

Merry Christmas Eve to those of you who celebrate the birth of a nice Jewish boy from Nazareth.

This is... a very large chapter. The um, romance aspect added 11,000 more words than I expected, and several other scenes expanded farther than I thought.

This chapter has been Grammarlied and Hiryo has gone through it! I would wager there will still be a few mistakes scattered throughout, but hopefully not enough to damage your immersion into the chapter.

In other news, Tomon has gotten back to me. I will be looking at his email after I post this, so hopefully, I will be posting Stallion over on Fanfic tonight.

Chapter 10: RS+M

The beating that Ranma had taken at the hands of Ryuji was easily the worst he'd ever taken in his life. None of his opponents back in Nerima, on the road, or in any other martial arts tournament had battered Ranma as badly as this fight. Shampoo had known that the moment that Ranma collapsed onto his face in the underground arena, but to hear the doctor assigned to Ranma list off his injuries, the number of bones broken in his chest, the fact that his lung had been perforated, along with his lower intestine and stomach, that was something else entirely.

Seeing Shampoo slowly sink deeper into her chair in sheer horror, Mai gently slapped a hand over the older man's mouth, cutting off his litany before he could get to his professional prognosis as to Ranma's future or anything else in terms of his actual wounds. "Thank you, doctor. We know it's bad. He's alive. That's all that matters right now."

The older man glared at her, reaching up to remove her hand, but found he lacked the strength to do so, as Mai tightened her grip on his jaw slightly. His clipboard clattered to the floor beside him as his second hand rose to join the first in trying to remove Mai's from over his mouth. "No, we don't need to know your prognosis. No, we don't know that he's lucky, unlucky or whatever to be alive that you were going to say. All you need to do is to keep that IV stuck in Ranma's arm. If it's removed for any reason, or the nutrients stop flowing..." Here, the already tight grip around his jaw started to grind the man's teeth together audibly in his mouth. "Then we will be having **issues**. Blink twice if you understand."

The man, who was now staring at her wide-eyed as both hands clawed at the hand Mai held over his mouth, blinked rapidly several times. Mai supposed that was a good enough answer, and she released him sending him stumbling back towards the door, surreptitiously wiping her palm on the hospital blanket by Ranma's feet. The doctors and nurses had decided to cut Ranma's clothing off him prior to surgery, which had been necessary the night before. At the time, Shampoo had been distracted from Ranma's injuries, thanks to Chun-Li needing the pair

of women to stay in sight and walk her through everything they did for the legal side of things and hearing about it was horrifying.

Both women stared at the man, who regained his footing but not his composure. He stared wildly back at the tall Japanese girl, then hastily ducked down, grabbed up the medical chart he'd been reading from where he had dropped it and hastily rushed out of the room.

As the door was open, Mai caught a glimpse of the two policemen outside. A guard detail had been assigned to Ranma the instant he'd been loaded up into an ambulance. While there was no specific knowledge coming out connecting Ranma or any of his companions to the police raid just yet, there might be a lot of people looking to simply get revenge for how Ranma had crippled Ryuji in turn for his beating. Unlike Ranma's injuries, the doctors ordered to keep the Mad Dragon alive had made no effort to save his ruined arm.

Also, if Ranma's connection to Shampoo and Mai, who had been seen aiding and abetting the police raid, perhaps came to light, he would become a target from that angle too. Mai honestly felt that was more likely, really. Judging from his attitude toward the crowd and his general level of insanity, Yamazaki didn't seem to be the sort to engender loyalty. But the Triad paying someone to put something lethal into Ranma's IV, thanks to him being involved with Mai and Shampoo, yeah, that the self-styled kunoichi could see all too easily, especially, as the newsies learned about the raid and the sheer number of Very Important People who had been rounded up after partaking of what the Triad had to offer.

Alone in the hospital room, the two women were silent, Shampoo simply giving Mai a look of thanks before staring down at her Airen, her husband in every way that mattered, marriage laws in Japan or China proper be damned. Shampoo had never seen Ranma being beaten so badly as when she and Mai had rushed into the arena again, never seen him look so small, as when he was loaded into the ambulance, despite not being able to concentrate on him at the time. Now, seeing Ranma lying there, the blood cleared away, an oxygen mask over his face, and several nutrient and blood IVs stuck into his arms, it didn't quite seem real to Shampoo.

In a way, remembering the aftermath of the fight was almost just as bad. She had seen Ranma's final attack, the Blue Burst. She and had seen Ryuji standing up afterward, ready and able to finish the fight despite his arm being basically blown to bits up to and including his shoulder. Ranma had taken the man completely by surprise, first by somehow, and Shampoo didn't know how, by latching onto him with his ki in a way that the other man couldn't escape, then reversing that flow. Yet even that hadn't been enough to put Ryuji down permanently. *And this is but the start of our journey. What other monsters are out there? Are we ready for this? I, will I end up like this if we continue, will both of us? I've never seen Ranma look so... this is, I, I--*

Before her mind could stumble further down a very unusual path composed entirely of uncertainty, fear and worry, Shampoo felt soft, feminine arms going around her. Turning, Shampoo found her face pressed into Mai's chest as the other girl hugged her from the side,

having moved around Ranma's bed and closed with Shampoo without the Amazon even noticing. "MMFR?" she mumbled, her voice muffled by the acres of flesh she found her face thrust into.

A memory came back to her of the times she'd seen Mai naked, most particularly the time in the shower when they'd had to act as if the pair had been overcome by an aphrodisiac the gangsters had released into the women's changing room. As those memories occurred to her, Shampoo began to blush, cursing inside her head. *Damn your curse form for waking me up more to finding women attractive, Ranma! I do not need to think of our best friend as sexy, especially now.*

Luckily for Shampoo's blood pressure, Mai was unaware of Shampoo's thoughts on that score, and her words brought Shampoo back to the here and now with a thump.

"Ranma'll be all right," Mai soothed. "This was nasty, but have you ever known Ranma to back down from a challenge? I admit, I haven't known him nearly as long as you have, but I don't think Ranma has it in him to stop trying to get stronger. And remember, he's got that insane ki healing. It might take him weeks, but he'll pull through."

Honestly, Mai was speaking more for Shampoo's sake than she honestly expected. While she had been astounded by Ranma's ability to heal from wounds before this, she'd never seen him take anywhere near as bad a beating before. Not even the Toughness Training came close. Yet that was what Mai needed to hear now, and Mai wanted to help her friend.

Hearing the caring words of her friend, Shampoo barely held in a sob as she turned her body in place to return Mai's hug, hugging Mai around the waist so hard that a lesser woman's ribs might well have been in danger. But Mai was no lesser woman should Shampoo reflected, oh no. *One of these days, I'm going to talk to her about joining the Amazon tribe. My grandmother will be over the moon to have another warrior of her caliber in our age group. And having a friendly rival in Mai is a lot more appealing to me than my one-sided rivalry with Dow El or Par Fume.*

Pulling slightly out of Mai's cleavage, with a certain amount of reluctance, those things seemed to have their own center of gravity, Shampoo smiled up at the other girl even as her eyes glistened with unshed tears. "Thanks, Mai. You're right. Ranma **will** bounce back. This is just, well, it's just a sign of how far we have to climb before we reach the summit of The Art. I know that's what Ranma's aiming for and me too, ever since I met him. The world is so much bigger than my little village, and I, I can't let this first hurdle stop me from exploring it. Although, you know, I haven't known him all that much longer than you have," Shampoo stated, not certain why she brought that up.

Thankfully, Mai didn't seem to have heard that last line, instead concentrating on teasing Shampoo lightly. "Gee, the world is wider than your little village, who would've thought."

Turning her gaze towards the bed, Mai's thoughts shifted to the future and how to stop one of the two of them, or Ranma himself, from ending up like that again. "Seriously though, I think we need to restart the Toughness Training. I don't think either of us would've been able to survive for very long against Ryuji as Ranma did. And..." Mai hesitated, looking towards the door, then down at Shampoo. "And maybe, I think maybe, we both need to think of some lethal techniques to start training in. My fireballs are good, but they're too defused to set someone on fire instantly to burn off bits, and my Shadow Fans are simple distractions. I think I might need a way to make them more lethal. And maybe a technique that doesn't rely on misdirection or trickery, too."

"I don't know if I agree with that last part," Shampoo said, reflecting internally that she was more grateful than normal that Mai understood Chinese so well so that she could speak on topics like this without sounding cutesy. "It's always time for misdirection and trickery. Look at what Ranma did there. I think, while Ryuji was dominating the fight physically, Ranma was out thinking him. Remember what Ryu and Ken told us? He used some kind of weird ki technique to bind the two of them together, to start to drain Ryuji's ki away from him."

"Yeah, that's another thing we might want to learn, how to read ki," Mai answered, smirking a bit at the amount of pride in Ranma that Shampoo could show in her tone. "Ryu told us he only got a vague feeling of it. Jubei also tried to teach me some kind of sixth sense technique, and while it works to a certain extent, maybe there's a better way? I certainly couldn't have told precisely what Ranma was doing in that fight."

"Hmm... Grandmother and some of the elders from the village have ways of figuring out if people are around them without it somehow, but I don't know enough about it to teach," Shampoo mused before turning the conversation back to the idea of killer moves. For her, since she was primarily a weapons user, the thought came far more easily than it would to someone like Ranma. Somehow using Ki to add even more striking power to her chui, for example, or simply slipping in dagger strikes while in close quarters. While someone like Edmond Honda or Ryuji could survive being slashed or stabbed if they took a dagger to the eye, even fighters who emphasized mobility would be down for the count.

Mai could also perhaps get away with adding some more killing techniques quite easily now that she was devoting some attention to the idea. Which, since most of her training leaned heavily towards capturing or knocking out her enemies, was an area she had never explored consciously before. Poison on her fans, for example, or simply using the ki reinforcement technique to make the edges of them so sharp as to cut. Such a technique would make her open fans into saw blades rather than simply surprisingly hard, blunt objects.

On the other hand, making her fireballs hotter or more condensed was another idea, one that Shampoo was enthusiastic about. "Few people are fireproof, and even fewer are immune to even hotter temperatures," she pointed out.

There were still talking about that, with Shampoo very grateful to have something to concentrate on other than Ranma resting so silent, so unmoving in the bed, when the door opened once more. Instantly, the pair of women reacted, weapons coming out of ki spaces. Simultaneously, Mai flipped herself up and over the bed to land on its other side, fans in either hand ready to be hurled, while Shampoo stood, her own stance more protective than offensive, waiting to block anything that came near her man, where he lay on the bed with her recovered chui.

Fei Long ducked his head inside, nodded at the pair of them, and then slowly opened the door to enter, followed by another man. This one was elderly, almost rotund, but not quite, and a bit on the short side. He looked quite jovial, smiling brightly at both women, then down at the injured Ranma, a moue of concern appearing on his face as Fei Long spoke. "Ladies, this is the lawyer I used to write up the contract I wanted you to look over. I figured that having him go over the contract with you would be a good idea."

"I will say now that while Fei Long has brought me in to help the two of you come to an agreement, my real loyalty is to the law. I will not make up a contract that does not equally favor both parties," the lawyer announced firmly. "I have a background in writing contracts up for dangerous jobs, and I make certain that both client and business walk away with a fair deal."

Shampoo's eyes narrowed, but Fei Long went on unhurriedly. "I've heard the prognosis about Ranma, and I know it'll be several weeks before he's able to move, but that really doesn't matter much, because I wasn't looking to employ Ranma, just you, Shampoo. And whatever you might be thinking now, camping out here watching him while he sleeps isn't romantic. It's simply a waste of time."

"I object to that on the grounds that having someone be there when you wake up from a beating is always nice, but I can't argue with the idea of spending all our time here being too much Shampoo." Mai stowed her fans away behind her body for a moment in her second ki space, a small area built up underneath her shirt. This sight had the lawyer blinking in surprise, although nowhere near as much as watching Shampoo's large-headed chui disappear into her sleeves without even a rustle of fabric. "I'll talk to the nurses here, get in a few more cots and arrange for at least one of us to be here twenty-four seven. I can take the first watch, and you can take over when you return, and I can head over to the hotel to sleep."

Shipping to agreement, and pushed herself to her feet, gesturing the two men back outside the door. There weren't any tables or anything in here that didn't have stuff on them, and she wanted to go over the contract thoroughly. At the door, she stopped and looked back at Ranma for several moments, causing Mai to once more reach out, touching her shoulder gently. "He'll be all right, remember? Just keep that thought in your head, okay?"

"I will. Ranma will. Thanks, Mai." Shampoo moved forward giving Mai another tight hug around the middle. "I'll see you in a bit."

Mai hugged her back and remained by the door for a few seconds, staring after Shampoo as she left. It was only when Mai's gaze began to shift downward that she shook her head, moving back over to Ranma. She pulled up a fashion magazine she'd snagged on the way in from the hospital waiting room, tipped back in her chair, and idly began to play with one of her fans in one hand as she began to read, watching the door the entire time.

OOOOOOO

Shampoo found herself getting into the back of a limousine of all things outside of the hotel, and she shook her head. *Ugh, rich people. Why the heck buy something like this if you can just buy a car that blends in and does the job, especially here in Hong Kong?* Shampoo wasn't a big believer in luxury when it came to cars. *Mind you, I could get behind the idea of having our own yacht, like Mai's been thinking about, or even a reaaaally nice American-style camper van like that one asshole who flirted with me on the boat to Japan was talking about. But a limo? Seems too limiting.*

Keeping a snort inside at the stray idea that Fei Long was trying to overawe her, she sat across from Fei Long while the lawyer sat next to her. Although, he had also rather primly made certain that there was room between them. Shampoo liked that. It was respectful, and it also showed that the lawyer wasn't taking sides here. He was simply brought in to write up the binding agreement between herself and Fei Long. In fact, as they walked through the hospital, he had admitted that he knew nothing whatsoever about martial arts or movies but had made his living by writing single-season contracts for dangerous jobs in excavation, construction, diving, and so forth.

Which, Shampoo reflected, probably could be stretched to cover what Fei Long wants me for. "So, how are we going to do this?" she asked.

"First, we go back to my office, where I will outline the contract for you, Miss Shampoo, and ask you to foot the bill for half my fee, which I will also explain. At that point, I will also give examples that I have found online of similar agreements and run you through my previous experience with dangerous jobs. The two of you will come to an agreement on the specific monies to change hands, which I will then put into the final contract."

"Just Shampoo, please, and that sounds fine. How long will it take, and are you expecting to do anything else today?"

"I'd like to get some of your first scenes done today, get a feel for how well you respond to stage directions and can hold an expression, I think. Things like that and the non-combat scene will be the tougher scenes for you. The scenes where you're just standing around looking menacing, your scenes with Mili and the Big Bad as he's giving you orders. Are you sure you're going to be up for those combat scenes when the time comes, though?" Fei Long asked, not elaborating further.

The lawyer had no need to know about Shampoo's activities the night before, although the man hadn't brought up any questions about why Fei Long himself was rather bruised around the edges, so perhaps he would not have batted an eye. Regardless, Fei Long knew Shampoo had taken a few nasty bruises and at least one cut to her side the evening before. A piece of shrapnel from Ryuji's attack on the police Shampoo had been standing near had caught her, something even Shampoo hadn't been aware of until after she had felt her shirt becoming wet with blood a few moments after Yamazaki had finally been knocked out.

"I will be. Give me a day or to rest, and my injuries should be gone," Shampoo said proudly. While she had nowhere near the level of ki her husband did or the ability to consciously use her ki to heal wounds like he could, she did have some semblance of life healing. *Better than Mai's, I know that. She was still complaining about her thigh this morning.*

"Lucky you," Fei Long snorted. "I'm just thankful that all but the scenes where you and I will be fighting one another have been already finished."

"Including that same down at the docks? I thought Mili's over-acting kind of ruined it," Shampoo sneered.

"It did. Trust me, I scrapped the majority of that reel after Mili began overacting. We'll redo it with you taking her place, never fear. That scene's supposed to be the second of three massive fights. Although, that brings to mind that you'll also be meeting more of your coworkers today should we come to an agreement that is."

Shampoo rolled her eyes at that, not looking forward to butting heads with Mili. Not that she hated the other woman. Rather, she felt something approaching apathy towards Mili. At first, when Shampoo had gotten into a back-and-forth with the other woman, she had thought that maybe she could be a local rival, but that had been before she had seen Chun-Li in action and exchanged blows with the policewoman. Now, Shampoo saw Mili as little more than a nuisance. *Huh, I wonder, is this how Ranma felt about that Kuno character he told me about? Hmm... doubtful. He could at least do air pressure attacks. Mili's more likely to whimper about breaking a nail.*

Shampoo resolutely did not let her mind dwell on her lover, nodding politely over to the lawyer. "In that case, perhaps we should start exchanging information now?" she asked, grateful that Mai had convinced Ranma and her to get passports.

Thankfully, Fei Long was more than willing to pay for what he thought Shampoo's combat skills were worth rather than waiting to see what her acting skills were like. In his mind, it really wasn't even acting, simply standing around looking menacing, stoic, angry or nodding as she got orders. Any child could do those. Shampoo's character was simply a berserker with little to no redeeming qualities other than not wanting to kill anyone who couldn't fight back. Mili's character, in contrast, had become far more nuanced during the rewrite Fei Long's screenwriter had made since being informed of splitting Mili's character in two.

Apparently, the man had already been thinking along that road. The synergy of having two similar but different second-in-commands to Black Hand, the story's penultimate enemy, worked better than a single enforcer. Black Hand's own character was a bit of a blank, as he was just a run-of-the-mill Triad Boss. Take away his ruthlessness, and there wouldn't be a character at all. Which was what Fei Long wanted. That way, the viewer could put the face or background of any local street gang leader or thug in his place, and enjoy watching him come crashing down.

At any rate, the lack of lines and how little movement and real acting she needed to show meant that for the days when she wasn't being called on to fight, Shampoo would be paid almost as little as some of the stagehands. Shampoo was fine with that, feeling that the amount she would make during the combat scenes would offset that to a tremendous degree. Eventually, the contract was signed, and a connection was made from one of Fei Long's bank accounts to the account Shampoo and Ranma shared at MAB.

Fei Long lightly teased Shampoo on that score, as the limo took the pair of them away from the lawyer's office, both of them holding copies of the agreement, having left a third copy with the lawyer. "Honestly, I didn't think that you would be the kind to have a bank account already. You and Ranma have that ki space, so I figured you'd both just use that and keep all your money and everything else on you. I've also never heard of Mab before."

"Hah, if we didn't want to find anything else but cash in our ki spaces, that'd be fine. The more you organize your ki space, the more ki it takes. As for MAB, it's a very select bank," Shampoo explained with a giggle. At Fei Long's inquiring look, she stated, "Martial Arts Bank."

Fei Long stared at her blankly for a moment, then brought up the same point that had occurred to Ranma, if in a somewhat different format. "Don't tell me: they practice martial arts bookkeeping? That's honestly quite horrifying. All I can see in my head right now is some villain deciding to take over the world and being backed by a horde of ninja bankers."

"The world would never know what hit it," Shampoo giggled.

