to the fact Haihane hadn't dealt with the sudden unsteady ground underneath them as the two Nerima Alliance members had.

But as the soldiers began to be thinned out on the ground, Minaka's trap was sprung. Above the battlefield several of the windows, which had previously housed riflemen smashed out of Ranma's way or Homura and Kazehana was once more filled by soldiers. But instead of rifles, these soldiers were armed with large super-soakers. They began to fire indiscriminately into the battle below.

Locked in battle with Pantyhose, Tsukiumi was the first to see this. She quickly raised a hand, taking control of the water coming towards her twisting it around to splash a soldier who had been trying to attack Kodachi in the back. She then blinked in shock as the soldier became a little black piglet. "What!? How!?" Realization dawning, she shouted out, "Get away from the tower, retreat!"

Kazehana wasn't as quick to obey as Homura and found herself suddenly splashed from above. The next second she was shrinking dramatically, disappearing into her clothing. where she had been standing before, now there was a large, dwarf-sized frog. She let loose a croak of shock, and raced away as fast as it could hop, which honestly was quite fast considering how much distance each leap covered.

Being a primary target Akitsu came under fire from several different super-soaker-snipers. She dodged two of them, as she constructed a shield of ice over her head. The next bolt of water was sent splashing way from this, dripping down onto the head of Benitsubasa, who had been charging forward. She blinked in shock stumbling as she grew several inches and lost some of her hips in the bargain. "Wh, what the heck!"

"Jusenkyo cursed water, like my Sun-sama, only in reverse for you," Akitsu answered absentmindedly as she kept the shield above her, protecting herself from two more bolts of water while all around her the battlefield quickly turned against them.

Uzume, who had just finished tying up Haihane and Kuno were not as lucky. Despite Uzume trying to use a shield of veils to defend herself, both herself and Kuno were hit as Kodachi dodged around a third spray. Kuno became a large howler monkey while Uzume became a small white and brown furred kitten. Kodachi grabbed up the kitty-Uzume and then used a ribbon to fling herself up and away, landing on a nearby rooftop.

However, Minaka had not completely reckoned with Tsukiumi. Having retreated to the edge of the square, she now reached out with her powers, grabbing at the water within the super soakers and that leaving them, controlling it. "Thou art mine!"

Several of those sprays of water were turned around entirely, hitting the soldiers who fired them, others hit their fellows on the ground all around the battlefield and the waters of Jusenkyo did their dirty work. More Howler Monkeys appeared, more cats. One or two other animals appeared too, a wolf here, a lizard there and several ducks.

But those streams closest to Taro were redirected toward him. He had kept fighting, nearly flattening Namiji and reaching forward to grab at the retreating Kodachi. Before he could grab the giant frog though, the splashes of water caught him in the back.

The instant the water splashed him, everyone there became aware of one of the worst aspects of Jusenkyo: when you were splashed by one cursed water while under the influence of a previous curse of the same temperature, the two cursed forms merged.

Taro's legs shifted into that of a frog almost at once. One of his arms disappeared, replaced by a duck's wings. His head shifted shape, becoming a horrifying amalgamation of cat, frog, duck, and his original minotaur-like face.

Unable to process this sudden shift, Taro couldn't control his body, and he crashed to the ground. Before he could get up, a still stunned Namiji brought the end of her halberd down in a vicious blow to the back of his head, putting as much strength into the blow as she could.

The effect of all this sudden chaos was immediate across the entire battlefield. The members of the Nerima Alliance continued to retreat, wanting nothing more to do with the water that was causing all this chaos, uncertain if there were still more super-soaker armed soldiers waiting for them. The soldiers themselves, those still conscious and mobile, also retreated, running away as fast as their legs could carry them in a different direction, while those who had been hit simply sat or stood where they were, stunned at the sudden change of perspective. All combat ceased as everyone just stared at the chaos of the battlefield.

During this lull, Benitsubasa stared down at himself then a broad grin appeared on his face. He looked up at the others, holding up a thumbs up, causing Akitsu to pause from where she was about to launch another attack at the pink-haired Sekirei. "Okay, I'm done. You lot can do whatever the heck you want. I'm off to find Natsuo-sama! I bet I can get him to do more than give me a peck on the cheek now!" With that and a slightly mad cackle she turned around and raced inside, straight to the elevators.

For a moment, Akitsu and Tsukiumi stared after her. Then they turned their gaze onto Haihane, still trussed up in ribbons and veils. She was the last of the defenders still conscious though, the super-soaker ambush having come too late to save the majority of the troops.

After a second staring back, the white-haired Sekirei shrugged her shoulders as much as her bindings could allow. "Erm, I surrender?"

OOOOOO

On a building overlooking the battlefield from quite a way's away, Happy sighed, shaking his head resignedly as he puts down the binoculars that the two geriatrics were sharing between them. They had made peace for the moment, too interested in the battle going on to continue their personal combat. "What, in the name of Amaterasu is happening! Those weapons, they are water of Jusenkyo! This Minaka is truly a madman!"

Cologne snatched back the binoculars staring through it and groaning aloud. "Those damned soldiers, I thought that being cursed would have stopped them, but no! That is insane. Damn it, if even a hint of this gets out to the governments of the world..."

"You'll be dealing with the Communist Party trying to push into your mountain range looking for the magic as they too endeavor to weaponize it," Haposai said dryly now on his face. "That isn't going to be pleasant."

"Understatement of the millennium! Cologne grumbled shaking her head. "If Ranma doesn't kill this Minaka fellow, I might have to for all the trouble that's going to cause us."

"Well, at least the youngsters overcame it. Still... I'm a bit worried. Those forms were all obviously not very dangerous. But I know Jusenkyo well enough to know that there are a lot of truly dangerous beasts that drowned there..."

"You don't think..." Cologne stared at Happy, then groaned and turned back to watch the actions above. "Well... let's hope that they didn't find any of the truly dangerous springs."

Happy blinked, staring back at her wide-eyed as he slowly shook his head. "You're three hundred and fifty years old,

and you still don't know that you shouldn't tempt Fate like that?!"

OOOOOO

Separated from the others and inside MBI tower, Ranma didn't know anything about what was going on outside. Instead, he simply kept on going upwards, cutting his way through one floor after another and foraging ever upwards. He paused only once, when he accidentally cut into a ladies' bathroom, blinking and ducking back down shouting, "Sorry!" to the three women there at the moment.