Across from her, Fei Long laughed along with the Amazon, reflecting that it was a pity that Shampoo was dating Ranma. The pair had made that very clear from the start, but finding a girl as good-looking as Shampoo who could also fight and was in his own age group? That was a rare diamond in the rough indeed. She was also Chinese, which was a bonus, and gave off more of a girl-next-door type of vibe than Mai, whose on-again, off-again moments of more mature sexuality had made Fei Long decide she wasn't his type. *Very much a look, but don't date that one. That, and she's Japanese.*

Fei Long didn't make a big point about it to Ranma or Mai, but he knew **lots** of people who had lost parents or grandparents during the occupation. Indeed, what little he'd been able to find out about his parents pointed to them dying in that conflict as well, with Fei Long being

left with friends first, then one of the many city-run orphanages. It wasn't a big deal to him, but it was certainly a consideration when it came to whom he would flirt with.

Shaking those thoughts off, Fei Long leaned forward eagerly, reaching into a cooler to one side to pull out water, tossing it to Shampoo before making sure the glass was up between him and the driver and the intercom off. "Now, tell me about what happened last night. Were there any martial artists there of any interest other than your companions? And did the Mad Dragon live up to his name? Is that who hurt Ranma like that?"

The conversation with the other martial artist in the limo had been nice. Even meeting with the same cosmetics and costume experts as the day before had been nice. Although Shampoo felt her new outfit, tight pants with bits cut out to either side and with metal braces for the lower legs and forearms, coupled with a top that looked like a sexualized version of a schoolgirl outfit, showed far too much skin. The shriek of "What is she doing here!?" which greeted Shampoo, as she walked into the studio where that day's shooting was going to occur, however, was anything but nice.

Wincing at the shriek that had reached heretofore octaves unknown to man, Shampoo saw Mili striding towards her.

Currently, she was dressed up like a cross between a biker chick and a secretary, her eyes glaring flintily at Shampoo through small circular wire-rim glasses, then over at Fei Long, an accusing finger twitching between the pair. "We have a contract, Fei Long! If you're thinking of replacing me with this backward hick just because she opened her--"

"Then it would be a better movie. I might not have your acting experience," Shampoo interrupted before the other woman said something that Shampoo would be forced to kill her for. No one could call an Amazon a whore without getting the beat down of their lives. She looked Mili up and down, making her opinion of that 'experience' plain with a sneer of derision. "But I wager I can perform my role just as well, if not better than you."

"We'll see about that!" Mili scoffed, but thankfully for her, she didn't try to insult Shampoo again. "Fei Long, seriously, what the hell? I thought you were running a real movie here, not a charity for the disadvantaged."

Or at least, not insult me in a way I can kill her for, Shampoo amended ruefully. "I'd challenge you for that, but not only would you not be much of a challenge, but you'd probably be complaining every second about how I can't target your face."

"Ladies, please. With all of the stoppages and other problems that the Triad's attempt at extorting me caused this movie, I literally can't afford to let the two of you wail on one another and put us even further back from our various deadlines. Hell, even after all the scenes are done, there's still the editing, the splicing and everything else. Mili, Shampoo is going to be

acting the role of your younger sister. You will retain the role of chief enforcer and aide to Mr. Hand and thus the main villain.”

Seeing Mili calm down slightly, Fei Long hurried on, getting all the explanations out quickly. “Your sister is going to be more of the combat mad berserker. She won’t be getting any words or anything like that. In fact, I’ve had the screenwriters work in a few lines to explain that, a few jokes at Shampoo’s expense at how she lost her tongue when she was younger. The two of you will be close, although you won’t really understand one another very well.”

“... Makes some sense, considering my character was sort of a weird dichotomy between a woman who wanted to challenge herself in every fight she could and someone who’d fallen into the darker side of life somewhat unwillingly. Let me guess, I came to Hong Kong originally to look for my sister, found her hanging out with a bad crowd and then found I liked some of the power I got in becoming an enforcer for the Black Hand?” Mili grumbled.

Fei Long nodded, thankful that Mili had been successfully diverted from making any more comments to Shampoo. “That’s essentially the gist of it. Instead of being an outright villain, you’ll be more of a tragic villainess.”

“I figured that when I received the new script this morning, I just hadn’t read through it all yet, just the changes to the scenes we were scheduled to do today. Believe me, if I hadn’t seen the possibility of you employing Little Miss Perfect here before, you’d be getting far more than an earful from me. At least her little followers aren’t here to get underfoot. How many re-shoots of the stuff we’ve already made are you thinking of?” Mili demanded, her tone suddenly turning professional, surprising Shampoo just a little bit.

“Not a lot outside of some of your longer scenes,” Fei Long wheedled, knowing Mili would like that, as it meant that Mili would be getting paid more. “Your meetings with Black Hand will have to be redone, although the others might need to be cut and spliced in a little bit. I’ll be going over that in greater detail with the director and the screenwriter over the next few days.” Fei Long gestured down to himself and the bruises dotting his body, particularly his face, and where a hint of wrapped bandages could be seen around his middle under his shirt. “As you can see, it’ll be a couple of weeks before I’m ready to do my part in any of the combat scenes.”

Mili blinked, looking at Fei Long, then over at Shampoo, taking in the sight of the few bruises that she was also sporting. “What, did you two already have a fight or something? That’s not exactly a good thing if you’re going to take this one on as some kind of **pet** project.”

The way that she emphasized the term ‘pet’ infuriated Shampoo to the point where she was about to punch the other woman’s head off her shoulders, but Fei Long had already been shaking his head before Mili finished speaking. “I got jumped at my apartment last night by some tougher-than-average Triad thugs. Shampoo’s injuries are her own to tell if she wants to. If not, then respect that too.” He glanced around at everyone else in sight, who had paused in

their work to watch the confrontation, drawn in by Mili's shriek. "That goes for all of you. Respect Shampoo's privacy or I'll let her deal with you."

"Well, whatever. If we're going to need to introduce my 'little sister' here, I suppose I should get started with the scene you rewrote for the day," Mili grumbled.

With that, the director, who had also been standing silently nearby, watching the conversation between the three anxiously, raised a megaphone to his lips. "You heard Mili! Lighting that one corner still isn't dark enough! I want it dark enough that someone can hide in it. New girl, that's your position. Steve, Frank, you better have the new lines memorized like you told me you did. Get into position."

Steve and Frank were the two actor's actual names. They were Americans who made a decent living acting like, well, quintessential gun-crazy Americans. Fei Long felt they were actually decent guys, although the looks they were giving Shampoo meant he'd have to talk to them again about boundaries.

"Mili, we'll take it from the top when you march into the office. Remember to look menacing when you stare down the bouncer outside the door and say you're 'I'm Expected. I'm always expected. Understand?' line. When you were practicing before, the glasses got in the way of your glare. If we don't get it within two tries, we'll ditch the glasses. I'm still not sold on them."

The actress nodded, tossing her hair arrogantly over her shoulders as she looked back at Shampoo. "You'll have the opportunity to watch a real actress at work, girl, be grateful."

"I've never said I was an actress or ever wanted to be one. I'm a martial artist." She looked pointedly down at Mili's chest before hefting her own chest just a little under her crossed arms. Given the outfit she was wearing, which she still felt the Triad assholes from the night before would have been pleased with, this easily showed the difference in how perky her chest was in comparison to Mili's, despite the fact that their outfits right now called for neither of them having bras. "And I know which one I would rather want to be."

Mili snarled at that but turned away, using the anger at Shampoo to get the first few moments of the scene right in the first take. After that, Shampoo was hurried onto the set, hidden in one of the shadows, awaiting her own debut.

OOOOOOO

Mai spent most of the day at the hospital in Ranma's room, watching over him. This wasn't always easy, as she had to convince several nurses one after another that they needed to change the nutrient bags feeding into Ranma. His body was going through it at an alarming rate. Even once convinced that, yes, the bag was empty, the nurses were astonished that he hadn't

yet had to go to the bathroom. "It's like his body's just soaking it all in somehow," one of them observed, frowning. "I don't think he's even needed to piss since we operated on him."

"You just want a chance to check out his man bits again, you horny bitch," the second nurse taunted, rolling her eyes as she replaced the nutrient bag. The blood bag had already been replaced. "Although it is really odd. We'll need to maybe keep an eye on that."

When she wasn't with Ranma, Mai was out getting booklets, brochures, and other things of that nature, mostly to help plan for the future. Between them and the laptop that she had bought back before their winter in the state park, she looked for martial arts styles and schools that they could go to, traveling further south along China's shoreline, then over to Hainan, from where they would make for the Philippines, as the three of them had decided they wanted to do.

Leaning back, several hours after she had finished planning out their route, Mai smirked slightly, looking over at Ranma. "You'll be pleased, Ranma. Most of these places we'll be stopping in to look up specific martial arts schools also have famous local dishes. The idea of sticking to the coastline is a good one, too, even if we don't end up buying a ship of our own."

She'd actually started on that aspect of planning for the future first, only to come away somewhat annoyed, wishing that she had thought of grabbing some of the money from the Yamazaki's safe the evening before, even if it might've gotten her into a bit of trouble with the police if she had. Even a small yacht, the kind that could be maintained and driven by three people, but which also had enough storage space for food aplenty, was more expensive than she had thought it would be.

Still searching did allow me to narrow down what kind of yacht they could buy and actually make use of a few. After all, they would need one that could also act like a sailboat just in case, and while Ranma had mentioned he felt he could learn how to control sails, it needed to have controls that Mai, the only one of the three with a driver's license, could use to control the vessel.

That narrowed it down a lot, especially here in Hong Kong. *I didn't know that they actually built yachts here, but I'm glad they do*, she thought before shaking her head. "Still, unless Shampoo gets paid a lot more than I think she will, then I'm afraid we're going to have to really rely on you beating Ken in that sparring match you both agreed to in the future."

Mai shook her head then, chuckling quietly to herself, wondering about how much her life had changed since the day Ranma and Shampoo had snuck up on her as she had been chasing her great uncle over the rooftops. *It's not even been a year, but now, I don't think I would really like my life without the pair of them in it. Strange to think about it like that. I dated Andy for more than two years, but I think, looking back on it, Ranma and Shampoo had a much bigger impact on my life than he did. Now, I don't think I could be living a better life than simply traveling with my two best friends, learning martial arts and growing together like that. Screw*

Andy and his dumbass machismo! The next time I meet him, I'm going to have gotten so good I can knock him flat!"

Mai smiled cheerfully. "Heh, I bet you'd be right there cheering me on, wouldn't you? You and Shampoo both." Her smile faded after a moment as she looked over at Ranma. Reaching out, Mai gently squeezed the hand nearest her, mirroring how Shampoo had been holding his hand earlier that day. "But to do that, you need to get back on your feet, Ranma. You can't laze about here for weeks on end. We'd both miss you way too much for that to be a good thing."

With a final smile, Mai stood up, squeezing Ranma's hand one last time before heading towards the doorway. "I think, though, right now it's time for me to partake in your second favorite pastime...or is it third, considering how much you like to make out with Shampoo? Whatever, food beckons. Heh, I wonder if the smell of some good food will wake you out of your coma the way just being fed scentless nutrients hasn't."

To Mai's surprise, she ran into Shampoo on the way back up to Ranma's room. The two of them spent the rest of the night there with Ranma, neither of them going back to the hotel as Mai had thought she would. Shampoo wasn't about to leave Ranma after having been out for most of the day and well into the evening, and Mai had to admit, now that it came to it, the idea of going back to their hotel and staying there on her own was unappealing in the extreme.

Instead, they stayed up late into the night as Shampoo described the acting process, as well as her various confrontations with Mili. All of these had been verbal clashes so far, but Shampoo was very certain that it was only a matter of time before one or the other snapped, and she was very much looking forward to putting her 'sister' in her place. "Although I have to say, the plot of the movie's kind of interesting, from what I can follow. The scenes I was in today were all over the place, and I don't think they were connected in order or anything."

In return, Mai told Shampoo what she had been up to, and Shampoo, with some reluctance, admitted that even with the generous salary that she would be getting once the fight scene started, they'd still be well below the amount of money needed to buy a ship. And since none of them had any long-term source of income, it was doubtful they'd be able to get a loan, even here in Hong Kong, where the rules of such things were very loose in comparison to back in Japan. Even Mai's allowance from home had stopped on her request when they left, and that allowance was nowhere near large enough to add significantly to their bank accounts.

It really did look as if they would have to rely on Ken for the money necessary, but thankfully, Mai met with Ryu and Ken the very next day. Or rather, the pair of them found the hospital where Ranma had been hidden and stopped in about an hour after Shampoo had left the next morning. The life of an actress apparently wasn't all about being lazy in the mornings, as magazines had seemingly made Shampoo think.

When the pair of martial artists entered, both of them still looked as battered as they had been when they had bowed out of the tournament two nights ago, and Mai smiled at them a little smugly as they took in her entirely not battered form with obvious jealousy. "Seriously need to learn ki healing," Ryu grumbled, shaking his head.

"I'm not an expert on it, so don't look to me for any instruction. Although I'd wager that both of you already have some ki healing of your own, or else you wouldn't be able to move so easily. Just the pain of the injuries you'd taken would be keeping you at home at least," Mai pointed out. "Besides, there's also Master Oro, who might know something about it." *Although, Ranma was the first person I've ever met who knew how to do it.*

"True that, but hey, at least our injuries were taken for a good cause," Ken joked as he lounged in the other guest chair next to Mai, not close enough to be annoying but close enough to make it clear she was his priority rather than the unconscious Ranma, while Ryu sat on Ranma's other side. "I don't think undercover work is for Ryu or me, but I was able to take a good deal of pictures that will make it very difficult for certain people to weasel their way out of things. And even if they do, I still have copies of the pictures. A few words to the right people, and they might find going back to their own perspective countries just as bad as staying here and trying the foreign national card."

He smirked then, reaching into a bag he had carried in handing it over to Mai. "By the way, here you go. That's your cut of the money I made betting on you, Shampoo, and Ranma. Heh, I figured one of you would throw your match, and I got lucky when it was Shampoo."

"You don't have to give this to me, you know. It was your own money you wagered with," Mai protested, making to hand the money back to him. While it would undoubtedly help their war chest, it didn't feel right just to take the other man's money like that, not when he had been the one to make it.

"Keep it. Honestly, money is just a way of keeping score for me when it comes to tournaments like this. Besides, I didn't give you all of it, just a twenty-percent cut, just as much as a fighter would get from his bosses in most underground fighting pits. I figure since you all were the ones fighting those matches, that made sense." Ken waved his hand airily.

"I wouldn't argue with Ken about this. He also bet on my matches, and he basically had to force the money on me. I'm even worse than Ken when it comes to money. He doesn't care about money because he has so much of it that Ken would struggle to spend it all if he tried."

"True," Ken grinned. "I mean, most of it's locked behind boards of trustees and my parent's control, but yeah, I'll coming into a lot of money," Ken said with absolutely no shame or false modesty.

Rolling his eyes at his friend's attitude, Ryu went on. "Me, I just don't think it's all that important."

"Really, you don't think money is all that important? And you wearing that ratty gi, I would never have guessed," Mai snarked, before changing the topic. "Well, thanks, Ken. This will be nice to add to our accounts. What are the two of you up to?"

"Long-term or short-term? Short-term, we both need time to rest and recuperate from the fights we had. Thankfully, Master Oro's permitted us to stay with him at his temple. He just demanded we do the cleaning and cooking while we're there," Ryu explained.

"Which has already proven something of an irritant. For a monk, he's got some pretty demanding requests for meals, not so much in terms of expense, but in how any food in his temple should be prepared," Ken interjected. "But I suppose that his help with meditating and growing our ki reserves makes up for that. Although when we leave, I've already decided I'm going to have a nice spa day, a massage and a lie-in before we head on. That old asshole demands we sleep on the floor, and I had too much of that with Master Gouken."

"Darn straight!" Ryu laughed, although Mai was certain Ryu agreed with only the first half of what Ken had said, and the black-haired man's next words bore that out. "I hope the pair of us are able to spam Hadokens by the time we leave. If there are monsters like that Ryuji guy out there, we'll have to get stronger to challenge them."

"You and Ranma are so alike it's not even funny," Mai laughed aloud, looking between Ryu and the bed for a moment. "I'm already imagining him saying something along those lines. Not that there's anything wrong with that thought process." *And I am NOT looking forward to restarting the Toughness Training. We weren't getting much out of it the way we were doing it before, so how is Ranma going to make it even harder on us?*

"You have my condolences, traveling with another meathead like this one," Ken joked, smirking over at his friend, who gave him the finger back. Honestly, Mai wondered how these two had become such close friends. Just being students of the same martial arts master didn't explain it.

"After that, the pair of us have decided to head to Thailand," Ken continued, turning back to Mai. "That style that used more knee and elbow strikes, Muay Thai? Neither of us has run into something like that before, and given the fight my opponent gave me, I think researching it in its own homeland would be a great idea."

Mai nodded thoughtfully, thinking of the two Muay Thai fighters that she and Shampoo had fought. *If the pair of them hadn't been taken by surprise and were able to gang up on us one-on-one, they could've given us a run for our money. And then there's why two Thailanders were there in the first place, packaging and cataloging all those relics from China's past. Now, some of those I really regret not taking. And I know that Shampoo snuck that one article about Amazons out in her ki space. Not that I'm about to sell her out to Chun-Li. Not even if it comes up missing in their investigation. I'll tell them that it was already gone, she thought. Friendship is way more important than the law.*

Aloud, Mai said, "Just be careful when you're there. Remember, he was a gangster and one of several. There might've been some kind of underground exchange going on there, to say nothing of the antiquities that Shampoo and I found."

That demanded more of an explanation since neither of the other martial artists had heard about that before. Mai gave it to them from the start, explaining how she and Shampoo had run into two fighters similar to the one that Ryu had faced, as well as what they had been up to. Although neither of them was Chinese, the idea of stealing cultural artifacts like that irritated both young men, although it had to be said the idea of criminals doing it and making money off the sales was even worse. Both of them promised to watch out for the criminal element when they got to Thailand.

"I've actually already done some research," Ryu confessed. "One way or another, we might run into trouble there with the criminal underground simply because the best Muay Thai fighter is named Sagat, and he's apparently serving time in a prison somewhere. An opponent taunted him at the wrong time, and apparently, he forgot to pull his punches."

"Because they don't actually use many outright punches," Ken added jokingly before cocking his head thoughtfully at Mai. "What about you? Ranma and Shampoo I get and what their plans are. Hell, there's a part of me that thinks it's amazingly romantic to travel the world with your significant other like that. But aren't you a little worried about being, well, left out? I know I would in your place."

"As if you have anything to worry about there. Your attempts to set me up on dates occasionally should have told you that," Ryu muttered.

"You could come with the two of us, you know. We certainly won't try to shut you out like a pair of lovers would. And who knows, maybe you'll find I'm better company," Ken said, half teasing, half serious as he ignored his friend's interjection. He wasn't certain if Mai was the kind of girl he'd date long-term. Indeed, when Ken pictured a girl he'd date for the long term, the type he'd bring home to meet his parents, being a martial artist did not enter into his mind. Yet despite that, Ken felt Mai would be a fun girl to get to know.

Mai shook her head with a chuckle. "Remember, I told you I was already in a relationship for several years. I'm in no mood whatsoever to get into another relationship with someone."

Well, another portion of her mind reflected, *that's not exactly correct*, something Mai had to acknowledge. Mai did want to be in a relationship, to be loved and love someone in turn. Beyond even the physical side, the emotional aspect of being with someone appealed to her greatly, simply being in a relationship with someone rather than doing anything physical with them. To laugh, hug, lean on, cuddle, argue about what movies to watch, wake up next to, that kind of thing. Everything she'd initially had with Andy until her body changed and he began to be more distant and what she had thought of as shy at the time.