Wondering why it was women had to go to the bathroom in packs, Ranma retraced his steps then and moved two alcoves over, staring in shock at the office workers as he moved through their walls, all of whom staring back at him in equal shock. "Really, you all decided today was a good day to come to work? Talk about dedication. Hope you lot got hazard pay."

Needless to say, there was much screaming going on in Ranma's wake. But in this manner, he was able to basically bypass most of the security inside the building, which there wasn't much of in any event.

About halfway up the tower, he cut into what looked like a training room of some kind, and was about to go on but a man burst out of the door to one side, racing toward the door. By this time Ranma was used to that response to his method of travel, however this was away from him, rather he was running around Ranma and the hole he had just jumped out of. Furthermore, in one hand, he was holding a Jinki as if it was a lifeline.

Ranma was about to leap after him, when a second man appeared, tearing the door to what looked as if it was a bedroom off its hinges and tossing it aside, his eyes alight with feral lust of some kind. He had pink hair, and a slash that was still dribbling a little blood going down his side, but that didn't seem to be slowing him down at all.

Ranma blinked staring at the pink haired man and taking in the clothes she was wearing. "What the hell! Benitsubasa?"

The pink haired Sekirei barely spared Ranma glance, as he raced after the man, catching Natsuo before he could reach the outer door. He tugged him into a kiss, and Ranma turned away hastily. He didn't have anything against guys loving guys, not really. That didn't mean he wanted to watch though.

"You're not going anywhere!" Benitsubasa practically yelled as he pulled away from the kiss, which seemed to have left the man, who had to be Natsuo the Ashikabi of the Disciplinary Squad, rather dazed. "You've done barely more than giving myself and Haihane the time of day, and while she's been willing to put up with that crap, I haven't! I was honestly reacting to you, and I want more! Fine, I understand you're gay! But look now! But that's not exactly a problem anymore."

Natsuo stammered, and Ranma took the opportunity to move closer, quickly grabbing at the Jinki. The man seemed to come out of his days at that point, and jerked back hard, but couldn't win a tug-of-war with Ranma, who pulled the Jinki out of his hand. "I'll just take this and go, shall I?" Ranma quipped, winking at Benitsubasa. "You too have fun, and remember Pinky, he's only human, so he might be a little more breakable than you think. Oh, and put out a sock on the door. I think that's supposed to be some kind of warning, right?"

"Right," Benitsubasa replied, not even taking umbrage at the nickname, as he reached down with one hand, still holding Natsuo still with the other one to pull off his sock.

"Here let me, I'm going that way anyway," Ranma said, taking the sock from the pink haired girl, while trying hard not to laugh at how odd this all was. Benitsubasa responding with a polite thank you only made it all seem even more surreal.

"You're just going to listen to him! He's the enemy!" Natsuo exclaimed, more because he was looking for anything to shift the pink haired man's attention on anything else. Yes, in this form he found Benitsubasa quite attractive but this was hardly the time...

"I don't care! Benitsubasa replied firmly, turning and dragging Natsuo back to his room. "The world can freaking end on its own time, right now, I want me some sex damn it! Time for you to do your duty Ashikabi-sama."

"Good luck and stay hydrated," was Ranma's final words on that matter as he raced out the door. True to his word, he did pause there to tie the sock around the doorknob before he moved on shaking his head. "Well to each their own, I suppose."

Several floors later, Ranma found himself coming up behind the secretary's desk outside a door marked, 'The Man in

Charge.' Ranma kicked open the door only to find no one within. "Don't tell me he just ran! That would suck."

Come to think of it, that's about the easiest way I can think of to block all of our plans. If Minaka had simply left the city, while still retaining the command of MBI and the remaining Jinki he had under his command, there was nothing they could do. Not unless Matsu could find out where he had gone anyway.

"Now, would that be an action suitable for one who wished to ascend to godhood?" a man's voice intoned from nowhere.

Ranma stared all around him until he spotted small speakers set into the ceiling. Then he sighed, shaking his head. "You're going to do the whole villain gives a last speech aren't you?"

"Of course I am! You have spoiled so much of my fun, allow me at least this one brief pleasure."

Scowling, Ranma stared around him, then very deliberately smashed Minaka's desk. Reaching down into the rubble, he picked out several bits of wood, and tossed them up and down. "I'll make you a deal, if you have more speakers than I can actually find, you can make your speech."

"That's not very..." Minaka was interrupted by the sound of screeching as Ranma embedded one of the pieces of wood straight into the wall where a speaker had been. Two more speakers devolved into static as Minaka went on quickly. "Well in that case, I suppose my speech can wait for when we are face-to-face."

Ranma paused at his destruction then, staring at the last speaker. "Really?"

"Of course! A new God should face the devil before taking his throne, shouldn't he?"

Ranma raised a finger, scowling. "I have no idea about most religions, but somehow I don't think that line made sense. If you're going to taunt someone you have to at least get your lines right, man."

"I know, I knew it the moment I said it. Still, I'm on the roof. Join me." Minaka seemed to brighten up then if his voice was any indication. "The one who wished to become a God, and the one determined to stop him, should at the very least have a face-to-face meeting before that mortal is thrown down among the dirt once more."

"Now that one I'll actually give you," Ranma said, before hurling the last bit of wood, silencing the final speaker.

However, just because he felt that Minaka was being dramatic for dramatics sake did not mean that Ranma was an idiot. He retained several bits of the former president's desk, as he moved to the doorway leading up onto the roof via a private stairwell set into one side of the office. He stared up at it speculatively, then began to toss the bits of wood ahead of him.

One of them was fried into ash by a laser, invisible until it intersected the wood. He shook his head, sighing sadly. "Someone has gone to the anime school of villainy, I see."

Another piece of wood was sent in an arc, that allowed it to travel just below much of the ceiling, and only at the end of its downward arc did it intersect another laser beam. "Well, that's good at least."

With that, he tossed the third piece of wood, noting where it embedded into the ruling, before leaping after it. A brief touch of one hand on the wood allowed Ranma to redirect his leap's movement downward to almost straight ahead, where he landed on the uppermost staircase, ducking reflexively. Another beam grazed across the top of his head, causing some of his hair to sizzle, but Ranma's duck had saved him and a quick punch shattered the door leading onto the roof.

A second later, Ranma strode out onto the roof where Minaka had spent so much time overlooking the city and the game he had begun within it. It was a simple enough rooftop, but looking over this stuff the city, Ranma reflected that was kind of sad. *Maybe after all this is over, we can make a little forest, or something appear. Definitely add an awning, some chairs, grass, that kind of thing. Shift his office into an apartment, maybe? Sure as hell wouldn't want to use his bed that's for sure.*

Shaking his head at those thoughts, Ranma looked around for Minaka, finding him facing Ranma with a wide smile on his face as he leaned back against the balustrade at the edge of the roof. "And so, we meet at last!"

Ranma stared down at the hands still containing two bits of wood, then over at Minaka speculatively. Then he sighed and let them fall to the rooftop. "I suppose I should allow you your final speech."

"Oh, it won't be overlong don't worry," Minaka said with a laugh.

Even now on the brink of complete defeat, on the brink of his greatest gamble, Minaka would not allow seriousness to control his emotions. He would face this with his habitual manic smile on his face, as he had faced every challenge and every accomplishment. That at least, Ranma could respect.

"I wonder, during your training with Miya, did she tell you why she was so powerful? That she, of all of the Sekirei embryos and children that we found, only she was not modified? Weakened to be more human?"

"No, but I figured," Ranma answered. "Too many other things pointed to that."

"Exactly. But did you know, that she, as the oldest child we found, could have elected to have all of their disparate powers added to her own!? The Jinki, they call them technology. But, any sufficiently advanced technology will be seen as magic by those less so. Computers which can mold a person's DNA, find the greatest secrets within, and then add those secrets to another DNA strand!" Minaka laughed wildly, slapping one hand over his face letting it slide down until he stared at Ranma once more. "And she gave it up. She had no desire to be so strong. Then later, she gave up any chance of becoming my right-hand woman to settle down with her husband."

"Friends though we might have been, that decision, I could never understand it. Why be satisfied with being merely human, when you can become a God! She gave all of that up, when I would give anything, do anything, manipulate, lie steal, kill to be on that level! You know it to don't you," Minaka went on, throwing his hands out wide as he pointed to the north. "You've faced her, you've trained with her. Do you honestly think that you could ever rise to her position without cheating?"

"Hell yes!" Ranma barked back, causing Minaka to stare at him. "Hell yes, I can! I have lived my entire life from the moment my old man started to train me to now with one goal in mind. To be the **best**. To be the **strongest**! To take the Art as far and as high as it can go! So, what if Miya has the ki of a goddess! So what if she has the strength and skill of someone from the age of mythology! All that means is, I have an example of the goal I want to reach! What you **think** you can gain through manipulation, lies, abuse of power, and all your strategies and plans..." Ranma smirked, slapping a hand against his chest. "I will achieve through my own fucking blood, sweat and effort!"

Minaka stared at him, then began to laugh. "Hahahahaha, what, what a simple way to live! Although, I should also thank you. After all, through you, I found something just as interesting as the Sekirei's powers. And with it, I have become even stronger. My ascension even greater!"

With that, Minaka took up a glass from behind him and dumped the cold water over his face. Then he began to change, shifting, becoming larger, much larger. About a head taller than even Pantyhose in his Minotaur form. His two arms became six, all of them larger and more muscled than his human arms. His shoulders were almost as wide as Taro's too, but his head was the biggest difference. Because his head had grown, and now sprouted two extra faces, one over each shoulder. His eyes too had become red, with yellow slits instead of irises. "Behold, the Asura!"

From behind Minaka, four of his arms whipped up long scimitars, the others beginning to glow with magic.

Ranma stared at his new form, shaking his head. "Deliberately giving yourself a curse? Damn, suppose I should have seen that coming after seeing Benitsubasa as a guy." *Fuck, I hope the others are all right. But I can't afford to think about that now.*

"It won't be the last thing you didn't see coming. I will defeat you, then use this to overcome Miya, to take the Jinki and use them in turn," Minaka shouted, his voice coming from all three mouths, creating a very creepy reverb effect. "Soon every Sekirei's powers will be mine! I will become a God in truth, able to remold this world to my own designs!"

In reply Ranma pulled Miya's sword out of ki space again, getting into a stance from her school, crouched, the sword held in one hand at a downward diagonal across his body as the blade started to glow gold and white with his ki. "Well you know that old saying? The bigger they are, the harder they fall." With that he charged forwards. "Fierce Dragon Slash!" The ki blast rocketed out from the edge of the blade as he slashed forward but was instantly blocked and deflected by a magical bolt from one of Minaka's upper hands which greatly resembled lightning.

As Ranma closed, the four swords slashed out quickly, two of them on defense to block Ranma's blade, while the other two made a scissoring motion towards his body. Ranma didn't allow the two defensive swords to trap his own sword and stepped backwards flicking Miya's large blade up and down to block the other two blows, twisting around into a slash towards Minaka's legs.

Minaka hopped backwards up onto the defensive wall, then out into the air laughing wildly. "Even flight is not beyond

my abilities with this form!" With that, he began to fire bolts of magical energy towards Ranma, fire and lightning.

In response Ranma scowled, then enhanced the Totsuka no Tsurugi with his ki, intercepting and dissipating attack in turn, though the lightning attacks did cause Ranma's hands to tingle and his hair to stand on end. After a few seconds of this, he stomped on the ground hard, shouting out "Tatami Shield!"

A large portion of the rooftop cracked open and lifted up as his ki flashed into the roof, just as it had done when he was fighting Mutsu, then Ranma shattered the shield, hurling the pieces outward like shrapnel towards the hovering Minaka. His own magical attacks caught most of them, but this let Ranma rush forward, leaping out after Minaka. Three more wildly swinging's one energy blasts a rusted from his sword as he closed, forcing Minaka to meet Ranma's furious assault in midair with his own swords.

Almost as soon as they crossed blades again, Ranma realized something and a fierce wolfish expression appeared on his face. Minaka, for all his advanced strength and speed given by this form had no idea how to use a sword. None. He was simply flailing them around, laughing wildly as he did. *Let's see if his reflexes are up to stopping this!*

Bouncing off of one return below, Ranma twisted around, then flicked his sword upwards through the air, distracting Minaka. He then grabbed one of Minaka's own swords, and shattered it, one hand holding it in place for a second, the other coming in as a fist, smashing the sword to pieces. Ranma then caught those pieces and flung them up into Minaka's face the next second, as Ranma twisted around a kick, landing on Minaka's leg, leaping upwards, dodging between three more attacks from his swords to grab Miya's blade again, flinging out another ki attack. This one was slightly than the others, enough that Ranma felt the drain, but Totsuka no Tsurugi gobbled it up and sent Ranma's ki forth without any lag time.