But Ken is definitely not my type.

Mai very carefully hid a twitch of surprise as that last thought percolated through her mind. *Wait, do I actually **have** a type?* For just an instant, the image of Ranma appeared in her mind, but it disappeared entirely too quickly for her conscious mind to notice. Instead, she concluded the thought with, *Although, I doubt it's surprising that my subconscious has sworn off Americans entirely.*

While Ken mimed injury as he shook his head, saying it wasn't like that at all, Ryu turned his attention to something else entirely. "What was that last technique Ranma used? You told us you didn't know what it was when we described the effect to you, but surely you have some idea of where he began to train for it."

"Honestly, I have no idea. The Blue Burst is an easy one to explain, although it hilariously began simply as a way to get out of ropes and other bindings."

Here, Mai snickered a bit. "For a while, he couldn't control the technique. He fought this other girl once, and when he released his technique, it shredded her clothing rather than doing any real injury. But the sheer power of the Blue Burst he released against Yamazaki was way beyond anything Ranma's ever shown before. As for how Yamazaki's blows stuck to Ranma, I have no idea."

She laughed suddenly. "Though, I'd wager practically anything that Ranma didn't have any idea of it either. Ranma's the best when it comes to learning during a fight between the three of us, so it makes some sense that he might've made that aspect up on the fly."

Ranma hadn't shared his discovery when training with Jubei with Mai or Shampoo, wanting to push the different aspects of his original Blue Burst along to the point he had something to show for it. Thus, even Shampoo hadn't been able to explain Ranma's strange last-ditch attack.

Ryu slowly smiled at that. "That's cool. That's how I learn best, too, although I don't think I have enough ki control to do what he did." He smirked over at his companion. "I don't suppose I could convince you to let me take your place for your spar with Ranma. I bet we could both learn a lot from a spar. And I saw him first."

"Yeah, no. Me first, bro. I'm the one who challenged him, after all," Ken caroled, shaking his head with a wry grin. "You don't get jealous of the personal airplane or any of the rest of the trappings of my money. You don't get jealous of my good looks or anything else, but now, you're getting jealous at the fact that I'm going to fight Ranma first. Have you seriously considered you might be a masochist?"

"Nope, sounds perfectly logical to me," Ryu snorted. "I know precisely how many hours a night you spend on research and stuff to keep your parents happy. I'd rather get a few extra hours of sleep."

"Well, anyway. Do you think you and Shampoo will be able to meet up with us for some food later?" Ken questioned, ignoring how on the nose that comment was. "I was serious earlier when I mentioned that Oro requires his meal to be cooked in a certain fashion and most of it is so bland and uninteresting you think you're eating gruel."

Mai agreed with that, and Ryu shifted forward, leaning forward eagerly. "So, besides stopping what amounted to an antiquities heist from China as a whole, what else did you and Shampoo run into after you bowed out of the tournament?"

For some reason, the memory of sharing a shower with Shampoo came to Mai's mind just then. The image of the curves of the other woman, wet from the water of the shower, stuck in Mai's mind, causing her to shiver. But again, just like the earlier image of Ranma, her conscious mind quickly ignored it as she began to explain more about how much trouble she and Shampoo had caused the local Triad. "Well, after knocking out this old pervert, we..."

OOOOOOO

Five days later, Mai made the conscious decision that since neither she nor Shampoo had shown any inclination to stay in the hotel for more than a few hours to use the facilities, they didn't need to keep paying for it. She spent most of that evening checking out and then grabbing her stuff, Shampoo's and Ranma's, from the room and bringing it over to the hotel. This task was made far harder than it would normally have been because of the sheer amount of traffic that Hong Kong sought in an evening. Not that the traffic actually slowed her down much, but the need to stay out of sight as she roof-hopped was somewhat annoying.

The reason for this was a call from Chun-Li that morning. Apparently, someone had begun to spread video recordings of Shampoo and Mai's rampage through the underground base among the somewhat leaderless Triad. This had been paired with a photo that, according to Chun-Li, "Has to have come from someone in the police department from the angle of it," which showed Shampoo and Mai after they had changed out of the costumes they'd worn the night before and connected them to the fight in the bar. "

It isn't definitive they've connected the dots yet, but you might want to keep a low profile. I've also doubled the amount of guards outside Ranma's room, just in case," Chun-Li had warned them. "There's more talk also about getting 'revenge for the Mad Dragon' than I ever expected, too."

Returning to the hospital, Mai let Shampoo, newly returned from a day of 'acting', vent at her a bit. This had become something of a daily occurrence, but each day, Shampoo had a unique gripe to share, so it hadn't become repetitive.

“Although, really, it’s more just standing around looking either bored or furious than acting. I swear that the director is trying to make me look like some kind of combat-crazy bimbo who only comes alive when the fists are flying. Ugh, standing around and looking angry and dangerous is one thing. Standing around and looking like I don’t know a potato from a turnip, that’s entirely another! Although, I will have to say that staying silent other than grunts or baring my teeth is interesting.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Mai soothed. “Although, if you want to come back here during the day and work out some frustrations, the room next door is empty completely because we moved the two cots from there into here. It’s not much space, but we could have some light spars in there,” Mai supplied.

Shampoo thought that was a good idea, and the two of them powered up Mai’s laptop, arguing lightly about what kind of movie to watch before they fell asleep. Their beds pushed together to one side of Ranma’s, the laptop set between them.

Another week passed before the two of them had some time to hang out in the morning as Shampoo was only due in at the set in the afternoon. To celebrate, they decided to go out for an American-style breakfast at a nearby McDonald’s.

Returning to the hospital room alone, Mai found herself envying Shampoo a little. While she complained a lot about needing to stand around and simply look menacing, it was still more interesting than staying here with Ranma, who had yet to even stir beyond draining ten times the amount of nutrient and blood packs that he should have been able to.

The locals had noticed this, of course. In the past few days, the nurses had remarked several times in Mai’s hearing that his wounds seemed to be healing at an accelerated rate compared to a normal person. This included his internal injuries, which, astonishing the doctors to the point they came around and poked and prodded at him, were almost entirely healed as if it had been months rather than weeks.

“So that’s good at least, but what to do with myself, while you keep on playing coma patient,” Mai murmured, her tone attempting to be tart as she closed the door after shooing the doctors out. Her face softened somewhat as she moved some of the hair off of Ranma’s forehead for a second before shaking her head, moving away, and powering up her laptop again. “I’ve put up with it before this, but it’s getting to the point where I’m bored out of my gourd. Hmm...maybe there’s a job I can do around here. I’d wager I could convince Ken and Ryu to pay me to cook for them over at their dojo, if nothing else.”

“I would not allow them to hire you, I am afraid. Cooking for this old man is helping to teach them harmony and balance, as well as patience.”

“EEEEK!” Mai nearly jumped out of her shirt, staring across at Oro as she leaped back over her chair, her laptop flipping through the air as she grabbed at her fans from her ki space. “What? How did you...?”

Oro snapped a kick up and over the sleeping Ranma, catching Mai’s laptop on his foot so lightly that the laptop balanced on one of its corners for a second on the top of his foot. It remained there until Mai, rather sheepishly, put her fans away and reached out, grabbing it and mumbling thank you under her breath. Oro simply chuckled, waving her words off with his working hand.

“I am an old man, and moving quietly is a skill one can perfect to a truly incredible degree if one has the time and patience to do so. And you were too busy mumbling to yourself to hear me coming after dealing with those so-called doctors. Bah, as if modern medicine is the be-all and end-all. Regardless, I don’t think mumbling is a habit you should get into, my dear,” Oro chuckled.

Then he turned his gaze down to Ranma, staring down at him thoughtfully for a moment before his eyes slowly shut.

It looked almost like he was meditating or something. Mai could faintly feel, or sense or see, she really wasn’t certain about the nomenclature here, that his ki was doing something, but what it was, Mai had no idea. She waited several moments respectfully, turning off her laptop and setting it aside. “I apologize for my reaction to your arrival honored elder, but what are you doing here?”

Hidden below the side of the bed, Mai was prepared to reach into her secondary ki pocket again at the small of her back. She had no idea why Oro was interested in Ranma or if that interest might equate to him trying to fight Ranma, but stranger things had happened. *And he’s a former friend of the pervert who apparently started Ranma’s original school.*

Oro opened his eyes, smiling slightly. “Ryuji Yamazaki was far more than he might have seemed to you all. I heard about what happened from Ryu and Ken. How Ranma faced him. How he used a strange technique to drain some of the ki from Ryuji. Even now, I can see ki within him, slowly building up, being funneled away to his injuries every time it reaches a point where it can be used thusly. But it will only be a matter of time until Ranma is fully well again, a truly amazing thing after fighting someone like that.”

“So it is simply interest?” Mai asked suspiciously. “You seem more worried than anything else. And if you knew about Ryuji...”

“I said he was far more than he might have seemed, but that does not equate to truly important in terms of the world. When one becomes my age, you understand that such people come and go, no matter how high they reach or how low they fall.” Waving Mai’s last words off thusly, Oro frowned faintly, raising his one working hand to tap thoughtfully on his chest in a

prayer position for several seconds before deciding to tell this young woman what he could. "As for why he was more... at times, a person's ki can become... infected. Not just colored by emotions, but infected by madness, to the point where their very life force is tainted by their bloodlust, becoming that of a beast rather than a man."

"And Ryuji was like that?"

"Correct. It might have been something spiritual that Yamazaki came in contact with himself when young or simply a result of his own psychopathy. But Yes. I and those like me who have made a study of the spiritual side of ki call this the Dark Hado. Others call it other things. Indeed, I heard recently that some young upstart from Africa or Germany, someplace like that, calls it psycho energy. While an apt term, I much prefer the older term," Oro explained.

"..." Mai was anything but stupid, and she understood where the other man was going instantly. "You thought this Dark Hado could somehow infect Ranma when he took it in?"

"Both the energy and the blood of people who have fallen deeply into the Dark Hado act almost like some kind of infection occasionally, yes. It would then take a great deal of meditation or spiritual strength to overcome it and it is not something that any outsider could help with." Oro closed his eyes again, and this time, Mai watched intently, saying nothing, her fans in her hand again, clenched to the point the wood of the handle was creaking audibly to her ears in the silence of the hospital room.

Eventually, Oro spoke up again. "Ranma, however, seems to be entirely clear of it. He took in Ryuji's energies but instantly expelled all of it, not keeping even a sliver of it for himself. I'd like to call that an astonishing amount of control for one so young, but I wonder really if it is simply chance or an instinctive desire to be as thorough as possible when powering his last technique."

Oro's tone was dry and almost dismissive, yet there was both relief and far less concern in it now, and Mai finally relaxed as he continued. "I will want to speak to him, though. Both about the last attack he used and the initial run-up to it as described to me by Ryu and Ken. Both of them did a remarkable job of doing so, and I can safely say that it is a style that I have only heard described in one or two ancient texts, and even then only in passing despite..." and here, Oro chuckled a bit, "That it has actually remained in the mythology of China enough to occasionally show up in Wuxia films. It is a fascinating style, but one that perhaps Ranma needs to think about in greater depth."

"I think you'll find greater depth and Ranma don't really go together very well, although, admittedly, this is about the art, so maybe," Mai said with a laugh.

"Oy, why am I taking shots when I can barely open my eyes, let alone defend myself? That's cold, Mai," Ranma groaned, his voice more of a croak than anything, thanks to a mixture of dryness from lack of water and the accumulated pain he was in.

Yet he was waking up, something that even Mai and Shampoo hadn't thought he'd be able to do for another few days. Mai wondered for a moment if Oro had done something, but right now was too happy to care.

"Oh, hush. You know it's true. And Shampoo certainly wouldn't have you any other way. I know I wouldn't." Flushing a bit at that last sentence escaped before she could cut it off. Mai moved on hastily, leaning over the bed and holding a glass of water to Ranma's lips, wondering why she'd added that last bit and hoping that Ranma hadn't noticed.

Thankfully, he hadn't and seemed to concentrate to the exclusion of all else on draining the cup as Mai continued. "And as for what you were up to when you collapsed, if we say that a fight can be decided by who walks away, I think you might declare yourself the winner of that fight, Ranma. You might've gone down first, but you're walking, and Yamazaki sure as heck isn't. We captured him alive, but the police have basically decided that he's going to be kept souped-up on so many drug cocktails he can't tell the taste of ginger from the color blue until it's time for his execution."

Ranma actually felt a little shiver of fear going through him, when Mai said Ryuji was still alive, as if the very idea of Ryuji still being out there horrified him. And in a way, it did. Ranma had never faced an opponent that was so far above him physically before. *Honda, sure, the Yokozuna could have absorbed nearly anything that I threw at him, but I had a massive edge on agility and overall speed. If it came down to it, I could've outlasted Honda-san, concentrating on his knees and elbows and fingers until something gave.* Terry Bogard might have had more ki attacks, but Ranma was way more durable. The other fighters in the tournament? Some of them had interesting techniques and could punch as hard as Ryoga did, but that was about it.

*Yamazaki was the whole **fucking** package. Stronger than me by a wide margin. Fast enough to keep up with me, if not quite up to Amaguriken level. **Way** more durable. It was like my blows weren't doing jack shit to him most of the time. And so much more ki it's not even funny. Worse was I couldn't get a read on his style **at all**! It was all just raw instinct.*

In other words, Ryuji had been a monster, one that Ranma would never have been able to defeat without his trick at the end. *And, if that wasn't enough, I'd have only maybe taken him with me. Yamazaki could've killed me with a single heel stomp at that point.*

However, Ranma had an image to maintain, and even though Mai and Oro could both tell from his eyes and the slight downturn of his lips that he didn't really mean it, he tried to sound upbeat as he replied. "Well, I doubt the bookies saw it that way, and I sure as hell don't look back on it either. But I suppose I'll take the good with the bad here."

"Young man, before you fall asleep once more, and I can tell you will soon, we must speak about your new technique," Oro declared firmly. *I did not wake you up via a subtle ki jolt to your system so I could watch you flirt with your second girlfriend, after all.*

“Style,” Ranma nearly whispered, his eyes already closing, although he roused when Mai held another glass of water against his lips. “Toned down, it might become the basis of my personal style. Not so much the ki draining technique, as the ki connection technique, bind yer enemies to you for a split second, drag a hand or arm out of position just long enough, ta, ta take advantage.”

“It certainly sounds interesting, although I think you will find it is far less dangerous in that fashion. Regardless, you need to be careful.” Oro reached forward and gently cupped Ranma’s face with his finger. Long, gnarly fingers they were, but powerful for all of that, turning Ranma’s head towards the older man instead of the ceiling. “Ryuji was truly insane, psychotic down to his very soul. There are others like him. And occasionally, some of them have gone so far off the deep end, as you youngsters would put it, that they’re very soul energy is filled with their vileness. If you are not careful, if you take in too much of such, it could impact your own Hado negatively.”

Ranma’s eyes widened slightly, even as his body demanded he sleep, his mind going into overdrive. “I... I felt something from him, like being around a rabid animal, only it got a hell of a lot worse when he started to use his ki. Is that what you’re talking about?”

“It is. And it is why, young man, when you awake next, we will be talking about what you call ki, and your use of it in general. Your techniques are fascinating, and I haven’t seen any sign of it yet, but I must make sure that you, after having such a close brush with someone like Ryuji, are not prone to using emotional Hado. Such would be a small stepping stone to such darkness.”

Ranma slowly nodded, and then, using the last vestige of his energy, he groaned out, “Mai... more, more vitamins, or wha, whatever, they call...zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz...” With that, he fell asleep mid-word, falling back into a dreamless sleep.

Watching him fall asleep, Oro smiled faintly. Just like Ryu and Ken, Ranma seemed a decent individual in the main. However, it would be interesting to speak with him in more depth in the future.

0000000

The leader of the criminal empire of Shadaloo stared at the video, humming thoughtfully to himself. The video showed a fight between an unknown opponent and Ryuji Yamazaki, the Mad Dragon of Hong Kong. It was not from the assassin that they had sent to deal with Ryuji but rather from a handler that his Fang Fei lieutenant had put in place to make certain that the mad Spaniard didn’t go entirely off the rails. Shadaloo wanted to take over the Triad’s network, after all, not gut it. This had happened occasionally in the past when his opponent was far too ugly or so beautiful that, in the Spaniard’s opinion, he or she challenged the egomaniac’s own beauty and thus, everything the target had built up needed to die with them.

I always find it amusing that the Spaniard reacts the same in either event. As if, in his mind, being better looking than him is the same thing as being ugly. Yet the Spaniard cannot see the sophistry in that, the man named Fang Fei thought, amused as always by the mental instability among many of the individuals that his Lord had gathered to himself. "I think it's clear from this recording that we underestimated Ryuji Yamazaki, Lord Bison."

"Yes. Vega would not have been enough. Indeed, even if we had sent Balrog to aid him, they might have lost. Neither have a good enough grasp of Psycho Energy to face this man. It is good then that this police raid captured Yamazaki, which..." M. Bison, creator of the Psycho Power and future ruler of the world, paused, fast-forwarding through the fight for a moment, directly to the end, where Ryuji was dealt with by a series of blows from different combatants. Including the other target that the Spaniard had been assigned in Hong Kong. "Was led by Chun-Li herself. Now, is that a delicious slice of irony."

He clicked the recording closed for a second and enlarged Fang Fei's face on the screen, the better to glare at the man. "Tell me that Yamazaki's demise is going to let us cut into the slavery network in Asia faster than we would otherwise have been able to."

"It will, but there will be commensurate risks for a time," Fang Fei answered instantly, quickly bringing up a map of China.

As if, Bison thought, he had anticipated that question. *Good help is worth its weight in gold.*

For several moments, Fang Fei spoke of how wide-reaching the Triad's net had been throughout China and how elsewhere, Shadaloo had already begun to infiltrate and take it over. Unfortunately, Hong Kong had been the main distribution point from China's underground out into the rest of the world. "It was also **easily** the most lucrative of the smalltime underground fight rings. You well know that three of the Dolls from the latest batch came from there. Whereas, we've not gotten one from the rest of Asia bar that one woman who bit off her own tongue."

"True." Bison glanced over his shoulder towards the door, where two extremely gorgeous women in skintight outfits with masks covering their faces stood, back straight, arms behind them at the small of their backs like soldiers at parade rest. One was short, barely coming up to his waist when he stood, almost boyish in appearance except for her hips. The other was almost as tall as Bison, with a very womanly figure but also with massively built-up arms.

These two were from one of the first batches of Dolls that he had remade. They were women whose original personalities had been completely subsumed by a second personality embedding it into their minds through the use of indoctrination via technology, chemicals and adroit use of his psycho power on their minds. The women at the door were simple soldiers, the indoctrination on them not deep or malleable enough to make them useful in any other

manner, but still incredibly good soldiers, with all the powers of a high-level martial artist coupled with weapons training in guns, demolition and so forth.

Later batches of Dolls were far, far more than simple blunt tools. Even ones so capable.

“So you’re saying we will need to be wary of this investigation spreading out from Hong Kong and, further, that we will need to shift the network enough to distribute elsewhere.”

Bison himself began to manipulate the map, putting in some more information that Fang Fei didn’t have on hand, including weapons deals that Bison was involved with and the purchase of certain heavy metals that he was also involved in from both China and Russia. After a few moments, Bison leaned back, eyes narrowed thoughtfully while Fang Fei went over the now changed map. “Going through Myanmar into Russia and vice-versa seems to be the best way. But, even that...”