He then chopped downwards towards Minaka, having gained height on him through that move. Minaka raised both hands uppermost, and blasted off several magical attacks, dissipating the larger ki attack. And he was still able to get two of his swords up in place to block the blow coming down towards them. But Ranma flipped upwards once more and across the locked blades, twisting in midair to bring the sword around in in another arc at head height with Minaka.

"GAH!" Minaka raised the blade, and then was smacked backwards in the air, losing his former position at the strength of the hit, losing the sword in question, but with his head still intact. But to Ranma's irritation, Minaka moved with that initial momentum, flying backwards and up, putting more distance between them.

With nothing to bounce off of, nor anyone attacking him right now, Ranma fell back down towards the earth. Controlling his descent, he landed on a nearby rooftop, staring up at Minaka.

Minaka howled in laughter. "Yes, yes! Ahahahahhah! You have the skill. But skill cannot make up for a deficit in power like this! Hmm... now, I know that you all martial artists and Sekirei like to shout out your attacks, so what should I call this one. Ah, I know! Rage of Icarus!" he yelled, thrusting out his arms to either side.

Magical spheres of flame began to grow all around them, first six, then a dozen, then twenty-four until there were sixty-six spheres of magic. A second later all of them rocketed down towards Ranma, homing in on him almost.

Cursing, Ranma used his Tatami Shield again, thumping down twice on the rooftop, then flipping himself up and over that wall right before the first of the magical spheres would've impacted him. He dropped down into the hole the technique had created, and then kept going, cutting through two more walls, and leaping out to the next building over, whose window he smashed in before skidding on the floor of the lounge room he found himself in.

Behind him, the tiny bolts of fire slammed into the roof and down into the hole he had escaped into, all of them even twisting around almost to follow him. But they couldn't quite get the angle right. More and more of them hammered into the top of the building above him and the one he had been on a moment ago, turning it into Swiss cheese, and drilling further down, until the whole edifice began to collapse in on itself.

Hitting on a plan, Ranma leaped backwards out the way he had come, landing in among the rubble as it started to settle, a large amount of debris and dust all around him for the moment. Then he twisted himself around, shouting out, "Emergency Attack, Ki Burst!" slamming the Totsuka no Tsurugi down on the ground.

The burst carried him up out of the cloud of debris and dust and an instant later, Ranma launched several more ki attacks which flashed towards where Minaka was still hovering in the air, while Ranma scowled, starting to feel the drain on his ki of continued six-armed Asura blocked most, but one of them actually got through, and he was forced to interpose one of his last two swords. The blade shattered under the ki attack, spraying his bits of sharp steel back into Minaka's chest causing him to shout in anger more than pain.

But he was still too far away for Ranma to really engage him very well. Ranma found himself falling back to the earth, cursing in annoyance, *The one weakness of the aerial style, if no one's around with you in midair, your options shrink to simply falling with style!*

Then he saw a sight for sore eyes. Down below, a somewhat shaky Tsukiumi and Akitsu were standing together. Tsukiumi launched several attacks upwards, one of them a geyser directly below Ranma, and he smirked, getting his feet underneath him just as Akitsu thrust her hand into the still continuing stream of water coming from Tsukiumi's outstretched arms. The water instantly froze and was thus no longer under Tsukiumi's control, but a solid ice, which Ranma could kick off, to once more ascending towards Minaka.

"Now that's just not on!" Minaka said, even as he tried to fly higher.

However, soon Minaka began to feel light of breath and realized he was going to high. He moved back downwards, only to pause and stare.

Below, Akitsu had realized that her Sun-sama, needed a way to close the range with Minaka, who could, apparently fly in this new, very bizarre seeming form. If that was the case, the Sekirei of Ice would give it to him. And Ranma had kissed her, while they were in the sewers. It had not been at all romantic, but it did allow Akitsu to use her Norito.

"For the love I share with my Ashikabi and for the bond forged over the broken remnants of what had gone before, I make this pledge. May the enemies of my Sun-sama freeze and shatter beneath my power. Ice Age!" Akitsu nearly shrieked, thrusting both of her hands forward at an upward angle as she directed her power.

Instead of freezing everything around her, although many people in the area did start to shiver at the cold, Akitsu shaped the massive explosion of power this time. Doing so she created a massive tower of ice which quickly grew larger than even MBI tower, slowly growing up into the sky far above.

Ranma landed on one portion of it, then leaped up, bouncing upwards as Minaka began to try to destroy the tower of ice, shouting out "No other being will all be allowed to stand on this stage of god versus human!"

"Fuck that! Humans have always survived through working together you know," Ranma laughed wildly as he landed on the top of the massive ice floe, which was continuing to grow as underneath them, Akitsu poured out her power into it.

"And that's why you'll lose." With that, Ranma leaped upwards towards Minaka again. "When it all comes down to it, you only have yourself to rely on. I have got Akitsu and all of our friends!"

Minaka was forced to use his last sword, to block the downward swing of Ranma's blade. Ranma allowed this to happen, then pushed off of the blade somehow in a fashion Minaka just could not understand the mechanics of, pushing himself forward through Minaka's sword arms. His two other arms having long divested themselves of the shattered hilts of their swords grabbed at Ranma, but not before Ranma's hands reached his chest as he shouted out "Buddha Palm!"

All of the ki that Ranma had built up for what Minaka had thought was an attack via his sword came out now, smashing into Minaka as his palms connected with Minaka's chest, hurling him backwards and down.

Now really starting to feel the drain on his ki, Ranma flipped through the air, grabbing the Totsuka no Tsurugi, and followed up, hurling down several bolts of ki, each of which were blocked or deflected by magic and Minaka's last sword, which shattered, even as Minaka slammed into the still growing ice floor beneath them.