“Might I make a suggestion, sir?”

Bison cocked an eyebrow, nodding his head. *Once more, Fang proves his worth. There are so very few among my followers who have the backbone to put forth their own suggestions rather than wait for me to make a decision.*

“I think that we should perhaps wash our hands of the entire slave trade in Asia for at least half a year. The news coming out of Hong Kong has been **hammering** that aspect of the Triad’s uncovered dealings, and I recently received a report that South Korea’s government has also begun to crack down on the small tendrils of Yamazaki’s recruitment network that was in South Korea. And the new chairman for the Communist Party in China is...”

“Ah, yes, I had forgotten. The new Chairman is looking for a new stick to batter his opponents with, isn’t he? Several of whom are indeed involved in the Triad’s business elsewhere. Very well.” Bison decided quickly, “The slave trade itself is admittedly quite lucrative, but it is not a particularly large portion of Shadaloo’s pie. Finding women for the Doll Program was really the reason why we started to get into that trade in the first place. Can we keep any investigation into the rest of the Triad across China from connecting them to us?”

“There will be a certain amount of bodies that we will need to leave behind, but yes. I already have a few agents on hand, including two of the Dolls you graciously sent to me recently, who can see to that deed.” Fang Fei bowed his head in thanks. “Even better, there are mid-tier bosses throughout China who we have also made significant inroads in two bringing to our side, and they can step up easily enough to help keep the weapons and exotic metals trade we require going when the government removes their bosses. We will need to provide some money and other resources, but that is cheap for the price.”

With a grunt of approval, Bison shrank Fang Fei's face down again, rewinding the video and watching it from the beginning. "The two women would've made good products for the Doll program. But there are three fighters here that are intriguing."

Bison paused the recording, cutting out a copy of it, specifically Genma Wudang's battle with Yamazaki. He then did the same to Ryan Sugimoto and Jason Vorhees. "It's a pity that the software engineers haven't figured out a way to come up with facial recognition software that is good enough to see through disguises."

"They are all certainly using disguises, yes, including the two women," Fang Fei agreed. "Personally, I only thought that the one that fought Ryuji was interesting."

"I recognize the style these two are using," Bison explained his interest in Vorhees and Sugimoto. "Ansatsuken, one of the deadliest martial arts out there. These two seem to have learned the less dangerous version, but one can jump from one to the other." *And there is already one monster out there using Satsui no Hado. I will not allow another to be born.* "They could be dangerous in the future and will be worth watching. Are there any hints that any of these three were involved in the raid?"

"Not as yet, my Lord. There are rumors that the two female fighters, Mu Dai and Su Lin, were involved, but whether or not that was because they figured out what was going on and fought back during the 'cultivation process' or as part of a previous plan made by the police is unknown. There doesn't seem to be any connection that I can find between any of the male fighters and the police, although obviously, as you can see, the other two male fighters stepped in when Yamazaki began to lash out at the crowd."

"Which can be explained away by simple self-interest. True. Although, those names sound somewhat Amazonian. I remember how much trouble we had with that Amazon we tried to brainwash to become a Doll. It was rather annoying having to liquidate her," Bison hummed thoughtfully, restarting the recording, watching the battle against Yamazaki from beginning to end. The youth's style was highly adaptable and incredibly mobile, yet he also seemed to have a high amount of endurance for one so young. *Again, just like the other two who know Ansatsuken, this one might bear watching. Especially, given that last technique. That was quite deadly and immensely powerful. Why did he keep such power in reserve? Was it simple desperation that allowed him to push through and unleash his soul energy like that?*

"Would you like me to assign specific watchers to these youngsters?" Fang Fei questioned. "While all of my agents on the underground side of things have been forced to either lay low or simply give themselves up until we can free them, I do have one or two individuals on the legal side of things that can--"

"No," Bison cut his lieutenant off. "You pointed it out yourself. Hong Kong is a beehive that has been kicked over at the moment. We would lose far more than we would gain in that. If the Spaniard kills Chun-Li, well and good. Message sent. If not, then we will need to take direct

action against the good detective when he leaves America in a few weeks. Beyond that, these youths are curiosities, nothing more. The one that crippled Ryuji got lucky, as even his final attack would not have been enough to win him the day. Besides..."

Bison smiled at the Fang Fei, a thin, almost dangerous smile. "Others will certainly take an interest in them. The German, the Polish and our newest and most reluctant acquaintance in Thailand. I am certain that one or more will be following up on events like this once they become aware of them. We will see them again in some tournament or other down the line."

OOOOOOO

When next Ranma woke up, nearly five more days had passed. He had a little more energy than he had before, and keeping his eyes closed for a moment, he concentrated on feeling it out. Most of his most egregious wounds were already healed if, he felt, still tender. It would probably be another day or so before his insides were really as good as new, let alone the various bruises and broken bones he'd taken.

Buddah, Ryuji really did a number on me, didn't he? I mean, I knew it at the time, but this is... oof. If not for all the training in ki healing I got thanks to the old man, and, as much as I hate to say it, Akane bashing me upside the head every time I turned around, I'd probably be crippled. Well, that and the toughness training. Without that, I'd probably have died in the first few seconds of that match.

That thought brought a real shiver down Ranma's spine. *Fuck, I came so damn close to dying... that's... well, if I didn't want to get stronger before, I sure as fuck do now. The next time I meet someone like that bastard, I'm going to kick their ass!*

"Are you awake, my love?" Shampoo asked, startling Ranma out of his musings, speaking Japanese, since she figured it would be easier for Ranma if he didn't need to translate her words mentally. She was there today as Fei Long was busy overseeing a reshoot of one of Mili's non-combat scenes while Mai was at Master Oro receiving some help in her training. She'd also wanted to go swimming, and Shampoo was due to meet Mai at a small water park that afternoon. Now, she was thanking her lucky stars that she was here when Ranma woke up again.

Leaning over him, Shampoo smiled warmly, despite still feeling some concern for her Airen. "When Mai told me you woke up two days ago, I wasn't certain I believed her, but then she said Oro was here at the same time, and I missed it, and I'm sorry and..."

"Xian Pu..." Ranma whispered, using her formal Chinese name for the first time, causing Shampoo's eyes to widen in surprise as she blushed.

He, he knows about my name, my real name? Oh, Oh my! Shampoo thought, staring at her beloved in shock. He never told me, never even hinted. Ranma must have been saving it up for a special occasion... I say again, Oh MY!

With great effort, Ranma raised a hand, reaching up to her face, gently touching her cheek with the thumb, before letting his hand fall back, even that tiny emotion having sent a twinge through his body. "It's okay, Xian. You don't have to be the first person I see when I'm waking up from something like this, just, just having you here is, well, it's amazing. You're amazing. Have I told you that recently? You really are a diamond, a jewel of..."

"Ranma best stop talking because right now, Airen writing check his body literally not able cash," Shampoo murmured huskily, leaning forward and giving Ranma a very slow kiss on the lips. It was either that or strip off her clothing and jump his bones right then. *So, I have a thing about being called a jewel. Sue me! It's my name, drat it and I love it, and no one's used it so romantically before!*

When the kiss was over, Ranma closed his eyes for a few seconds, fighting the urge to fall back asleep. Besides his body still feeling like it'd been rung through a ringer, he felt about as weak as a day-old puppy. Most would've used the imagery of a day-old kitten, but not Ranma. *Huh, ya know, that, um, that particular issue ain't come up since I met Shampoo. FUCK. Knowing my life, I'd wager anything that means when it does, it's gonna be a fucking doozy.*

Trying to find something else to concentrate on, other than the fact that karma might be winding up to give him one hell of a kick, Ranma smiled up at Shampoo. "So, what've you and Mai been up to, Xian?"

Shampoo melted a bit again, hearing the amount of love that Ranma could pack into using her actual name rather than the messed up Japanese version. Unfortunately, for what she felt should have been a romantic moment (if somewhat limited in scope since Ranma could barely lift his hand, let alone do anything else), Ranma had chosen a poor time to wake up. Because this was around the time when a doctor or nurse would come by to check on the young foreigner.

Given the insane speed with which Ranma was healing, all of them had taken a massive interest in Ranma. Some had taken to calling him a medical wonder, and more than a few had remarked to one another that perhaps blood samples and other things of that nature could be used to find the next stage in human evolution. Those pundits were roundly discouraged by the, alas, few doctors who had any understanding of what Shampoo and Mai could do to them and any hint of a bedside manner, yet it was a fact that none of them could explain how fast Ranma was healing, and were very, very eager to figure it out, whatever they had to do in order to solve the mystery.

"Miss, it's time for the young man's next physical," a doctor with bleached blonde hair and a monocle in one eye intoned firmly as he opened the door, only to pause as he stared,

seeing Ranma's eyes open. Behind him, a nurse stood in the hallway, looking a bit harried but also astonished as she looked around the doctor's body toward the bed. "He's awake! I honestly didn't believe it! Nurse, run and get Doctor Shibuya. I'm taking over his patient. We have **tests** to perform!"

The man rushed forward, pulling out and uncapping a syringe from his pocket, moving forward to stare down at Ranma with an almost manic gaze. "Now, young man, we have quite a few questions for you. Don't worry. This will simply keep you up and answering questions for a bit. After you'll crash, but I doubt there will be any long-term consequences. You could be the key to medical breakthroughs like the world's never--"

Shampoo's hand clamped down on the doctor's wrist, interrupting his rant. Before he could react, she pulled him away from the bed, squeezing until he dropped the syringe to the floor, where Shampoo promptly stepped on it, shattering it. "You will not experiment on my husband!" Shampoo growled, switching to her native language as she fought the urge to shake him like a Shibu with a rat.

"Nurse, security! She's trying to stop us. We can't let her, for science!" the doctor shouted, trying to bring up his other hand to either slap or punch Shampoo, she wasn't sure.

Regardless, she blocked it and then slapped the man across the face so hard his monocle flew off to shatter against the wall. "You are an idiot, and I might do us all a favor if I break you."

The nurse, having far more common sense than the doctor, stayed out in the hallway, not getting involved. It might have been Shampoo's imagination, but she also looked as if the slap had caused her to smile a bit.

The two policemen outside also didn't bother to move. Chun-Li had downgraded the security needed for Ranma since the initial days after the tournament since none of the police informants had passed on information that confirmed that the Triad, completely headless at the moment and with more of its mid-bosses being rounded up thanks to the information taken in the raid, knew where Ranma was despite the initial rumor that the Triad might be looking to take revenge on him as well as Shampoo and Mai. Thus this job had become a bit of a break for any of the police assigned to it, and they were not about to ruin that by getting involved with whatever madness had gripped the bleached-blond doctor.

One of them even went so far as to shake his head at the man. "The youngster's a martial artist. They aren't normal. Whatever he's doing, I doubt you could replicate it."

"That, that is just blatant stupidity! What one human can do, another can replicate with sufficient science!" the doctor gasped, turning towards the policeman, having shaken off the shock of being smacked far too quickly, in Shampoo's opinion.

Looking over her shoulder, Shampoo saw that Ranma had fallen asleep again. Growling angrily, she turned her attention back to the interfering doctor, lifting the man up off his feet by a few inches, shifting her grip from his wrist to the back of his shirt. "I believe that you have overstayed your welcome here, doctor. You and the rest of your fellows will keep the nutrient bags coming, or else I will hunt you down. You will not try to experiment on my love, or I will hunt you down. You personally will not show up in this room again, or I will break you," she snarled, keeping her voice from becoming a shout with difficulty.

"You can't do this! Don't you have any understanding of what kind of a find that young man is?! If we can study him, study how he heals himself, we could find the secret of regeneration, of immortality!"

"That sounds as if you'd be hurting him again to watch him heal," Shampoo deadpanned.

"Well, of course, we would need to hurt him occasionally, but we would do so in a controlled..."

This doctor had thus far shown very little in the way of self-preservation instincts and now proved he had no filter. *Still, none of the other doctors we've met seem bad sorts, just full of themselves.* With that thought helping her self-control, instead of breaking his jaw fingers and then hurling him out a window for good measure, Shampoo simply kept on walking, holding the man in the air despite his attempts to wiggle out of her grip.

The nurse followed after her, looking a little shamefaced, until Shampoo had tossed the man into an elevator that the nurse had hastily run ahead to open for her. The doors closed even as the man tried to scramble back to his feet, shouting about how Shampoo was a Luddite who did not understand anything.

When it closed, the nurse bowed apologetically to the younger woman. "Er, I'm sorry about that. Doctor Stein's always been a bit of a character, and his bedside manner well, we say it wasn't installed when he was being built. I don't know what he was doing up here instead of Doctor Sou. I'll try my best to make certain he doesn't bother you again."

"My response to him will get worse every time he does. This time, no broken bones, only a bit of humiliation and being tossed about. I didn't even slap him that hard. Next time, I claim his pinkies," Shampoo warned, leaving it up to the nurse's imagination whether that meant she would break them or simply cut them off.

The nurse's eyes widened and she nodded convulsively, pulling out her phone, ready to pass on those orders.

With a huff, Shampoo turned aside, heading back to Ranma, finding him still asleep. "I should've threatened both pinkies and middle fingers. Blast it!" Shampoo sighed, before shaking

her head, pulling out her phone, eager to tell Mai the news that Ranma had woken up again. *Although, since he has also fallen asleep again, I suppose that there's nothing to stop me from joining Mai at the waterpark as we had planned. Oh well, that will give me more to tease him about missing when he wakes up again,* she thought cheerfully, feeling far more cheer than she had since seeing Ranma laid out on the hospital bed for the first time. Her Airen was on the mend, he had shown again he was a closet romantic, and all was right in her personal world.

0000000

The next time Ranma woke up, it was the very next day, and Shampoo, alas, had once more been pulled away by her agreement to work with Fei Long on his movie. Mai was there, though, along with the far more unwelcome face of Master Oro. "Ugh, has anyone told you lately that your face is the last thing anyone wants to see when they're waking up, Old Man?"

"I rather think I'm quite pretty for my age," Oro joked a small smile on his face at the little personal witticism there. *After all, I'm a little over eighty years old, and I can still throw down with you youngsters and have far more life ahead of me to boot.* "Do you feel well enough to actually talk at this point?"

"I think so? I don't know if I'm up for any movement, but I think I've healed all the internal stuff," Ranma said after a moment of reflecting on his body. "Damn, I've never needed to use ki healing to this level before, but I'm glad I knew how.

Although the only one I'm going to actually thank for that is Tofu. Akane and Genma weren't exactly hitting me to help me learn it, after all, Ranma reflected internally. "Although feeling my stomach out... fuck, I don't think it's up for solid foods just yet, damn it."

To one side, Mai snickered, commenting on how Ranma at least still had his priorities straight, while Oro chuckled. "I do not doubt that. Ki healing is a very esoteric skill, and you have traveled down that path far deeper than most young people ever could or should. I did not learn it until I was in my sixties, far too late to do anything for my arm. That you have been able to use it to such a degree, tells me interesting things about your life prior to coming here to Hong Kong young man, but I will not. It is not my place to do so. However, as I mentioned to you the last time I was here when you awoke, I do have some questions and some observations of your newest, as you put it then, style."

"Ask away." Ranma tried to shrug but found the movement was extremely difficult, given how little energy he had. "I'll admit that it was a desperate move. I had no idea where Mai and Shampoo were or if help was on the way from Chun-Li or anything like that. All I knew was I was locked in a cage with a madman, and the bastard had been basically taking everything I could dish out and laughing. Literally laughing. Like, if I had any doubts about his insanity, his laughs cured me of those right away."

Mai opened her mouth, looking guilty suddenly, but Oro held up a hand before she could. "That I understood last time I was here. However, I wish to understand how you came to build this technique and where you think it is honestly going to take you in the future." *I do not want this young man to become some kind of ki vampire. I have heard of such, indeed... come to think of it, didn't Happosai have something similar? Odd how a student from his school who has purportedly never meant that ancient fellow has come up with a technique that could be used similarly to how Happosai remained alive for so long.*

"And I'm sorry that we didn't get there sooner. I know Shampoo probably tried to say the same yesterday, but I figured I'd add my words to hers," May interjected, glaring lightly at the old master. "She also told me to pass on that the next time you wake up and she's here, you had better have enough energy for lots of kissing. She says she owes you for being a tease."

Ranma snorted at that. Although internally pleased at the idea of kissing his girlfriend and at the idea that it had only been a day since he had last woken up, Shampoo and Mai had nothing to apologize for, and he told Mai so now. "We went in knowing that things could get dangerous. That's the life of a martial artist who wants to be the best. I'm not about to blame anyone else for how that fight went other than my opponent. And even then, I'm just gonna use how good he was as a goal to beat, ya know?"

"I told Shampoo that you'd think that way," Mai chuckled, shaking her head. "Still, you were the only one of us seriously injured, so you'd at least best prepare for some major pampering from your girl."

Mai then held up her phone, saying that she would send a message to Shampoo, stepping back away from the bed so that Oro could dominate Ranma's attention.

With Master Oro looking at him expectantly, Ranma marshaled his thoughts, going back through what he had been thinking during the fight and before that. He explained how he had come up with his Blue Burst technique the first time, because he hadn't been able to shift his ki around his body and create spikes of cutting force in order to escape from bindings and other things of that nature.

That was an incredibly advanced technique that Master Oro had heard of before, although he felt that perhaps Nawa had been teaching this to the trio to more teach them humility than anything else. Even he would have trouble both creating physical ki and then shaping it into a cutting force without a vessel of some kind like the cloth of his outfit or something similar. Adding a cutting edge to even things like scarves was far easier than creating a spike of ki that could cut in the same manner. He said so now, adding, "I will note that I also know that Master Nawa only teaches women. Women do have an easier time shaping ki like that, but even so. Regardless of why Nawa introduced that technique to you three, I take it that you were using this curse that Ryu and Ken told me about?"

"If you try to splash me with water right now, I honestly might have to kill you," Ranma warned in lieu of reply, staring hard at the old master, his teeth gritted angrily. "I'm in no condition to try and dodge, and while my insides feel mostly healed, a few of my bones aren't. The changeover would hurt like hell!"

Bruises and cuts were one thing. Changing from Ranma's female form to his male form or vice versa with those was no more annoying than it normally was. Bones, though, along with internal stuff? That would hurt like blazes. Ranma had discovered that the first time he had tried to avoid going through 'her' period by changing back into his male body the instant he understood what was going on. Phantom pains had wrecked his body in ways that the male body just wasn't built to deal with, far worse than in his female body, and Ranma had been forced to hastily change back.

Thankfully, Master Oro didn't seem in any rush to experiment with his curse form and simply indicated that Ranma should continue his explanation. It turned out to be quite fascinating, and Oro had to hold back a smile at this glimpse into how Ranma's mind worked, breaking the technique down with Jubei's help and then how to use each part of it consciously as a separate skill.

He also had to laugh at how Ranma began to muse aloud that the 'Clinging Gecko' technique he'd learned from his father was but a reversal of the technique. "I mean, with that technique, you sort of push your ki out into the ceiling or wall you wanna cling to, making it act like a suction. The Undertow... ugh, I don't like that name, um, the ki draining pulls in ki, so it's kind of the opposite, right?"

Ranma's plans for the future were again something that Oro didn't really want to comment on. He still wasn't certain how well the idea of using Ranma's 'ki glue' technique in small amounts in a fight would work, and was far more concerned about the overall ki draining technique and what Ranma would use it for. Once he had a better idea of Ranma's overall moral fiber, and that he understood the risks, only then did Oro volunteer to Ranma through the beginnings of a real Hado sensing technique. Even then, Oro warned Ranma again to be extremely wary of using that kind of technique against someone who used the Dark Hado, as Oro called it, although pleased when Ranma demanded that Shampoo and Mai be taught the technique too.

From there, Oro delved deeper into Ranma's concept of what Hado, or ki as Ranma insisted on putting it, was. This was a very esoteric and deep conversation, one that Ranma would never have been able to keep up with or even seen the point of as little as a year ago. Genma had never taught him about the philosophical or spiritual side of the arts beyond the basis of Ranma's Code, although many of the monks and martial arts masters Ranma trained with when he was younger had done what they could to help shape Ranma's mind.

However, since then, first meeting Doctor Tofu and learning more about the softer style of martial arts like Aikido and the doctor's own style, and then traveling with Shampoo and

learning from other masters had introduced Ranma to the spiritual side of things, and not just in terms of the Yin and Yang sides of ki. He understood what Oro was warning him about and promised that he would try his best not to use his technique against anyone like Yamazaki again.

For his part, Oro came away from the discussion somewhat pleased. Ranma was a little too prone to making his own way, a little too prone to ignoring voices of authority and deciding for himself what was right and wrong and didn't seem inclined at all to care about the big picture or what problems his actions could cause in the future for Oro. Yet he was a well-meaning young man with a distinct sense of honor. With that, and the fact that there was still no hint of the malignancy of the Dark Hado inside him, was as good as Oro could honestly hope for. *By teaching him some small measure of ki sense, I will have done my part to keep him from falling to the Dark Hado. That is enough.*

Oro eventually left, leaving Ranma and Mai alone. Mai told Ranma that she had finished with her call to Shampoo, but that and the following text message had gone unanswered. "Which probably means she's on stage right now. No one's allowed to have a phone on them while on the set unless they're expecting an emergency call." Mai smirked a bit. "She tried to get away with it once, insisting that any information about you was an emergency, but the director apparently shouted at her loud enough to convince Shampoo that wasn't the case."

"Oooh, she and that Mili chick thrown down yet? Or worse, Shampoo and Chun-Li? I really don't want to miss that fight," Ranma confessed.

"I wouldn't want to miss it either, although Chun-Li's been so busy with the follow-up investigations and the whole legal side of the raid that we haven't even seen her in person and have even only exchanged a few phone calls. It looks like her plan to behead the Triad here in Hong Kong really worked. But making it even harder is that a lot of the police, and especially their higher-ups, are now being investigated and are under house arrest for corruption. Thankfully, all of the people we took prisoner are still in lock up, even those who had high-priced foreign lawyers and made demands to their local embassies to be freed or at least given some kind of bail amount they could pay to be allowed back out."

Mai grinned toothily. "That was in the news for a few of them, as were the photos of them in the crowd watching what the newsies called 'a truly horrendous bloodsport, replete with violence and sex on the side'. Some of those cases will be fought over in the courts for years just because of how much money the assholes have, but they will spend those years right here in jail."

"That's what they get for being caught with their hand in the cookie jar," Ranma snorted, shaking his head. "I still remember the amount of bloodlust and desire for violence, how much they were shouting for more. That was, that was nasty, really. I mean, I know I like fighting, but to enjoy watching other people fight, die, and be maimed. That's just wrong. I ain't got any sympathy for anyone in that crowd."

Mai nodded, remembering much of the same thing, although, in her and Shampoo's case, the crowd had also felt some emotions beyond bloodlust whenever they had been fighting. That hadn't made it any more pleasant, but the memory now reminded her of something else she wanted to say to Ranma, though.

"Speaking of the tournament, I have to thank you again for your words to me when me and Shampoo showed up in the waiting room dressed as the locals wanted us to be. It meant a lot to me, that despite well dressed as we were, you are still willing to see beyond that, especially after everything that went on with Andy." Mai fell silent for a moment, shaking her head. "Looking back on it, I can almost understand the fact he just didn't like how..."

She fell silent, just gesturing down at herself. Since she was wearing a tight blouse and even tighter jeans right now, there wasn't actually that much skin to see except at the top of her cleavage, but even so, Mai would, in Ranma's opinion, look sexy in a burlap sack. Indeed, he had a lot of trouble tearing his eyes off her sometimes, and now was definitely one of them.

Mai's next words, however, caused him to flick his eyes back up to her face. "My style or body. That, well, it's just personal preference. You can't really change them, although his not understanding that until he saw Natsume and could compare us? That I lay at his feet for being a fucking emotionally retarded."

"Or just a guy," Ranma tried to interject. "Er, I mean, I could see myself not understanding that kind of thing even if it was rubbed in my face all too easily ta throw stones, ya know?"

"Maybe before you had Shampoo come into your life, although, from your story about how you were already thinking about leaving your father and Nerima, I doubt it," Mai argued back before breathing in deeply, returning to the former topic even as she felt a little thrill shoot through her at Ranma's gulping noise as he took in what that did to her chest. "I, what really hurt that night and looking back on it, though, is how he didn't see me as a proper martial artist. Not just because I was a woman but because of how I dressed or how I acted. As if, I couldn't be a martial artist and enjoy being a woman at the same time. When, when you told me that what was underneath was more important, that I was more than just my looks that meant a lot to me."

And you said you cared, too. That was really nice, Mai added internally, keeping the words inside with a surprising amount of difficulty.

Ranma shook his head firmly, the first words out of his mouth harkening back to the words Mai had kept in, reaching forward and squeezing Mai's hand as he did. "I told ya that at the time because I care about ya. Mai, you're as good as a martial artist as anyone, don't let anyone tell you different, not Andy, not Terry, no one. If Andy couldn't see past your flirtatious attitude and your clothing, that's **entirely** on him, not you. In comparison to guys, you might lack strength and durability, but I've never doubted your drive or your adaptability. Heck, you've

been able to win bouts against me because you outthought me. Anyone who doesn't take you seriously, because you're a drop-dead gorgeous woman, is in for a bruising. That includes Andy the next time you spar with him."

Ranma was dead serious as he spoke. While his female form had helped him get over a lot of the machismo stuff that Genma had beaten into his head, meeting Shampoo and then Mai had stomped all over the remainder. That, and getting to know Mai, had shown him that while her style was nowhere near as straightforward as Ranma's, that didn't mean she was any less of a martial artist. Indeed, Ranma had come to admire Mai a lot for how, instead of resting on her laurels like Andy had apparently thought she should. Her drive to get better was right up there with the things he really enjoyed about her, just like her sense of humor, cooking skills and her friendship with Shampoo.

Biting her lip, Mai had to fight the urge to give Ranma a hug that would put any of Shampoo's to shame. To hear Ranma speak like that, to understand that he respected her to that degree and was speaking from the heart, that was huge to her. To say nothing about hearing he cared about her for the second time.

Before the internal conflict within Mai came to a conclusion, the door banged open, startling her out of her mental quandary as Shampoo rushed in. She was wearing her character's combat outfit, which consisted of a short black skirt with a slit to one side and a tight top that looked like a Japanese schoolgirl outfit, along with, for some weird reason, Shampoo had yet to understand, leather bracers and black lipstick. That, and her hair had been done up in loose twin tails with two balls placed close to her skull, a hair style that normally looked kind of childish.

The overall impact of her looks was that of a schoolgirl assassin, which was not like Shampoo's normal looks at all. Yet it was still striking, and Ranma found himself blushing as he stared at her. A moment later, he had another reason to blush as Shampoo reached him and instantly leaned over, kissing him hard on the lips.

Ranma's eyes widened, but he slowly closed them, giving as good as he could in his current condition. His arms stayed where they were at his side, but he did lean up slightly into the kiss, and opened his mouth, allowing his tongue to duel with Shampoo's in her mouth for a few seconds.

Mai watched on in amusement and... Something else. Joy, delight? Mai wasn't certain what she was feeling, but it certainly wasn't jealousy or sadness or anything like that, despite a brief thought that she'd really like someone to kiss herself right now. Before she could analyze what she really was feeling more than that, Shampoo pulled back suddenly, staring down at Ranma, and Mai began to laugh, understanding that Shampoo had indeed, as she had threatened the night before, kissed the living daylights out of Ranma. "Shampoo, I've heard about being eager, but show some moderation, girl."

"Moderation can go hang! I've missed my romance time!" Shampoo shot back, shaking her head, although she also looked a little apologetic.

Laughing again, Mai stood up, heading towards the door. "It's time to get him another nutrient bag. I think I need some food too. We can see if he's well enough to be woken up by the smell. That failed the first time we tried it, but since he's woken up two days in a row..."

Shampoo agreed with that, and the two of them headed off to find the floor's nurse station. As they went, Mai made certain to remind the guards to keep Doctor Stein out of the room and, in fact, anyone who wasn't the nurse assigned to the floor. The doctor had been making trouble that morning again after having roped in a few nurses and another doctor. In response, Mai made it very clear that if Stein or anyone else tried to take 'samples' of Ranma, she was more than willing to go through with Shampoo's threats of claiming his thumbs.

"Actually, I only threatened his pinkies," Shampoo observed as Mai related this to her while they waited for the elevator.

"That was a mistake then. The pinky is the most useless of fingers. The thumb is the most useful. Threatening the thumb will get across our point way better than the pinky," Mai replied firmly. "Don't worry, though, I understand threats of crippling harm come slowly to some people."

Shampoo laughed at that, and the pair entered the elevator, chatting happily, as they headed down to the ground floor. However, as they passed the next floor down, alarms began to blare. "What is that?" Shampoo murmured, staring up at the ceiling.

"I don't know. It doesn't seem as if it's the alarm to warn everyone about some kind of natural disaster or something." Mai cocked her head thoughtfully, also staring up at the ceiling. "I've never spent much time in hospitals before this, I'm afraid."

The two girls looked back at one another, then, as one, pulled out weapons, ready for trouble. By this point, they both understood how their lives were going. "How much you want to bet this has something to do with us or Ranma?"

"No bet," Mai snorted.

It was well they had prepared (and gotten into the habit of always having a ki space with their weapons on them) because as they exited the elevator, they saw seven men pinning the hospital security guards in place using pistols and a pair of strange guns that looked strangely put together to Mai's admittedly inexperienced eyes. The hospital had a guard station to one side of the wide entryway, but now both security guards were pinned behind that desk by the seven armed with guns while ten more charged past them towards the stairwell. Around them, two nurses lay screaming on the ground, along with at least five other bodies and more screaming civilians.

Looking closely at the group heading towards the stairwell, Shampoo shook her head. "Their eyes look entirely too wide to be natural, and look, some of them are even wounded but don't seem to be feeling it."

"Some drugs that can do that. You take the closer group. I'll help the rent-a-cops." With that, Mai launched her fans forward, the fans multiplying as they left her hands via the Shadow Duplication Technique. Two of them went down, struck by the fans, the thrown fans having been imbued with enough ki to make them hit as if they were hurled war hammers. More of them ducked and tried to turn in her direction, with one of the shadow duplications hitting one unlucky man right in the eye, causing his shots toward her to go wild.

He went down with a cry of pain, and Mai laughed. "The only place I could hit someone with one of those and have it do anything!" Originally, Mai's shadow duplicates had been simply that, just condensed, shaped shadows of the object they were copying crafted by her ki leaning heavily into the spiritual, or Yin side of ki. After training with Master Nawa, she'd learned how to solidify them into something that could be called a 'paper-thin physical illusion'. The man had just gotten unlucky, being hit by something so lightly in one of the few places he'd feel it despite possibly being on some kind of drug.

Shampoo charged under Mai's attack and past her, one of her maces instantly slamming into the door of the stairwell, with one of the attackers had closed behind it, possibly to bar it against anyone trying to come up after them. Whatever they had done, though, wasn't enough to stop Shampoo's ferocious attack. Her blow smashed the door off of its hinges despite being made of metal, slamming it into the man on the other side.

Then Shampoo was in the stairwell, the enclosed space leaving little room for her maces. She quickly divested herself of them, dropping the chui to the floor as she lashed out with punches and kicks instead. Five men found themselves unconscious or just broken quickly before Shampoo raced up the stairwell after the last five, dodging back and over the safety railing as two of them opened fire at her, killing their fellows below.

Meanwhile, Mai had leaped up over the charging Shampoo, lashing down towards several more attackers with two more normal fans before lighting her next set of fans on fire and hurling them towards the center of two clumps of the seven attackers still in the room that wasn't near any civilians, dodging return fire by taking a page out of Ranma's book and bouncing off the ceiling.

The attackers scrambled away from her attack, and Mai landed in front of one of them, a kick slamming up and into his chest with enough force to send him flying backward and into the ceiling while she rolled to the side, dodging a hail of bullets from one of the men. This was one of the guns that didn't actually look real, more something cobbled together in some fashion, but it certainly shot out bullets at a fast rate for a few seconds before it jammed, nearly hitting Mai several times, but the man was just a bit too slow.

At that point, the two guards were finally able to stick their heads up over the desk they had been hiding behind. The desk had only a veneer of wood and was metal underneath, providing good cover, something that had occasionally been necessary in Hong Kong over the decades this hospital had existed. Now, the pair of security guards fired at the gunman, killing him and wounding another of the attackers, one of the others with a makeshift-looking gun.

Dodging still more fire, Mai bounced off the wall and the door, a move that surprised the last three attackers. Before they could train on her, Mai was in between their points, and her manriki flashed out, crashing into them one after another too fast for any to react.

Standing between the three who she had brained, Mai whirled her manriki in place in front of her for a few seconds, staring around the entry hall. "Were there any others?" she demanded, shouting to be heard over the wailing and screaming of the wounded civilians. One of whom reached up to tug her leg just a bit too high up her thigh for Mai, and she growled at the man, kicking him lightly away from her. "You're not even bleeding, man. Get over yourself!"

"Er...no miss, other than the group that ran past and entered the stairwell," one of the guards answered, keeping his tone extremely respectful. Seeing a Japanese girl dressed in tight jeans and an even tighter blouse pull weapons out of her cleavage and wail on larger attackers was not something he was going to forget anytime soon, and called for a certain amount of respect. *And getting drunk later. After this, yes, I definitely need a drink.*

"Then it's a good idea that I knocked these three idiots unconscious. I rather doubt Shampoo was in as forgiving a mood, and you all might want to figure out why they were sent here."

"It's not like I went out of my way to finish them off or anything, Mai," Shampoo grumbled from the entryway into the stairwell. She was dragging several bodies behind her, although, to Mai's surprise, only a few of them looked to have passed on permanently. Not so good was the amount of blood that had splashed back on Shampoo, with more blood showing around her sides and on her lower legs. "And it isn't my fault either that these buffoons have no idea about the term friendly fire."

"And how much of that was because you weren't able to use your chui in the stairwell very well?" Mai asked archly.

Shampoo stuck her nose in the air and sniffed haughtily, causing Mai to laugh, followed by Shampoo giggling, tossing the bodies, both unconscious and dead, aside, moving forward to link arms with the other girl. She showed a remarkable lack of care for the civilians around them since dozens of doctors and nurses were now rushing towards them from the halls to either side, figuring that they would be able to handle the wounded. "Come on. I'm still hungry. And I doubt there's going to be another attack before we get back."

She looked over at the guards to see if they had a problem with that. Thankfully, only one of them seemed to want to protest this, while the other one, the one who had spoken up to Mai before, simply nodded. He certainly wasn't going to argue with either of these two superwomen, thank you very much. "They probably were after my Ai, er Ranma. Call the police on duty outside his room and figure out how they learned where we were. We might want to move Ranma someplace else."

"Or at least move him to a room on a higher floor," Mai agreed. "Although, Shampoo, you might want to go get changed. You've got a little something, well, in a lot of places, really."

Looking down at herself, Shampoo sighed, nodded and turned towards the nearest restroom. "This will take some explaining to the costumes director."

OOOOOOO

As his son was feeling better than he had in several weeks after being stuck in a bed to heal, Genma was feeling worse than he'd had in months. This was because of the intense fight he and Madame Rose had just had with a young Korean woman. Despite her age, that of a college age student, the woman had fought like a blood-maddened creature, but one who could throw out magical attacks that made Genma's hazy memories of his old master seem tame in comparison. Rose had eaten one of those attacks early on in the battle and found herself flung through several walls. After that, Genma had been forced to play keep away from the young woman until Rose had come back into the fight.

Both of them were battered, not just from the fight with the madwoman but also from the rest of the far-too-military types that the woman had gathered around herself somehow. *Blast it all, I wish I knew enough Chinese to know what this was all about. If this girl is some kind of trained government assassin instead of some cult leader...*

Shaking that thought off, Genma stared into the distance, hearing the sounds of approaching sirens. Whatever nation you were in, that meant trouble. *Although they are remarkably fast to respond to such a remote, no, No! Genma, remember, Rose used her magic to do something to the video cameras to get us in. There won't be anything the locals can use to hunt you down, and the Chinese government won't come hunting for you.* "We, we need to get out of here."

Rose nodded, but instead of getting up from where she was kneeling down to the younger woman, she reached forward and gently wiped the dead woman's dark purple and black hair out of her face. The next second, Genma stared in shock as Rose pulled the woman's eyepatch to one side and reached into the socket beyond. This was followed by a squelching noise, causing Genma to blanch. "WH, what are you..."

"As dangerous as this child was, she became so not just because of her own grief-induced madness. Such would never have drawn my attention. No, something was given to the

girl, something that..." She frowned as she pulled at something in the eye. "She should never have... what is this? Some kind of device?"

Genma grimaced but glanced at the thing in Rose's hand, which looked like a small metal cylinder with hundreds of tiny, almost invisible wires leading off it, caked with gore. There were lines of reddish energy glowing from within that gave it a strangely sinister look. "Looks like some kind of battery?" He scowled as the sound of the sirens began to sound much closer. "Rose, we---"

"Yes, let us be off. I, I cannot get any read on this. I knew Juri Han was dangerous, but this, this eluded my sight." Rose turned, and with a gesture, pinkish energy washed out from her hand, tearing apart a wall at the back of the underground base. This showed what must have been some kind of air shaft to the deeper levels of the base. "Come." She waved Genma out before her, pausing just a moment to look back at the young woman, sadness crossing her features. "Farewell, Juri Han. I wish you better in your next life."

After another hour, most of Genma's wounds had begun to heal. While he had pushed his son far harder than he'd ever been in terms of ki healing, Genma had also learned the esoteric art while with the Ancient Master. This served him well now, to the point where Rose, who was probably sporting at least a few broken limbs, was looking at him with some envy.

The strange... base? Lab? Mercenary outpost? Genma wasn't certain. Regardless, the base had been in a well-out-of-the-way area near China's northeastern border with Russia, high up in a series of hills. They soon found themselves out the side of the hill it had been built into, heading down into another forested valley.

Once the noise from the police or whoever had really been responding back there faded behind them, Genma turned, glaring at Rose. While Genma was a proud misogynist, killing that girl, although clearly necessary given her shrieking laughter as she hurt him, Rose and several of her own people when they got in the way, didn't sit well with him. "We are through, Rose. This was what you wanted me for, and we are done."

Rose had been looking down in confusion at the thing in her hand, hence why he had repeated himself there, but as he did so for a third time in a louder voice, she finally looked up, somewhat startled. "Oh, um, yes. In fact, that fight was, well it was more than I had anticipated. I did not realize she would be part of some strange think tank or that it was why she had appeared in my vision at all."