Quickly, the Asura found the ice trying to freeze him in place. "No, I won't let you. Um, Uh, Flame Aura!" With those words, Minaka slammed all six palms together. While he hadn't practiced with his swords, Minaka had spent a lot of time since receiving this form, determining with what this body could do and the magical spells he had access to. One of them flashed into being around him now, creating an aura of heat which kept Akitsu's powers at bay.

But concentrating on that had cost him. As the aura of flame sprang into being Ranma was on him now, slicing downwards with the Totsuka no Tsurugi. The blade's edge sliced into the upper shoulder of one side of Minaka's body, cutting into it, but not deeply enough to remove the limb. Asura were, after all, quite durable demons.

With that hand Minaka reached up to grab at Ranma, but he disengaged, allowing himself to fall to the floor of ice beneath them for a second, then lashing out with the blade towards one of Minaka's legs.

Minaka was fast, and he dodged backwards, but this opened him up for a thrust, which he barely was able to block, forearms straining as his hands were cut by the blade caught a bare inch away from his chest. He gritted his teeth,

but try to push through it, despite being a person not exactly used to such things, trying to concentrate enough to create another spell.

Ranma reared back, allowing the blade to drop as he stepped back, kicking out hard, the bottom of his foot catching the pommel of Totsuka no Tsurugi. Minaka had loosened his grip a bit with some of his hands when Ranma had released the blade, and this move took them by complete surprise, allowing the nodachi to cut along his side, as Ranma rushed forwards, leaping up and throwing out a series of punches and kicks towards Minaka.

In so much pain Minaka could no longer call upon magic, leaving him with his untrained, physical abilities. This was a lot, and one blow actually got through to hit Ranma hurling him away for a second to skid on the ice underneath them. But his ki healing was up to the task, and he kept on with the fight, furiously engaging the other man.

For every blow that Minaka desperately returned, Ranma landed ten. And most of the blows that Minaka lashed out with didn't land or if they did, they certainly didn't land cleanly. Ranma redirected them, using the momentum of them to stay in the air, bouncing all around the now completely pinned Minaka. The aura of fire that had kept the ice of the ice floe from coming up his body had dissipated thanks to his lack of attention on it, trapping his feet.

A lucky blow however smashed into Ranma's face, breaking his nose, and sending him flying backwards. But even as he landed, his ki healing had gone to work, and he used one thumb to wipe away the blood, smirking at Minaka, who was gasping for air, bruised from several dozen hits, his hands still bleeding from where Minaka had caught the edge of the Totsuka no Tsurugi.

"So much to for ascending to a God," Ranma mocked, causing Minaka to scream in anger.

With his anger Minaka was able to push aside his pain and all six of his hands glowed with magic once more as he began to fling balls of fire out hard and fast. At the same time, he flared his fiery aura again, sending magic through his legs, to try and melt the upper portion of the massive ice floe that Akitsu had created.

Ranma idly hoped that no one was in the buildings that had been incorporated into the ice floe, but knew that he couldn't concentrate on that, he had to keep the momentum up. With that in mind Ranma charged forward, ducking what magic bolts he could, although he did take several hits now, being so close and the ice beneath him turning to water Minaka somehow making these magic bolts go faster. One hit Ranma in the side and, Ranma felt another rib go, as his side exploded in pain, flames licking up and down his side. Another one caught Ranma in the head as he stumbled searing away the skin there and flicking blood down into his eye.

But Ranma still had one working eye and despite being badly depleted, his ki healing was already going to work before he reached his destination, grabbing up the sword again. Then he pushed half his remaining ki into his legs, tearing his tendons and bones even as he launched himself forward faster than he had moved before, almost disappearing to Minaka's sight as he rolled forward underneath the magical assaults.

Desperately Minaka grabbed at him with all six hands, the magic in his hands flaring out into Ranma's body in an imitation of Ranma's Buddha Palm technique. Ranma screamed in pain as his flesh boiled and his bones broke, but he was already thrusting forward and up, Totsuka no Tsurugi stabbing entirely through Minaka.

As the large blade punched out the Asura's back in a welter of blood something gave out within the demon body and Minaka's limbs stopped obeying his commands. One by one they fell from Ranma who fell backwards onto the ice floe, gasping in agony. *Thank God he didn't know how to fight with that form well enough! If he had, that kind of strength, magic and speed, it would've been almost impossible for me to win.*

Slowly, as his now horribly depleted ki began to knit him back together, Ranma pushed himself to his feet. Still blinded in one eye by the blood that had soaked his face from one of the earlier hits, he stood shakily, but still moved forward.

Minaka hadn't moved and was staring down at the sword thrust all the way through him as blood began to pour down his him and mouth. He looked at Ranma, smiling wanly. "Well, if I cannot be a God, at least I died a death worthy of..."

"Shut up!" Ranma growled, and with his little remaining ki sent out a blast of energy which took Minaka in the face, thrusting his head back. Then Ranma grabbed the Totsuka no Tsurugi and tore it out of Minaka's body, before twisting in place with a vicious over arm slice, decapitating the former master of the Sekirei Plan.

OOOOOO

Cologne nearly fell off her cane as Happy guffawed, slapping on diminutive hand on an equally small knee. "Ha! Well, would you look at that, the boy did it! A perfect example of the Aerial Style and how to incorporate a nodachi into it too. Hahaha, ahh with him and all these Sekirei, the future of the Art looks bright indeed."

"And that has nothing to do with almost all of them being bountiful young women?" Cologne questioned, her tone deadpan.

Unlike Cologne, Happy's tone was dead serious when he replied. "Not at all. That fact is actually an even bigger draw than my school expanding to keep me here."

OOOOOOO

From the scattered video cameras and the satellites they had taken over, Matsu had watched all this with a growing sense of shock and horror at Minaka's transformation, segueing into shock at the strength of Akitsu and then utter awe at Ranma's victory.

Next to her, Miya watched as well, smiling faintly, her hands on the twin jinki which glowed faintly just once before fading out. Minaka had not controlled enough Jinki to use them to shut down the Sekirei down, "I told you. Ranma will surprised you, and Akitsu... their love has made her powerful, far more so than any Sekirei, bar myself. She stood up, holding out her hand to Nabiki. "Now come, the pair of you. Ranma and the others that done their job, now it is your turn to do yours, as well as myself."

Nabiki nodded, her phone dropping from her nerveless fingers. Right before Minaka and Ranma had appeared in the camera's view the first time Kasumi had called, telling her that Minaka had indeed attempted to try and kidnap her and the two young Sekirei. Genma and her father however had dealt with them.

Now she slowly rose from where she had been staring at the image of her victorious boyfriend standing on an ice floe that was as large vertically as a glacier, shaking her head. "Man, if he wasn't a keeper before this, he sure is now!" That was the last word she could speak before the wind of their passage sucked all her ability to speak, if not think. Ranma's part of this was over. It was time for Nabiki and the other cerebral fighters to step in.

Epilogue

Feeling a little sheepish in the suit that Miya had convinced him to buy, Ranma rang the doorbell to the Tendo house, smiling as he took in how it had been expanded over the past few weeks. He'd done most of that work, while Nabiki and the other brainiacs were dealing with politics and so forth. But the two houses to either side had been incorporated further into the Tendo place, the original walls expanded to cover them, there really opened, to link together, creating one continuous area. This had been necessary, because of the number of guests and students who now lived there to take lessons in Anything Goes Martial Arts.

Haihane had been the first. With Benitsubasa and Natsuo a permanent couple, one of the first things that Miya had done with the gathered Jinki was to un-wing her from the pretty boy. She hadn't attempted to wing herself on Ranma thankfully. Instead, she seemed to be interested in Ryoga.

That reminds me, I gotta tell her that I saw Ryoga on the news. Him and Musubi too. That is one pair that is very easy to pick out of a crowd. Especially when they're tossing terrorists around like ragdolls. Somewhere in Syria I think?

Until the lost boy returned, Haihane had decided to join the training that Soun and Happosai were leading. Genma wasn't taking part in those lessons, being busy with Ryu, basically training him out of using his Yami-Sen-ken so profligately and beating it into his head that it was his own father's fault he had died, not Genma's. This wasn't, alas, a slow process to say the least. And it was continually being interrupted by other people showing up, demanding to speak to Genma about past wrongs, something Ranma attempted his best to steer clear of. When he couldn't he introduced said problems – suitors for the most part – to Akitsu and Nabiki.

Haihane's former partner had not joined her. Benitsubasa and Natsuo still worked with Takami and were quite happy with one another. But it was obvious that 'his' priorities had shifted from fighting to loving.

The last member of the Disciplinary Squad, Taro, was also living in MBI tower. With his powerful alter-form no longer viable, he was honestly kind of pathetic as a fighter, and was dealing with a lot of depression but was being looked after for now. Everyone agreed that in the last battle he had become another victim like the rest of the soldiers who had been hit by the Jusenkyo water. Rounding them up had been quite a task for Kodachi and the others.

Next to move in with the Tendos had been Namiji. She had been very impressed by the skills Ranma had, as well as

Akitsu in hand-to-hand combat. A few others from the Nerima Alliance were also students here, but they didn't live here like Namiji and her boyfriend did in one of the separate houses.

Then had come Natsume, Akane's new rival as heir to the Tendo school of Indiscriminate Grappling. With her came her sister, Kurumi. As Happosai had thought, the two young women had continued their training much like Ranma had on the road, dodging the truant officers and stealing food whenever they couldn't buy it. *They were both good kids, with a lot of untapped potential*, Ranma thought.

But obviously, with the two girls added along everyone else, including Shiina, Homura, Yashima and little Kusano, the Tendo's had needed the space. And between them, Ranma and Kusano had been able to rearrange the garden pretty darn quickly. Not that that was the only garden project that Kusano had been busy with since the end of the Sekirei Game.

Ranma's thoughts were interrupted as the door opened, and he turns with a smile for Kasumi, only to pause as Soun stepped out from the entryway instead of his oldest daughter who normally answered the door.

He stood there staring down at Ranma, about 4 feet taller than he normally was, clad in samurai armor from head to toe, and wielding a naginata. "And what are your intentions towards my daughter Ranmaaaaaaa?" he growled, elongating Ranma's name as he glared at the younger martial artist.

Ranma however was not afraid. "Nice ki technique there Soun, but I've seen Miya's hannya mask, next to it, this is just funny looking, not intimidating at all."

"Daddy, can you please get out of the way! Honestly, I know you're proud of the fact that you finally were able to use your special intimidation technique, but Ranma and I've been going out for months now, and your attempts to intimidate him or getting old," Nabiki's voice sounded out from behind her father, who reluctantly moved to one side to reveal his second daughter. Nabiki wore a tight black blouse, and a skirt which was, while long, coming down to her knees, quite formfitting, with a slit to one side to allow ease of movement.

The two young people stood smiling at one another for a few seconds, while Soun grumbled in the background again about getting no respect but they were quickly interrupted by a screaming voice of Akane within. "Damn it Ranma, you know you can't be around here when Yashima is!"

Ranma quickly grabbed Nabiki up into his arms as the wall right next to the door and the door itself exploded outwards, and the hammer wielder launched herself forward, her eyes a little bloodshot, and her face looking as if it contained every blood cell in her body at the moment it was so red. The fact that she had been apparently getting ready for the bath was not helping matters.

"Run away!" Ranma shouted, leaping up over the girl, 1 foot tapping down lightly on the back of her head as he leaped further upwards to the nearby rooftop and away.

Shaking her head, Nabiki drawled, "Well I suppose I can't count that as martial arts madness interrupting our date, considering it hadn't yet officially begun. Still, are you going to be taking me someplace to make up for this near-mishap?"

"I'll leave that for you to decide, although I think it's pretty awesome myself, and so does Kasumi and Chiho."

An hour later Nabiki set down the bowl of noodles that she had been munching her way through for the last few minutes. Smiling sardonically, she questioned, "What is it with you and high places anyway?"

"You don't like it?" Ranma asked from where he was sitting beside her, on a balcony said to the side of MBI towers rooftop. True to his thoughts during his battle with Minaka, Ranma had turned this area into a small garden, but it wasn't alone in that. From where they sat at one corner of the roof, Nabiki and Ranma out several dozen rooftops which had been turned over to plant life of all sorts. He, Kusano and Kasumi had been very busy, making small gardens throughout the city, and enlarging the various botanical gardens, which had already existed within its outer limits.

"I didn't say that, and I suppose it's nice for us to survey all our domain," Nabiki quipped, staring out at the ship, which gleamed like gold and crystal in the light of the setting sun.