Grunting, Genma nodded at that as it made sense. Rose's mystical powers weren't all-knowing, something she had been very upfront about when Genma and Soun went to her for help in finding Ranma. Even so, he was pleased she wasn't arguing. "Good. In that case, I think we should split off here. And you should remove this mark of yours."

That amused Rose somewhat, as right now they were truly in the middle of nowhere, but she nodded, her scarf flowing forward and around Genma's forearm, obscuring the rose tattoo. There were certain methods of travel she could use that would have forced her to leave Genma behind anyway. *And this thing, it's its science, not magic. Or some unholy mixture. I thought Juri Han to be a Dark Hado monster I could nip in the bud before she grew too strong for me to face. Now, I need to call in someone who knows about science to tell me more about this thing. Or use psychometry to discover its creators if I dare try to see its past.*

For now, though, Rose felt that rather than simply paying her back Genma's help had put her in his debt a bit. *Without him, those gunmen who came on us as we were fighting Juri would have killed me, and finishing Juri off would have taken me far too long. Drat it, I'm a spiritualist, not a pugilist.* Aloud, Rose asked, "Are you still looking for your wayward son?"

Honestly, at this point, Rose knew that wayward wasn't really the right word to use. Rose also knew that there was little beyond the martial arts and getting his son back under his control that Genma cared about. *And as long as I don't need to help him do that, pointing Genma in the right direction is at least easy enough.*

"Yes! Can you help?" Genma answered quickly before hissing as the ki mark faded away. "But I, I don't want to go on another mission like this."

"There is no such feeling in the ether I can sense any longer. Hopefully, that means this device was just a one-off." Rose glanced down at the still gore-incrusted device in her hand, shivering at the very idea that someone could mass-produce these things. She shook that horrible thought off, holding out a hand. "But aiding me as you did has put me marginally in your debt instead of the reverse. Give me your hand and a bit of your blood. I will find he who shares it wherever he is in this world."

Gingerly, Genma cut his palm, laying the now bleeding palm down on Rose's outstretched one. *This always feels weiiii!*

Genma's thoughts broke off as his blood shifted between their palms, forming some kind of shape unseen under his hand. A moment later, it heated up to an almost painful degree as Rose closed her eyes, sending out her mystic eye, searching the world for the one who also had the blood of a Saotome.

After a few seconds, she nodded, and Genma pulled his hand away, seeing his blood flowing out from an image that looked like a pentagram with a triangle behind it and an eye in front of it before they all flowed away, sloughing off Rose's hand to the ground below as if it had suddenly become completely viscous. *And it still looks freaky, too. Blood should not act like that!* "The, the eye, um, the triangle, using both was um, new..." Genma trailed off, staring at Rose expectantly.

"Your son is currently in Hong Kong. By the time you can make that journey, he will no longer be there. I sense he will be in the Chinese city of Haikou three weeks from now. I cannot tell you his method of travel, as that has yet to be determined. It is, quite oddly, completely up in the air. Odd." Rose made a moue for a moment. "Normally, I would be able to tell if someone is going to travel by land, sea or air, but here, that is murky to me."

"Well... Haikou... is..." Genma stumbled, running into the fact that, along with not knowing how to speak Chinese or Korean, he had only the vaguest understanding of geography.

"It is on the island of Hainan, one of China's southernmost provinces." *And I am not going to say that I only know that because I was once there on vacation a few years ago.* "I am afraid that is almost all I can tell you. That and... you should not venture too deeply into China. And don't follow any strange men into subways."

"What?" Genma stared at her blankly.

Rose shrugged. "That is what I see." *And that you should avoid crabs. But that vision was simply hilarious, and I'm not going to get in the way of it.*

"Er... alright. I'll just go then." Still looking confused, Genma pulled a compass out of his ki pocket, then turned and began to make his way straight south.

Behind him, Rose stared after him for a few moments before bursting out into giggles. "Hehehe, crabs. Oh yes, I so hope that my crystal ball will lock on to you again in the future, Genma Saotome. That vision of the future is just too amusing to miss. Beyond that... I might wish to meet this son of his. Some of the other visions I received... he could be quite interesting." Rose sighed then, staring back down at the thing in her hand. "For now, though, I need to see what I can discover about you, drat it."

OOOOOOO

While the pair of them were still generally upbeat after the easy battle against the drugged-up gangsters, that topic and the ongoing and rapidly growing follow-up to the raid dominated the pairs' discussion over dinner, which they took at a nice Italian restaurant barely a block from the hospital. Eventually, as the two of them debated whether or not to get dessert, the conversation turned to one subject they'd been very carefully avoiding over the past ten days: the topic of the aphrodisiac gas and the shower they'd taken to avoid it and talking to the other girls.

Shampoo did so first, blurting out the words as they came to in an effort to get them out and move on. "I don't think I ever thanked you for noticing that gas. If you hadn't, I would've, well, I don't think it would've affected me enough to sleep with that dirty old man who was sneaking up on us in the shower, b, but I don't know for sure if it wouldn't. Instead, I got a rather nice experience rather than a horrible one."

As that last sentence left her lips, Shampoo's eyes widened, and she blushed, looking away, wondering, *Why the hell did I say that!? I mean, yes, it's true that it was nicer than the alternative but, but, curse Ranma and his female form!*

Thankfully for Shampoo, Mai was also blushing rosily at her words, looking down at the table instead of across at Shampoo's face. She was also wondering why the other woman had put it that way, that, but felt extremely happy hearing it regardless. *Gah, best to move this conversation along quickly.* "Well, I think it was a nice moment too, w, what happened afterward and the implications of that aphrodisiac, that is far more serious."

At those words, Shampoo's blush disappeared, and she leaned forward. "You mentioned you talked to Chun-Li last night, right?"

"Only briefly. But I've been following the news more than you have probably," Mai trailed off, looking over at Shampoo expectantly, who simply nodded. Shampoo hadn't been following the news at all and freely admitted it. "Well, anyway, I don't know if you remember, but the announcers and the other workers down there mentioned a few female fighters by name. I passed them on to Chun-Li after all of the prisoners had been rounded up and taken off. She promised the police would start looking for them, but I was basically told that the general rule of missing people is that after seventy-two hours, it's pretty much impossible to find them again."

Shampoo scowled angrily. "That's horrible. No woman should be treated like that, especially not a warrior. But unless they were able to recognize what was going on as you did..."

"They wouldn't have even put up a fight," Mai stated sadly. "I've been thinking of ways to put you and Ranma through the training needed to recognize that kind of thing. Would you be all right with that? I'll warn you now: it will be kind of embarrassing occasionally."

"You mentioned that Jubei taught you. I can't imagine that was very pleasant," Shampoo pointed out with manifest understatement.

To her surprise, Mai shook her head. "Say what you will about my great uncle, but he would never actually take advantage of a woman's body like that. Privacy, sure. But he taught me about that kind of thing as well as a man could and never took advantage of it, simply leaving me to get over the effects myself. He's still a pervert, don't get me wrong, but Jubei isn't the kind that would take advantage of a woman to that degree."

Shampoo nodded at that, as well as in agreement to go through the training Mai had mentioned, which sounded difficult, before turning away, signaling a waiter that yes, the two girls would like some ice cream as dessert. Once the waiter had left with their dessert order, Shampoo changed topics. "I've written to my grandmother. There have been a few cases of Amazons who went out looking for husbands that didn't come back. After so long, I doubt even

one of the elders would be able to pick up a trail, but this kind of thing is a danger they need to know about.”

Mai nodded, and Shampoo, deciding that there really wasn't much more they could talk about on this topic and still a little confused by why she had mentioned how nice it'd been to shower with the other girl, decided to shift the conversation along a bit. “You've been planning our trip over the past few days, right? How's that been going?”

“Pretty good, actually. I figured out ways we can travel the coastline even if Ken doesn't come through with his wager to pay Ranma as much money as he wants if Ranma is able to win their spar. I've found a few things along the way for us to do beyond martial arts. Water parks, for instance.”

She grinned, and Shampoo grinned back. The two women had discovered that they both greatly enjoyed water parks, and not just because of the amount of attention they got from the male side of the park goers, but because of the sheer amount of fun the water slides had turned out to be.

“I found a few weapon and unarmed combat styles that I think we'll all find interesting, although, I doubt that any of them will have anything specific for us to learn. It'll still be good practice fighting other opponents, one or two of whom might be on our level. I even contacted a few of the dojos in question, and they've agreed to put us up there during our stay. Others simply don't have room for such but are more than willing to entertain traveling martial artists like us.”

Mai shrugged. “There's one that I know could be interesting. It belongs to a local master who apparently has devoted his life to mixing Japanese Aikido with Chinese Wing Chun into a single style. And there's another that specializes in toughness and armor that sounds like they harden their clothing with ki, which I figure could be very interesting given my fans and what it could imply in terms of ki techniques and what we already learned from Master Nawa. Although I doubt we'll run into any true challenges while we're following the Chinese coastline.”

“Hmmm... Then I better get my fill of a real fight from Chun-Li.” Shampoo grinned ferally, a look that did something to Mai's insides for a moment, and she found herself licking her lips a little as she looked at the other woman for some reason.

Shampoo didn't notice as her feral look faded quickly and she reached across the table to grasp Mai's hands where they rested on the table. “Thanks for doing the planning and stuff like that. Ranma and I, we're not so good at that kind of thing, particularly the whole money aspect. It's been a lot of fun traveling with you and I don't think that me and Ranma would be having as much fun without you along. It, looking back, it wouldn't've seemed right to've left you behind even if you'd decided to go with Andy, let alone if you had just decided to stay home after the two of you finally broke up.”

"Thanks, Shampoo, that means a lot to me, although ouch on the 'finally' bit," Mai snickered at that but squeezed Shampoo's hands back feelingly, the knowledge that she probably would've felt much the same going across her mind.

That came as a revelation to Mai. *Even as far back as that point, I, I would have chosen to travel with my two friends rather than the love of my life? Or who I thought of as the love of my life at the time? That's... Telling.*

"Hah!" Shampoo allowed her hands to remain clasped in Mai's, twining their fingers together as she laughed. "I still can't believe that any man would choose to travel with his brother than his girlfriend, especially one who looks like you. I still remember how you looked that night. It was one of the..." Shampoo paused, getting a little flustered for the second time in this conversation, before trying to turn it into a joke rather than say what she had been about to say, IE, that it had been one of the hottest things she'd ever seen, right up there with seeing Ranma doing a kata from Wing Chun dressed in only his boxers one morning. "Well, let's just say that if you had walked downtown in that kind of look, you would've had your choice of boyfriends or girlfriends."

Mai laughed at that, although she was also looking down at their joined hands. The earlier moment she'd shared with Ranma, the look in his eyes when he looked at Mai, how much she enjoyed it, enjoyed looking at him and Shampoo alike, and the thought that she'd just had were mixing in her head. And like any concoction, it was creating something new.

But, if I would've chosen my two friends over who I thought I loved, then Ranma was right. I don't think I ever really was in love with Andy, just the image of him I built up in my mind. In, instead, I...

Carrying that revelation to its next step, Mai's smile slowly shifted into a far more tender one as she looked back up at Shampoo. "Well, thanks for that, although I think that the list of people who I would actually let see me like that is a, a **very** exclusive list. In fact, it's so short, I don't think it could be called a list at all."

The look in Mai's eyes had Shampoo flushing a little, but thankfully for her, their ice cream arrived at that moment. This allowed both women to pull back from what had become an emotionally charged moment. This allowed Mai to get some more perspective on her sudden revelation. *It's not just Ranma but Shampoo, too. Well, all the better, I suppose.*

Aloud, Mai laughed at something Shampoo said, shaking her head and continuing the conversation with half her mind even as the rest of her concentrated on this new understanding that she had suddenly reached and what Mai would need to do about it. *Because I will be doing something about this. Oh yes. Because I very much think that both of them feel the same about me too. It's just that none of us have realized it. Oof. And I called Andy emotionally blind. This will take some planning and, perhaps, some preparation and a bit of chicanery. But I am nothing if not determined,* Mai thought.

Across the table, Shampoo felt a strange sensation go through her as if she had suddenly found herself being hunted, yet she also liked the feeling.

OOOOOOO

The next morning, after making sure that Ranma had been transferred to another room, higher up in the hospital (and that Doctor Stein still wasn't allowed anywhere near him), Shampoo and Mai found a message on their phones from Chun-Li, asking if they wanted to meet up for breakfast. This was accompanied by a series of directions leading them to Chun-Li's personal apartment.

Chun-Li's apartment was much smaller than Fei Long's, being only a one-bathroom, one-bedroom apartment, with each room also being on the small side thanks to, well, being in Hong Kong. Much like in any other city across China, housing was an issue in many ways.

The pair of women were allowed in after using the buzzer and soon found Chun-Li opening the door to her apartment for them, dressed in what was probably her around-the-apartment clothing, baggie sweatpants and shorts. "Come on in. I was almost finished with the bacon."

Entering, the pair found themselves in the kitchen, where Mai was instantly drawn to one particular area of the kitchen, where the smell of coffee was wafting to mix with the smell of bacon from a rather complex-looking machine. "Oooh, nice. Do you mind if I make a cup?" Mai liked coffee just as much as tea but had rarely had the opportunity to experience much variety of coffee in contrast to tea, which was far more prevalent in Japan.

"Suit yourself. Just don't break that machine, it was a gift for my dad. Although honestly, I don't exactly do much experimenting myself. I just prefer my coffee to be as strong as possible," Chun-Li admitted with a wry chuckle.

Soon, all three were sitting down to breakfast around the tiny table that still dominated the main room. As Mai savored her cappuccino, having made one herself from instructions she'd gotten online, Shampoo asked the other woman why they were there. "If this is about setting up a time for us to spar, you could've just called, not requested we come over like this."

"You're still going on about that?" Shampoo had mentioned that in text back to Chun-Li literally, every time Chun-Li had contacted the two over the past two weeks. Chun-Li had thought that a little much for a running joke, but by the look in Shampoo's eyes, it very much was not a joke at all.

"Yes, I'm still going on about that! I definitely want to fight you before we leave Hong Kong." Shampoo nodded firmly. "My pride as an Amazon wouldn't let me leave without doing so after you attacked me as you did."

"I will remind you that you were in the process of causing a public disturbance at a place we were trying to use in a sting oper--- you know what, fine, I suppose I'll be free next weekend for a little while anyway. So much for sleeping in," Chun-Li muttered, shaking her head as she saw Shampoo's bland, uncaring look.

"It's Wednesday now, right? Hmm... ten days, still, that's fine, I guess," Shampoo hummed in thought. "Sundays are normally break days for me, too."

The fact it was Wednesday was something that Chun-Li barely acknowledged, considering how many all-nighters she'd pulled since the raid, something she said aloud now. "In fact, this is the first morning I've had to myself this entire time."

Shampoo shrugged, looking vaguely apologetic but still determined, and Chun-Li finally decided this fight just wasn't worth the effort. "All right! Fine, if that's the way you want it, yes, we can spar. I'll reserve some time at the dojo down at the precinct I'm currently using as the investigation's base of operations. But that's why I wanted to call the two of you over here."

Mai pulled the cappuccino away from her mouth with manifest reluctance, looking across at the other woman as Chun-Li looked between Shampoo and Mai, the Japanese foreigner and the Chinese girl who might as well be foreign for all that she disdained local laws. "You'll be happy to hear that I won't need you to stay in Hong Kong until the dissertations and trials begin. Your recorded statements about what you found in the Triad's hideout, the amount of evidence you discovered in Yamazaki's apartment complex, and everything else is more than enough. It took some convincing to get the higher-ups to agree that you didn't need to be here for any of that, but the attack yesterday on the hotel was more than enough to convince them that maybe having you two and Ranma away is a good idea for both public order."

"Wait, that was a possibility?" Shampoo blinked in confusion.

"I've seen enough law dramas to know that most of the time they want witnesses to stay around and give live, what's the term, not coverage, affidavits?"

"Testimony," Chun-Li supplied, snorting a little at Mai's efforts. "And normally, that would be true. But this is pretty much a cut-and-dried case against organized crime, even though we are still continuing to find more evidence of corruption among the police force here in Hong Kong and among our politicians."

"Of course," both other women stated as one before breaking out into giggles. And although she couldn't say the idea made her want to laugh, she had to admit that, yes, that was a kind of obvious statement.

"But everything is so public by this point that no one is going to be able to squash it," she continued, speaking over the sound of twin giggles, causing the pair to break off their fun. "And a request from Major Heidern actually brought in a special judge to oversee the cases."

“That’s good to hear. So all of the people that were captured in the arena and everything else, they’re all going to be prosecuted? I was a little worried about that when you told me that there was some pushback going on,” Mai admitted.

“So was I. But at that point, the reporters had gotten wind of everything going on, and while some of their own higher-ups are about as crooked as they come, a few of the reporters are fundamentally straight shooters and were willing to run with the story once we began to feed some information to them. That and the special judge coming in halted most of the efforts many of them were making to get away with being there. I say most since there are still the foreigners who were captured down there to deal with. That’s an entirely different kettle of fish and one that I’m not involved with on the trial side of things. Instead, I’m still heading the ongoing investigation as more information is discovered from questioning the prisoners or what few electronics we were able to capture intact to complete taking apart as much of the Triad as we can.”

“That sounds interesting at all, but the only thing I’m interested in personally were the women that might’ve been captured and sold off in past tournaments and where all of those antiquities came from,” Shampoo shot back, biting almost angrily into her bacon for a moment.

Much like the McDonald’s that she and Chun-Li had gone to on the second day of Ranma’s stay in the hospital, Chun-Li had surprisingly gone for an American-style breakfast, bacon, hash browns, and pancakes, despite how fattening it all was. “I was furious when we found those antiquities, found them being packaged up to be sent who knows where! We thought Thailand because of the people who are doing the packaging, but who knows?”

“The Thailanders aren’t answering any questions on that score, and they apparently don’t exist in terms of the Thailand government. No information on them is known or available, not even how they got from Thailand to Hong Kong. Of course, that’s not exactly unusual in countries like Thailand, Cambodia and so forth. But it is annoying,” Chun-Li answered before shrugging. “On the other hand, we’ve discovered where those antiquities were initially found and have been able to start rolling up that aspect. That’s out of my jurisdiction, but I know that other police across China are already following up on it. Selling antiquities within China from one person to another is one thing. Selling them off to foreigners is entirely another.”

Mai and Shampoo both nodded, and Shampoo leaned forward intently. “And the other aspect I was interested in, the girls?”

“We recovered the girls who had already been shipped out among the women who were working the tournament and discovered a few others who had gone missing prior to that. Unfortunately, most of them are foreigners, North Koreans for the most part, who may well be forced to return home. A few people are trying to get them work visas to stay here, but again, that’s not something I’m handling personally. As for the women who were taken from the actual tournament itself...”

Chun-Li sighed. "We've got names. That's about it. One of them we know simply died of her wounds, but a few others, including one of your countrywomen, Mai, we have very little to go on. We have pictures from their time before coming to Hong Kong, but it's been so long that they could literally be anywhere in the world. And unfortunately, the Triad very carefully did not keep records of that kind for very long."

"Give me pictures and allow me five minutes alone with any of the Triad leaders. If they have any information on them, I'll get it out of them," Shampoo growled, with Mai nodding in agreement.

"While we've been able to stop them from trying to flee the country or lawyer up entirely thanks to all the evidence and finding them at the scene of the illegal underground tournament, allowing the two of you to torture them for answers is a bit much," Chun-Li rejoined repressively. "I believe in the rule of law, thank you very much. Besides, even if they knew where those women had been sent, I'd bet anything you want to lay down that the girls have already been moved on from that initial site."

Something tells me that whoever wanted Rainbow Mika and others like her, women who were able to advance pretty far in the tournament, they wanted them for something besides simple bedmates, Chun-Li thought to herself, remembering the latest conversation she'd had with her father over in America. Apparently, there was some new underground criminal empire that they'd been finding hints of recently. It leaned far more heavily into the martial arts side of things than any other had before it. Because of that, he'd been extremely interested in her stories about what had been going on here in Hong Kong.

"I don't like it, but I can accept that," Mai reached out a hand to take Shampoo's forearm in her grip, squeezing lightly. The other girl looked at her, and then subsided, nodding in agreement. As an Amazon, the idea of being drugged and abused struck at the heart of Shampoo's pride, but she also had to admit that the law certainly would not be on her side in terms of how she would go about getting some answers there.

Her begrudging annoyance with that faded as Mai continued, still squeezing her forearm. That gesture felt very nice, almost like Ranma was there giving her support. A comparison that Shampoo didn't look too closely at, instead concentrating on Mai's words, words that caused her to grin.

"Considering that Shampoo, Ranma and myself are going to be traveling the world looking for martial arts styles to learn and tournaments to fight in, it's almost an inevitability that we'll be running into other underground tournaments. And if we get any hints of this kind of thing again, well, you wouldn't happen to know anyone at, what's that international police agency, Interpol, would you? After all, while we can do investigating and infiltration, looking after prisoners afterward isn't exactly going to be something we'll be interested in doing."

"In other words, you all think that the instant you find something like this elsewhere, you'll go all wrecking ball if you don't have an alternative. You realize that way, you won't find all of the culprits, right?" Chun-Li pointed out, even as she pushed herself to her feet, heading over to a small table nearby.

"Better some than none," Mai stated firmly, taking the card that Chun-Li handed her.

"That's the number for a unit of Interpol that handles white slavery, the group's private numbers. I'll ask you to please keep those numbers to yourself, don't even put them into your phone. The people that will answer that phone number, they've made a lot of powerful, ruthless enemies around the world," Chun-Li cautioned.

At that point, the window behind Chun-Li shattered, and something small rolled in, showing the group from Interpol were not the only people with enemies. The ball exploded instantly, sending smoke everywhere. This was followed by a far larger object smashing into another window, the silhouette of its movements barely discernible through the smoke.

By the time the smoke bomb went off, Mai and Shampoo had already kicked off and away from the table, twisting around to face the window that the attack could come through, while Chun-Li had rolled away from the point of impact. This meant that all three were facing a different direction from the actual person who had come through the second window.

For a moment, Chun-Li wondered how that had been done before she rolled forward to avoid a slice from some kind of claw weapon. She found her footing and charged backward towards her attacker, kicking out hard. This was redirected by a forearm, and then she hissed in pain as another claw weapon raked down her outer thigh.

Despite that, Mai flipped onto her hands and began to kick out in every direction, forcing her attacker away even as blood flew from the injury to her thigh, covering the walls and floor. This also had the added benefit of dispersing the smoke quickly, but Chun-Li gasped as the pain from her leg redoubled, the man tagging her on her foot as it passed by. *Fuck!*

"Fire Fan!" Mai shouted, lashing out towards the masked man, following up by charging forward, ducking under Chun-Li's whirling attack as the policewoman's attack began to slow down. Shampoo followed, rolling to one side of Chun-Li and then charging forward similarly.

In response, the masked man twisted away from Chun-Li's outstretched legs. His claws flashed through the air, slamming the fireballs in either direction, causing them to hit the walls of Chun-Li's apartment, igniting and spreading as they did. He then leaped upwards, kicking off of the roof almost like Ranma would have, coming down in a whirling dervish of blades, forcing Shampoo and Mai to back away from one another just as they closed with him.

But that was all Shampoo did, back away a single step before bringing her weapons down hard, aiming to smash not the man but his weapon as one twisted sideways toward her

hand. She caught one of the weapons, smashing it to the ground, carrying the man's arm down as wall, but was surprised when the man's claws didn't shatter under the blow from her mace.

That surprise didn't stop her from twisting into another attack towards the man's body, which he barely ducked backward out of the way from, before ducking under a kick from Mai, lashing out at her pivot leg with his claws, forcing her to push off into the air where he followed, spearing upwards with both sets of claws pointed towards her. Only a desperate shield of her fans, reinforced with ki, protected her from being stabbed through the stomach. Even so, her own fans were slammed back into her body with enough force to cause Mai to gag before she was slammed into the ceiling, causing that gag to turn into a groan of pain. *Fuck, this guy is strong to get through my toughness training and fast too! And what's with those claws?*

"AIYAAH!" Shampoo bellowed a war cry as she leaped up in turn, bringing her chui around, but the man pushed off of Chun-Li's body where she was still pressed against the ceiling, using that to dodge Shampoo's strikes, lashing out at her with his claws. Shampoo barely blocked the strike with one of her mace's shafts and found herself tossed into the other wall, slamming into the slowly spreading fire there just as Chun-Li lashed out with a kick that this time caught the man in his own leg, spoiling his landing, and forcing him to roll away.

Grunting more in anger than pain, Shampoo pushed to her feet, then took a moment to grab up the water pitcher from the table, tossing it into the fire and dousing it before it could get worse. She then had to do the same for the second one, mentally reminding herself to speak to Mai about using fireballs in enclosed spaces. *And she teased me about my chui and the stairwell yesterday.*

Meanwhile, Mai had allowed gravity to pull her away from the ceiling and landed lightly on her feet, grimacing and holding her stomach with one hand. "Yep, definitely more toughness training."

With the fires seen too, Shampoo took a few steps forward, attacking the man where he had been forced on the defensive by Chun-Li for a few seconds, cutting her arms in turn twice. Twisting to concentrate on Shampoo, he blocked her first strikes, but one of his forearms was out of position for just a second too long, and her return swing of the mace, which she could swing far faster than anything of that size should be able to move, caught him on the forearm to one side of his claw blade's guard.

Whatever his speed and striking power, this man wasn't nearly as durable as someone was like Ranma or Shampoo herself. His forearm didn't break like a dry twig, but it did break with a resounding crack, and the arm fell limp to his side. "GEHH!!!" he groaned out from behind his mask.

Despite that, he was able to back away from her follow-up strike, lashing out with his claws. At first, Shampoo wondered why as she was out of range of his claws, thanks to the reach

of her chui. Yet from the edge of those claws, three ki strikes lashed out, slamming into her with punishing force, hurling Shampoo away with a cry of pain.

Mai's hurled fans, tossed over Chun-Li's head as she tried to push herself upright, slammed into the man one after another, causing him to stumble and gasp as one of them caught him in the masked, shattering it. A wild-looking blue eye was revealed there, along with more blonde hair, the man gazing back at her manically as Mai charged forwards, fans flying again, followed by her manriki making an appearance as she put herself between the man and Chun-Li.

For his part, Vega, the man the locals knew as the Spaniard, was not having fun right now. While fighting such beautiful women was one of his life's greatest delights, facing three of them like this in such an enclosed space was proving incredibly difficult, and now he had a broken arm to show for it. *Curse this place's security! If I had been able to place a video camera in the entryway to the apartment complex, I would've known these two were here today.*

That, and the window he had used to enter didn't have a view of the table, only the small sofa set on the wall opposite. The window he'd set up his little robotic friend, which had shot the smoke grenade into the apartment, might have.

Vega had been able to gain a copy of Chun-Li's schedule at the police precinct where she was currently working. With that, he decided that today, the first day where she would be home half the day, was the perfect time to assassinate her. Now, he was cursing his own desire to do so in an actual battle rather than a simple assassination. *If I had just shot at her from a distance, she would never have known what was happening! But such would not have been elegant enough when facing such a beauty.*

His somewhat pain-addled thoughts were interrupted as Mai entered close range. The two of them danced back and forth, one without an arm, the other one sore and bruised around the chest and stomach from Vega's earlier strikes.

However, Chun-Li wasn't out of the fight just yet. While one of her legs could no longer take her weight, her arms, although cut in a few places, could. Chun-Li pushed herself to her feet and launched herself forward, whirling in midair like a spinning drill her one good leg outstretched as she launched herself forward into the man. "Lóngjuǎnfēng yǎnxí (Tornado Drill)!"

Vega could barely get his other good arm back from blocking a blow from Mai to redirect the incoming kick, and howled in pain as his own hand was smashed back into his chest just as he had done before to Mai. At the impact, he found himself in midair and launched out the same window he'd arrived in.

Flipping in midair, Vega grabbed onto a windowsill of a building across from Mai's apartment with his one working arm. He then dropped down again and again, retreating

quickly. *Oh well, if I can't have my one-on-one fight, then I suppose I must fulfill my contract another way, although honestly, I doubt I will be lucky enough to catch them with my little surprise. Hopefully, once those two have moved on, I can try again with the lovely Chun-Li. Oh, but those two ladies will get theirs eventually, too, oh yes. You struck my face, woman, and Vega Fabio la Cerda does not forget a grudge!*

"...that was too easy," Shampoo grumbled, pushing herself to her feet through the use of one of her maces, causing Mai and Chun-Li to turn and stare at her incredulously even as Shampoo's own chest and lower stomach throbbed from the pain of the two ki strikes. They'd been fast but hadn't been diffuse at all and struck like a blow from a cannon.

Shampoo ignored them, looking around her. "That man was an assassin, probably involved with the Triad out to get revenge. He wouldn't have just stopped like that. Not unless..."

Her words caused the other two to pale, a noticeable feat in Chun-Li given how much blood she'd already lost, and it was the policewoman who saw Vega's final surprise a second later. As part of the police course for Interpol, she'd been forced to examine makeshift explosive devices to the point she could at least recognize them, although diffusing them would be an entirely different thing.

Thinking quickly, Chun-Li stumbled forward, pointing at the small, home-built pipe bomb, cursing the wound to her leg as she fell to her knees, crying out in pain. "There! Get it out of here!"

Chun-Li saw it and launched herself forward. Grabbing the device, she lifted it up into the air, hurling it towards one of the windows. But she'd done so too quickly, not having properly calculated the distance. *It's not going to make it, fuck!*

Then Shampoo was there, flicking one of her mace's up from underneath the device, slapping it up and out the window. "Fore!"

The impact caused the bomb to go off even as it left the point of impact behind. Yet so quickly did Shampoo strike it that the explosion rocketed out of the window rather than back towards her and the rest of the room.

For a moment, all three women simply stood and stared as Shampoo slowly let the remnants of her mace drop out of her hand. "Well, that was... Exciting," she said slowly before slumping back onto her rear while Mai hurried over to Chun-Li to help give her some first aid.

"I think that I've had enough of Hong Kong," Mai stated, not looking up from her work. "No offense, Chun-Li, but your hometown has lost a lot of its flavor for me."

With a groan, Shampoo pushed herself to her feet, heading over to kneel down on Chun-Li's other side. "And you owe me a new mace."

Chun-Li stared at the other younger girl, then rolled her eyes. "Tell me, will your Amazon pride at least allow you to put off fighting me until I'm healed?"

OOOOOOO

Ranma gleefully flipped himself up from where he had been performing push-ups Ranma style and began a kata, delighting in how his body reacted and moved, fully healed as he had told the doctors this morning. *Fuck 'em. If they don't let me out by lunchtime, I'm going to blow this popsicle stand, there's a freaking window right there! Heck, I could've left yesterday, but noooo, 'two days of observation,' my ass! And that was before the douchebag with the water pitcher spilled it on me this morning.*

That had not been fun, but thankfully, Ranma was indeed fully healed, and the change hadn't caused him any actual pain. Just annoyance.

At least he and the nurse who was there at the time fainted, and I was able to get the guy out into the hallway and then explained it to the nurse as a hallucination. I'm not bothered so much by my curse any longer, and oh boy, is that a big change from when I first got it. Thank you, Shampoo and Mai. Even so, explaining it every time is really annoying! Especially to people like doctors and so forth, whose worldviews' are so wrapped up in science and stuff.

Shifting from one kata from Anything Goes to another that came from Wing Chun, Ranma allowed his thoughts to dwell on Shampoo and Mai again. It was obvious to him during his interactions with them over the past few days, during which he'd spent most of his time actually awake and able to eat normally, thankfully, that the two of them had grown even closer since his enforced incarceration here in the hospital. That was really nice to see, and Ranma was looking forward to spending time with both of them again. *Girlfriend time with Shampoo, hopefully, is something that I'm looking forward to almost as much as fightin' Ken.* Ranma was also interested in learning what Master Oro had been teaching Mai whenever she wasn't at the hospital.

Although, it is sad that Chun-Li isn't going to be able to fight Shampoo unless we stay here until she's healed. *Given our conversation last night, Shampoo really doesn't want to do that, despite her Amazon pride. As for me, well, I wouldn't mind seeing more of Hong Kong. We didn't actually do a lot of sightseeing before the tournament and everything. But if they want to move on, I'm more than happy to do that.*

The thought of moving on with Shampoo and Mai brought a wide grin to his face. While others might see always being on the move as a hardship that was the life that Ranma had led for as far back as he could remember. Living off the land, moving around, camping, switching from one hotel to another, that was what Ranma knew best. And he had enjoyed it far, far more

since Shampoo had decided to accompany him away from Nerima. *Having Mai along just makes it even better, even if Ken backs out and doesn't want to pay me enough money to let us buy a yacht.*

Why that was, and why it was just as important to him to have Mai along with them as it would have Shampoo, was something that Ranma accepted but didn't dwell on too closely. She was their best friend, a big part of his and Shampoo's life for more than half a year now. Life was simply more fun with Mai beside them, something that Ranma had brought up with Shampoo the night before and had been happy to hear that she agreed with wholeheartedly.

Her exact words had been, "I told her this a few days ago when she and I had dinner together. Leaving Mai behind at her dojo would've simply felt wrong. Letting her travel with Andy and Terry would've simply felt wrong. I think I would've been fine with Andy coming along with us, but the main thing was that Mai really needed to. Having her around, well, it's just natural at this point."

Ranma wouldn't go so far so say it felt natural. At times, Ranma still had to pinch himself occasionally to make certain he wasn't dreaming that he was in a relationship with Shampoo. *Let alone traveling with not just one, but two gorgeous women who share my passion for the Art that I actually get along with.*

For a moment, Ranma stumbled in his kata as the fact that he just called Mai gorgeous registered. Then he continued, mentally shrugging. *After all, why shouldn't that occur to me? It isn't like it's untrue. And friends can call one another handsome, pretty or whatever, right? Although, like I've told her, the fact that Mai's gorgeous isn't as important as how strong she and Shampoo are both in body and mind.*

At that point, the rhythm of the kata claimed Ranma and his thoughts fell away, leaving his mind in almost a meditative frame of mind, his eyes closing as his physical memory went to work. He remained thus for several more katas before there came a knock at the door. Even then, Ranma didn't open his eyes or stop his kata as he called out, "Come in."

He really should have. Or, barring becoming more aware of his surroundings, Ranma should have remembered that he was still wearing the hospital gown that he had been given after the doctors had operated on his lungs and other perforated internals. Because he was. Shampoo had dropped off some of his clothing that morning, but the doctors had kept him from changing into it then as they wanted to run a series of tests on him, and he hadn't done so since. Not even after beginning to exercise, so eager was he to be up and moving.

Thus, Mai, who had been the one to knock, was now given a full view of Ranma's muscular back and everything below the belt from behind as he continued to do an extremely intricate, coordinated kata. When he twisted to the side to launch a kick, she saw even more and whistled loudly. "Woo!" *His ass might be nice, but **that** is even nicer!*

That broke Ranma out of his movement, and he paused, one leg outstretched in a kick at just the right angle for Mai to see past the rest of his thigh to his dangling boy bits. His head turned in her direction, his eyes going wide and a blush erupting on his features like Mount Vesuvius going off. "M, Mai?" he squeaked, then pushed off of the floor with his pivot leg and all over the bed, grabbing at his clothing that had been put on the small stand on the other side of it, rolling underneath the bed a moment later.

"You shouted to come in," Mai giggled, shaking her head. "I thought that meant you were decent. And you were. **Very** decent."

Ranma paused. That wasn't the first time Mai had said something that could be taken flirtatiously in the past few days, but it was easily the most overt. "You know that Shampoo is going to hit you upside the head with her chui if she hears you say stuff like that, right?"

"I don't know, I think that she'd want us to all be even. She did tell you about the time she and I showered, right?" Mai shrugged. "Although to be fair, I suppose I need to strip off in front of you, too."

Shampoo had indeed told Ranma about that, about how the two of them had decided to hide in a stall to avoid getting drowned out by questions from the rest of the girls who were working for the tournament crowd, and then been in there while someone had begun to pump aphrodisiac gas into the room. Shampoo had come clean in such a way that it'd been clear that she feared Ranma's reaction, but Ranma had taken it in stride, even though he had noticed that Shampoo seemed to have enjoyed the moment.

"I don't think so. After all, Shampoo and I saw you that night you broke up with Andy. You might not've been entirely naked, but ya were the next best thing," Ranma answered back, rolling out from underneath his bed fully changed.

"True." Mai walked forward, causing Ranma to twitch, but he didn't move away, and she rearranged his shirt a little, then brushed him down, chuckling. "I was impressed you were able to get dressed underneath the bed without the bed moving at all, but I think we might need to speak to the staff. It's obvious that it's kind of dusty under there."

Ranma laughed at that, then lightly batted her hand away from his chest, shaking his head. "Please tell me you're here to tell me that I can leave. If not, that window is lookin' really good ta me."

"It took some doing, but I convinced the doctors to let you go. I'll ask you to ignore the unconscious body of Doctor Stein. He wasn't so willing to let you leave before he could test your regeneration skills."

"Bottle blonde? Yeah, he tried to sneak in here the other day. He came through that window too, if you can believe that. Apparently, he climbed out from the room next door. I

beaned him with the bedpan the nurses left here despite my being able to get up and go to the bathroom. I don't get why they were giggling when they told me to, though."

"I just got a glimpse of why they were probably doing that. After all, a lot of patients who use bedpans need help to put it in place," Mai stated, suddenly scowling. "Which they were probably doing several times over the past few weeks while you were unconscious. You know what, Shampoo and I might come back here to talk to some of those nurses. That sounds legitimately nasty."

Understanding the implications of what Mai had just told him, Ranma flushed and shivered at the same time. Embarrassed at the thought of some unknown woman touching him below the belt, and also a little freaked out at the very fact, just like Mai, considering that he spent most of his time in the hospital unconscious. "Let's get out of here. I really, **really** want to put as many blocks between us and this hospital as quickly as possible."

"That's good to hear. But do you think you're really up to fighting Ken, or should we put that off for another few days? Shampoo's filming what should be the final scene if they get it all right today, and Fei Long offered to let us use the set as a sparring area if you think you're up to it, but if you're not, we can find someplace else," Mai questioned worriedly.

"I'm up to it. I told you all yesterday, I could've left then. I'm back to 100%," Ranma replied firmly, even arrogantly.