As important as MBI Tower was to the organization of the city, the ship was important to the Sekirei and the defense of the city. For one thing, all the Sekirei who had been eliminated from the game rather than killed – like Karasuba and many of Higa's were stored there. On top of that, the ship was a major storehouse of technology, and it was also

where they were keeping all the Sekirei prisoners from Higa and his partner, the two combat-crazy Sekirei bound to Nishi Sanada and several others.

Their bonds had been broken by the Jinki, but they were in no way reconciled to the regime change, just like Nishi himself, who was being watched almost constantly by Seo and a few other previously independent small-time Ashikabi. Higa on the other hand was an outright prisoner, serving out a sentence of ten years, on top of having been neutered via pressure points.

Hayato and his Sekirei were not counted amongst the prisoners. They were part of the defense of the city, with Hayato still staying at Izumo House with Miya watching over him. The youngster knew very well what side held the whip hand, and actually seemed to be learning quite a bit under Miya's influence.

Beyond the importance of the ship to their cause however, it was the ship's sheer rich magnificence which always drew Nabiki's eye. "It's just that at some point we're going to have a date that happens on the ground and I wouldn't want you to faint from shock."

Ranma grinned, and put an arm around her, nuzzling into her neck and the side of her face, before laying several kisses on the side of her neck. "So, am I forgiven for favoring Akitsu all that time?"

"I suppose," Nabiki drawled, shaking her head with a smile as she pulled away slightly only to turn around and kiss Ranma full on the lips. She let loose a little whimper as his arms went around her, tugging Nabiki against his chest hard enough that her breasts flattened against his chest.

All around them, some of their closest friends sat or lounged on other soft chairs, taking in the view, or talking quietly amongst themselves in what would obviously become a Sekirei and martial artist hang out. The rooftop was covered in grass from one end to another, with tables and chairs scattered among trees.

Kasumi sat with Kusano, Shiina, Kodachi and Homura at another table that sat on the edge of the roof overlooking the east side of the city. The two men were talking quietly to one another comparing notes on what it was like to be bound to their very different Ashikabi, while the two women were debating what kind of hairstyle Kusano should use on her first day of school.

At the other side of the rooftop on a diagonal from the corner where Nabiki and Ranma were Chiho sat, serenely smiling as she caressed Uzume in her cat form. While the first time Ranma had seen her cat form had not been a pleasant moment for anyone, Chiho had adapted quite well to her lover being a part-time cat, even if Dr. Tofu's abilities had not in point of fact revealed any means to heal her from her sickness. That had taken a second application of Jinki technology.

Nabiki knew for a fact that both Tsukiumi and Akitsu were around somewhere. She could even see a hand holding a book sticking out from the top of the glacier which still stood next to the tower. Tsukiumi on the other hand...

This wasn't the first date they'd had since the fall of MBI. They'd been on three dates before this with Akitsu joining Ranma and Nabiki for all of them. The last had been interrupted by Tsukiumi who had finally reached the end of her rope....

Flashback:

The restaurant door crashed open, and Tsukiumi stood there. Nabiki turned from laughing at a Joke Ranma had just told her and Akitsu to stare at the blonde. Instantly, Nabiki noticed that Tsukiumi's face was flushed, as if she was in the throes of a fever. But her nipples were very clearly poking out from under her blouse, and her chest heaved in such a way that every man in the restaurant was gulping and staring, although only Ranma was looking at her wide-eyed and shocked, rather than lustful.

Tsukiumi marched up to the table, glaring at first Ranma then Akitsu, then Nabiki. "I hast lasted eight days," she declared. "Eight days! One day more than you demanded of me, Akitsu. But I cannot take this anymore!"

Without further fanfare she reached down grabbed Ranma with both hands around the lapels of the suit he'd bought and pulled him across the table. Ranma had barely a second to look beside him to Akitsu's impassive expression, and Nabiki's amused one, before Tsukiumi lips met his own. Her wings, which looked as if they were made of water but of different colors per feather, sprouted from her back and away.

As the kiss went on, Tsukiumi's fever and apparent overreaction to Ranma's 'signal' receded as the others watched, her face returning to normal, and her breath becoming more even. She pulled away, smiling happily. "And now, I am

one of thine wives as well. Please treat me well, my husband."

Nabiki began to laugh, and only continued to do so when Ranma spluttered and stammered and Akitsu joined in by saying, "So long as I am first wife that is acceptable."

End flashback

She moved deeper into Ranma's arms, shifting so that she was sitting on his lap rather than the bench underneath them. "So, do you think that hammer will ever recover from her embarrassment about what happened earlier?"

"I doubt it," Ranma chuckled, the sound causing a deep rumble in his chest, that made Nabiki shudder.

"Seriously though, I don't think you should be near our house any longer Ranma," Nabiki sighed. "Meeting you at the door is a very nice start to these dates but..."

"Then why don't you join us here?" Ranma asked.

That caused Nabiki to stiffen and she pulled away from him to stare at him in surprise. "Are you asking me live with you?"

"Well yeah. He gestured around the rooftop of MBI tower, and downwards. "It ain't like Aki-chan, Tsukiumi and I don't have the space up here. And, um, I mean, I know this isn't the most romantic way to say it, but, I, I'd really like for you to move in with me. I think it's time."

Again true to his word, Ranma had turned Minaka's office and indeed that entire top floor of the tower into living quarters working on it while everyone else was still working out the agreements and various deals for the creation of the Independent City-State of Tokyo. The organization of that new management, the City Council and creation of new laws, organizations and suchlike had taken a long time, hence why Ranma had the time to spend on his private projects.

Essentially in those agreements, the Republic of Japan acknowledged the creation of the city state out of its former environs of the same name. They had also acknowledged that MBI was still a recognized international company based in Japan so they could, apparently, tax the hell out of it. In return, Japan got first access to the technology of the Sekirei's ship, which was currently sitting in the center of Tokyo Bay. It had also helped when some of the people in the DIET, who represented the oldest, most prominent former noble and samurai cast families agreed with the creation and said that something called the Nerima Protocols could be extended to include the entire city.

Takami too had been excellent when it came to the political and economic theatre. She had known a lot more about what MBI was up to than anyone else, and between her, Nabiki, Matsu and Kocho they had kept the business side of things going. They had even expanded the medical side, and dozens of new patents Minaka had been sitting on were starting to make their way into the pharmaceutical market.

Other nations had issues with Tokyo's independence and the Sekirei of course the foremost being Russia, China and America. Each in their own way had attempted to claim control of the city and all of the Sekirei within. Russia had attempted spies, but they had been found. China had attempted computer attacks and embargoes, while also trying to hunt down their own Amazons and take control of Jusenkyo. That project was still ongoing, with the springs themselves starting to dry up somehow, the method of which Nabiki hadn't been informed of. She did know though that the Amazons were looking to set up an enclave here in Tokyo, led by Cologne and Shampoo. *Is it just me though, or is Shampoo spending a little too much time around the tower and the dojo when Ranma's in residence?*

Other than that, China hadn't been able to pressure the city-state much. The embargoes didn't hurt much, and the computer attacks had been turned around and made worse by Matsu and Kocho. Now China was being forced to face an economic crisis of their own thanks to those two.

America had sent an aircraft carrier into the Japan's national waters, but when their F-22s flew overhead they did nothing but amuse Ranma and the others, and all of them had gone on TV to jeer at them. America had then attempted more physical means, attack helicopters sent into the city to drop off troops in order to, "Secure the new tyrants attempting to take a city hostage in order to blah, blah," as Ranma had put it.

The video of him dismantling one such Special Forces squad and Miya cutting three of the other helicopters in half well out into the bay had pulled the American's teeth. They weren't willing, after all, to simply order in their jets to bomb the city, since even now most of the city's population were still there, just under new management. Two other infiltration attempts had also been halted before they could get into the city.

Nabiki shook off thoughts about what Russia or China might try next to get their hands on the Sekirei, staring at the iceberg, which was one of the many reasons why the various powerful world governments were so eager to get their hands on the Sekirei. The iceberg had shrunk significantly in the days since, but most of it was still there, despite the best efforts of the sun's heat and Homura's fire.

Of course, something only Nabiki and Tsukiumi knew was that Akitsu routinely used her powers on the iceberg, keeping it solid. Ever since she had heard someone call it a 'physical representation of her and Ranma's love she had been determined to make certain it never faded.

Then she looked around at the other buildings in sight, all of them with rooftops blooming with green, sighing. "Little Kusano did all this?"

"Heh, yep. She and Kasumi had a heck of a fun time with it too, while you, Matsu, Hayato and so forth were meeting online with the DIET. Now come on, you know you're not supposed to think deep thoughts while on a date," Ranma teased.

For all that though, Nabiki knew Ranma had been thinking long-term thoughts of his own. It was why he had been pushing for more training among the Sekirei in group tactics, why he had spent so much time on the outskirts of Tokyo, not even bothering to go to school any longer so busy was he with everything else. He just didn't do politics or economic maneuvering. Ranma felt that someone – possibly Russia, or maybe America - was going to go for a brute force attempt to 'retake' the city before everyone would finally agree that maybe leaving the Sekirei and their martial artist allies alone was a good idea.

Still he had a point. *Two points actually.* "Yes, Ranma I think it's time too. I'll move in with you." She then leaned in, smirking as she very deliberately moved her rump in Ranma's lap. "And I'm done thinking deep thoughts."

How long they kissed, Ranma didn't know, but it was alas, interrupted in a most rude manner: by someone splashing the pair of them with water.

Twisting around, the now female Ranma glared through clenched teeth at the little midget that had appeared from nowhere, cackling at him. "He looked as if you needed to cool off, and besides, if I have to watch someone kiss, I want it to be two girls!" Happy said with a cackle, then leaped away from the ki blast from Ranma, who snarled and went after him. Soon Happosai had Tsukiumi, Kodachi and a screeching Shampoo after him too, while everyone else just kept their heads down.

Leaning back, Nabiki laughed, watching her friends and family have fun on the roof, leaping to the next one, or up to the giant ice flow then off it to the next building over.

The only one who wasn't here was Miya. Several of Ranma's friends and many Sekirei had moved into the small inn with Miya, and although none of them were training with her as Ranma did, all of them seemed to find some comfort from her presence. But Miya refused to leave the little inn where she and Takehito had made their home.

Now, Kasumi glanced over to the clock and shook her head. "Ranma, you wouldn't want to keep Miya-sama waiting for you, would you?"

Ranma skidded to a halt, glaring angrily at the little munchkin, then over at a clock set into the wall that just housed the personal passageway down into Minaka's office. She nodded at the time there, turned back to send a glare Happy's way. "Right, I'll punt you later, you little garden gnome."

With that the redhead leapt off the building down towards the next tallest and away. There was training to do. There was always training to do. *And what else out of life could I possibly want?* she thought, as Akitsu moved to join Ranma from where the Sekirei of ice had been laying out, in a bikini of all things, on the top of the ice tower. *Friends, loved ones, the Art and fights. What more could I ask for?*

However, elsewhere, plans were being made which might give Ranma too many fights even for his sensibilities. A meeting was going on in a video conference, the people involved obscured by shadow and voice equalizers. "So, we are agreed? If we cannot directly control these martial artists and Sekirei, then we must coerce them, use their various honor codes against them to do our work for us."

"Yes. And we might need them close to home too. The last army group we sent in past Jusenkyo to see what else those mountains might contain was mauled, and returned with tales of flying people with wings, fire magic and other such."

"Convincing this Ranma fellow and those like him that only they can face the supernatural and mystical threats that are still out there, yes. Fight fire with fire," another voice said, one with a distinctly Indian accent. "There is a rather delicious irony in that, after all."

At the same time, another, more personal problem was coming home to roost. In the outskirts of Tokyo at one of the quieter borders, a middle-aged redhead who had seen Ranma on the TV during a news conference about Tokyo was asking directions of the police officer who had taken and examined her ID before entering the city. "Excuse me, but could you direct me to MBI tower? I understand that is where Ranma Saotome lives, correct?"

FIN

And there you have it. Does this tie everything up into a pretty bow, no. But it is an ending. An ending that is necessary. The only way I could think of to add more excitement to this story at this point, with Minaka disposed of, Miya and Ranma and all the others all allied, would be to add another alien species coming after the Sekirei à la 'Warriors Way' or go into various mythologies and I'm already doing that with FILFy and planning to do it on a smaller scale with GDWHOM. But this was never supposed to be a huge world building sort of fanfiction anyway, so I think this ending works to bring it to a successful and happy conclusion while also hinting at more adventures for the characters within.