He wasn't, really. Physically, yes. Ranma hadn't lost any muscles during his three weeks in the hospital thankfully, and all of his injuries were fully healed. His ki reserves were not quite where he would want them to be, though. Despite that, Ranma was more than willing to fight Ken or Ryu at the current level. *I think I might even be able to use the Ebbing Flow technique against Ken, too.*

Ranma had done a lot of thinking about what to name his two techniques and had decided to call the first, when he consciously pulled in the ki of someone touching him, Ebbing Flow rather than Undertow. The name he'd decided to pair with that for his massive bust-type attack was Tsunami, yet Ranma was far happier with the first, albeit new, name than the second. Much like techniques themselves, naming them took time.

Ranma blinked then. "Wait, does that mean that Shampoo is going to be wearing that same outfit she wore a few days ago?"

He couldn't help but smile at the thought, and Mai laughed, linking arms with him and pulling him towards the door. "There, we have proof positive that despite your curse, you are still all male up top. Or just have a pulse, really. Shampoo makes that outfit look good, doesn't she?"

The pigtailed youth nodded instant agreement to that before reflecting for a second. *Huh. That almost sounds as if Mai likes looking at Shampoo when she's dressed up like that just as much as I do. Huh.*

Ranma wasn't certain what to do with that analysis, so he simply shrugged it off, set it aside, and continued to follow Mai through the hall of the hospital, noting absently that the policemen weren't there any longer. Unlike the doctors, Chun-Li was willing to take his word that Ranma was fully healed the other day and had decided to pull the officers away from guarding him, which he was more than happy about. Having Shampoo and Mai around just in case of trouble when he was unconscious was one thing. Mai was a friend, and Shampoo was his girlfriend. Friends did that kind of thing for one another if they thought there was trouble. Having police watch over him though, that had made Ranma feel more like he had done something wrong than anything else.

Beside him, Mai looked around, watching as Ranma stretched and held up his arm, staring up at the sky, shouting "Freedom!" in such a way that several passersby looked at him very strangely.

Mai let him have a few moments, then thumped him on the shoulder before gesturing to a nearby building. "Well, invalid, are you up for a bit of roof hopping? Or will we have to go the old-fashioned way?"

"One, two, three, you're it!" Ranma shouted, leaping up and grabbing the awning over the hospital entrance, flipping himself up and then bouncing off the wall above it onto the nearest roof.

While everyone around them gawked, Mai glared and raced after him, dodging through passersby to cut them off as he jumped across from one building to another on the other side of the street, leaping up after him there. "That's cheating, you dick!"

She almost tagged Ranma a building later, but the chase continued, with both of them laughing now, Ranma in sheer delight, at once more being able to move and be outside, and Mai simply laughing at Ranma's sheer exuberance for life. *Damn, if I didn't think I loved him before, this would've done it! Not to mention the view from earlier. Because **damn**,* she thought, before shouting out directions to Ranma so he didn't simply just run through the city in a straight line. "Playing tag when you don't know where exactly we're going is kind of stupid!" she added.

Sighing, Ranma slowed down, letting Mai almost plow into his back so quickly he'd stopped. Instead, he turned and, with a grin, picked Mai up, twirling in place, shouting, "Woop, but damn is it good to be out and about again!"

Giggling, Mai hugged him back, deliberately pressing her chest into his, watching him blush a little as he realized that the position the two of them were in could be seen as romantic

all too easily. "And you've only been conscious for a week out of the more than three you were in the hospital," she teased.

"Yeah, well, for someone like me, that was more than enough. I mean, I think I've got an even better grasp of ki healing than I did going in, but I could've done without that coming included with staying in the hospital for so damn long," Ranma quipped, surprisingly not pulling away from the hug, even as his blush continued to grow. "And Mai? Thanks. For, you know, you and Shampoo, being there so often when I was out of it. You didn't have to do that. Shampoo didn't have to do that. But it meant a lot."

"We care about you, you goof." Mai shook her head, pulling away from the hug lightly, reaching up to his face and very deliberately not saying in what ways she cared for him. "Of course, Shampoo and I would be there. Just like I'm sure you would be there for either one of us." Her smile widened into a full-blown grin as Ranma nodded firmly, but then she gestured on. "Come on, we have a sexy villainess to watch make her final stand."

"Is it really going to be the final scene in the movie too? I thought, from what Shampoo was saying, everything would be all sliced together after they had each separate scene done," Ranma questioned, turning and gesturing Mai forward.

Mai leaped over to the next building before answering, landing lightly. Ranma watched her go for a second before following, trying hard not to let his eyes drift down her body to her rear and failing miserably. *Damn! Shampoo and I desperately will need some alone time, don't we? This isn't nearly as bad as after we left Master Nawa's, but this lack of control is seriously annoying.*

"Given how much Fei Long changed the script, it actually worked out that the last scene would be the last one shot. Although I will warn you, our girl is supposed to die in this scene. You can't charge into trying to defend her," Mai pointed out.

"Ehh? I didn't know that, but I can understand it. And don't worry, I won't run in and ruin anything. Except maybe her makeup before the shooting begins," Ranma added as an afterthought, "that will be a mutual thing."

Mai laughed again and, moments later, felt the strange feeling she'd felt every time over the past week whenever Shampoo and Ranma kissed as she watched Shampoo leap into Ranma's arms, claiming his lips eagerly the second his feet touched down in the open air set. Mai had even looked it up, compersion. *Happiness and delight at someone else's happiness certainly fit the bill*, she thought, smiling and allowing herself to feel that feeling and this feeling of arousal that came with it now, watching Shampoo and Ranma make out.

Fei Long and the others, stagehands, cameramen, stumps doubles, Mili, and more, watched on as well, some of them snorting, others making ribald comments, but not loud enough to bother the couple. When it became clear that the two martial artists had decided to

fully test how long either of them could go without breathing, however, Fei Long coughed delicately. "Makeup, we're going to need you over here in a moment. Shampoo, if you could leave off making out with your boyfriend for a bit, we do have a movie to finish here."

Shampoo pulled away reluctantly, looking over at Mai, who grinned and gave her a thumb up, causing Shampoo to giggle, shaking her head as she leaned against Ranma's chest for a second. "Wo Dai Airen (I love you, Husband)," she announced, smiling when Ranma whispered 'Xian' in her ear.

Even over a week after the first time he'd used it, hearing her real name from her lover gave Shampoo a secret thrill. He didn't do it all the time, and she was fine with that. It was why Shampoo had introduced herself to so many other people here in Hong Kong with the bastardized Japanese version of her name rather than her given name. It made it seem more special, more personal. *And I absolutely love how he says it. A whisper, a prayer, all the emotions he can push into it. It's enough to make a girl feel all gooey inside.*

Still, Shampoo knew now was not the time to think about such things. Shampoo had a job to do first. She stepped away from Ranma, surreptitiously fixing her dress and everything else ruined by her jump into his arms, grateful that Ranma was such a gentleman that his arms had never wavered from their position around her waist, even though, given the outfit she was wearing, the same one she had worn the night of the attack on the hospital, he would've had extremely easy access to her rear and chest if he so wanted.

But not in public, thank you very much. Although, I might get a skirt like this for myself in the future. Not the top, though. And if I ever need to change my hairstyle again, I for certain will use this stupid twin tails look. Ugh, these stupid balls are too darn tight. Since meeting Ranma, Shampoo had begun to wear her hair loose, with little in the way of ornaments, and had even swept the two strands she had normally styled to fall down her chest back in her village. They had gotten in her way once too often during an intense spar.

"Just you wait. After this, I'm **all** yours," so saying, Shampoo leaned up, giving Ranma a final kiss, feeling a thrill go through her when she felt Ranma try to lean into it before pulling himself back. The desire in his eyes was thrilling.

Shampoo was still giggling and giddy as the makeup artist began on her face, redoing her lipstick and other makeup quickly. *My word yes, Ranma and I are going to have a time soon. If not tonight, then very, very goddamn soon! And... I think that it is time we take our relationship to the next level.*

Yet that thought brought with it some connotations, and Shampoo sobered a little. *I wonder who I can ask about where to go for some kind of pill or whatever. While I very much want to ride the wild horse, I don't want anything to come from that exercise nine months from now.*

"I know that look," Mai hummed. She had followed Shampoo back into the women's dressing area, where the makeup artist had forced Shampoo to sit down, clicking her tongue in irritation at how making out with Ranma had messed up not only her lipstick but her mascara, the little bit of rouge on her cheeks, and the eyeliner underneath her eyes that the makeup artist had come up with to make Shampoo's eyes pop a little more. "That's the look of a woman who's determined that she wants some, what's the American idiom, homerun, some homerun time with her boyfriend."

"That line doesn't quite scan, dear." The makeup artist chuckled.

"Still got the point across, didn't I?" Mai snorted, leaning forward from behind as the makeup artist moved to stand in front of Shampoo, hugging the other girl from behind her chair. "Worried about complications?"

"Only one type of complication, really. I don't suppose..." Shampoo's word stumbled to a halt, her voice faltering, and she looked into the mirror at Mai, feeling oddly vulnerable and in need of help. While she knew a good deal about medicine as it was practiced back in her village and had learned a good deal about modern-day practices when it came to broken bones and things, this was an entirely new and very personal territory.

Luckily, Shampoo didn't elaborate, her friend smiling in sympathy as she responded to Shampoo's unasked question. "When we all split off in Wakayama, I went and got a shot for myself so that Andy and I... well, you know what happened there. I'd recommend that route. It lasts for a long time and is almost entirely effective. I'd also recommend Ranma get a shot, although I also understand that talking to him about that kind of thing beforehand isn't exactly romantic. We could maybe get Fei Long to talk to about it, or maybe Ken and Ryu?"

The idea of Ryu even knowing about any such thing was so laughable that Shampoo nearly burst into giggles, ruining the work that the makeup artist was currently doing. A quick flick from the end of the woman's brush against her forehead stopped her from doing so, and the woman stated, "I know that Fei Long goes every month to get a shot. He doesn't make a big deal about it, but he has a few girls he sees occasionally and doesn't want any complications there. I think if you're thinking of going all the way with your boyfriend, he can talk to him about it better than the other two martial artists I've seen around the set. Although, maybe the American would do just as well. The other one seems a little too focused on martial arts."

"You tried to flirt with him, didn't you?" Mai guessed, pulling back from hugging Shampoo to smile commiseratingly at the woman.

"I won't deny it. Ryu didn't even notice." The woman shrugged unconcern. "But Fei Long would be my choice between the two."

Shampoo nodded, then glanced pleadingly over at Mai, who laughed and offered to handle telling Fei Long about the request. She even volunteered without needing to be asked to

contact Chun-Li about recommending a doctor to give Shampoo her shot as well. *And while I'm about it, I'll make two appointments. One for Shampoo, and one for me.*

Soon, Shampoo's makeup was reapplied, and she was back out onto the set. Standing to one side, Ranma watched along with Mai, well back from any of the people who were working the various sound-capturing things. Ranma wasn't certain about the name of them, they looked large and complicated, although nowhere near as complicated as the series of cameras, several of which were on winches and being moved around on ropes from one portion of the stage to another.

Ranma was actually better able to follow what was going on in the scene itself than the directions from the director and everything else, unable to keep up with the orders he was giving to specific people. It began with a fight between Fei Long and Shampoo, which moved from one stage to another, the first being an indoor area that looked like a dance club of some kind, although in Ranma's opinion, it was a little too open to be someplace in Hong Kong. The fight consisted of Fei Long trying to get past Shampoo and a group of thugs rather than finishing her off.

Fei Long took several shots from Shampoo, which seemed to legitimately hurt him, bringing to life the realism of the scene. The next second, Fei Long had turned the tables on Shampoo, smashing her through a doorway, which her 'sister' and the big bad they both followed had run through a few seconds before. This brought the two combatants out into some kind of open parking lot for employees.

At that point, Ranma watched as a car pulled out from what looked like a private parking area directly next to the club, trying to race away, only for Fei Long to rush forward. Ignoring Shampoo even as she rolled to her feet, he tossed some throwing stars toward the car. At that point, the director called cut, as his throwing stars all missed.

"CUT! We need to get that part right before we can move on to Fei Long. Take it from the top where Fei Long follows Shampoo out. Shampoo, you could do a better job selling actually being injured. Flop a bit more on the ground when you hit. Stunt doubles, work with her on that for a bit. Fei Long, you told me you could throw those things."

"Oh, joy. More getting kicked through doors," Shampoo grumbled over Fei Long, trying to defend himself.

"Why not use caltrops?" Ranma observed, frowning. "Throw a bag of them up into the air ahead of the car, let them shower down. That way the car can't get past them whatever he tries. Throwing stars are a really stupid weapon anyway."

Hearing that, Fei Long scowled, shaking his head. "Caltrops would be something my character would have to have prepared ahead of time specifically to stop a car from getting away. He's a little too hotheaded for that."

“You don’t say,” Ranma, Mai and several others stated as one in rather deadpan tones. To which Fei Long replied very maturely by giving them all the finger.

This one shot took the better part of an hour as Ranma and Mai got bored, went off, grabbed up some playing cards and brought them back. At which point Ranma proved once again that while he could bluff with the best of them in a fight, he had absolutely no ability whatsoever to keep his face from showing what he was thinking when Ranma looked at his cards, causing Mai to giggle and almost but not quite mess up the last perfect shot, where Fei Long nailed two of the escaping cars wheels, front and back on its right side. The car wheeled in place, and the stunt double inside slammed it sideways into one of the other waiting cars, causing alarms and other things to go off in both cars.

At that point, the action resumed. Shampoo caught Fei Long from the side with a kick and then nearly broke his arm with another blow before taking a shot to the ribs, which, according to the script that Mai had picked up during the time the issue with the ninja throwing stars had been happening, was supposed to have broken a rib. It hadn’t because of Shampoo’s toughness training, but she tried to act as if it did.

This was helped along by a prepared blood package in her mouth, which provided real-looking blood to dribble down from her mouth. The next second, Shampoo was slammed with another punch to the cheek that sent her staggering, although she also returned fire by ‘nearly breaking,’ again according to the script, Fei Long’s thigh bone with a kick. He stumbled but turned the ball into a twisting roundhouse kick that caught Shampoo again in the side of her face, slamming her into one of the nearby cars.

Now, Ranma knew that the kick probably only hurt a little bit, and the impact on the car probably didn’t hurt much at all, thanks to their toughness training. Fei Long was good, but he wasn’t strong enough to really get through her toughness training like the assassin a few days ago had been able to do to both Shampoo and Mai at different points. Despite that knowledge, the sight of Shampoo getting hurt had Ranma almost out of his chair, growling under his throat.

Only Mai’s hand clamping down on his forearm stopped him from moving, and she quickly took his hand, squeezing gently, leaning in and whispering into his ear so that the sound recorders didn’t pick them up. “Remember, it’s a movie. You saw them put those blood packs on her a moment ago. That’s not real.”

Nodding, Ranma slowly settled back into his chair, but he didn’t remove his hand from Mai’s, simply squeezing it as he watched Shampoo sliding down the side of the car to her knees, dazed and confused. Before Fei Long could finish her off, Mili charged forwards from where she had been in the back of the car. This put her in the way of another man’s view of Fei Long, the older man having stumbled out of the other side of the car. He had gotten to his feet and pulled out a pistol, which he now shot wildly towards Fei Long, missing Fei Long but hitting Mili in several places just as her own stabbing dagger sliced into his chest. Mili stumbled forward against Fei Long’s chest, eyes wide and unseeing.

Behind her, Shampoo shot to her feet, her mouth open in a wordless shriek as she charged not toward Fei Long but toward the middle-aged man who had shot her 'sister'.

The man stumbled backward, emptying the rest of his magazine into the charging Shampoo, who only fell to her knees, her charge faltering as the last round found her chest, joining four other bullets there. Shampoo collapsed, her face towards Ranma, who stared, then breathed easily when she surreptitiously sent him a wink the moment the zoom camera as it had been called several times, was off her face and back on the running man.

The man couldn't get far before Fei Long, younger, fitter though sporting a lame arm and limp, caught up to him. The man tried to fight back, knuckle-dusters coming out from underneath his sleeve, but Fei Long dodged his wild blows, broke his arm, and then crushed his trachea with a chop, standing over the man as he fell to his knees, both hands at his throat, gasping and groaning.

"The streets of Hong Kong will be cleaner without your filth in them!" Fei Long shouted, and Ranma blinked, leaning sideways to whisper into Mai's ear.

"Really? That's it? He's just trying to clean up the streets, vigilante-style?"

"There **is** actually a bigger story there, from what I remember. I also think that's one of four or five lines that Fei Long could've gone with..." A moment later, this was proven as the director shouted cut.

"Fei Long, that line just doesn't hit hard enough. I'm sorry," the director announced apologetically. "It isn't catchy enough like the American 'yippee kay yay mother fucker,' and it just screams cliché."

"You said the same things about the four other lines. The cliché thing, anyway. Take it up with the screenwriter," Fei Long grumbled, gesturing over the director's shoulder to another person who'd been watching the action. "I agree, but I also don't think my character is broody enough to just stand over his enemy in silence before turning away."

"You and the director both think that I argued that he is, and I'm the one who wrote all your lines up to this point. Donny Jen is just as much my character as yours, sir," that worthy began to argue as Shampoo pushed herself to her feet, grinning cheerily as she looked down at the blood-soaked top. Her final tumble to the ground had undone her top more than a bit, which revealed a goodly portion of breast in turn to the watchers until she covered it up with a hand and moved over towards the costume expert.

She winked at Ranma again, surreptitiously making as if to pull her blouse again to the side as she looked at him, then not doing so as there were other eyes to see, causing Ranma to blush and stiffen in turn, while Mai giggled beside him, having reclaimed her hand from his after the director had shouted cut. "Someone's got it bad~," she teased in a singsong.

“Yeah, well, that’s what it’s like to be in love, you know,” Ranma retorted, shaking his head with a laugh, giving her a look that, for just a moment, took Mai’s breath away.

I know most of what I’m seeing there is really for Shampoo, but woo! The Japanese girl thought, fighting the urge to bite her lip coquettishly as she looked back at Ranma.

“And we need to redo that whole getting shot bit with Shampoo,” the director nearly shouted, scowling a bit and reclaiming everyone’s attention as he looked over at Shampoo. “Shampoo, you barely even twitched. You need to flinch every time a bullet hits you. I think you should even stumble a time or two while Fei Long is...Hmm...” The man frowned thoughtfully.

“A slash won’t do enough damage to halt Fei Long’s character for long. I could stab him instead,” Mili opined, her tone making it clear she wasn’t entirely talking about doing so in terms of Fei Long’s character. Three weeks of working alongside Shampoo had done nothing to improve Mili’s opinion of having another female lead.

While Shampoo grumbled about the comment on her acting skill, the change to Mili’s attack on Fei Long was accepted quickly, while the discussion about the final line took a bit longer. Thankfully, the video editors were able to cut in those three points so long as the man playing ‘Mr. Hand’ was able to retrace his steps.

In the second take, Shampoo overacted to the point as if she was mocking the man shoo, causing Mai, Ranma and several of the others on stage to laugh and the director to shout “Cut!” almost instantly. The third take for that portion of the scene went well, and they moved on to the final portion of the scene, with Fei Long saying another line that Ranma didn’t bother to listen to. Instead, he and Mai had gone outside to meet with Ryu and Ken as they arrived, Ken having called ahead of the pair.

“Yo, man, you ready to lose?” Ken asked jokingly, reaching over to punch Ranma in the shoulder while Ranma and Ryu exchanged simple nods of greeting. “Seriously though, I don’t want you to come back and say I pressured you into fighting when you weren’t ready or anything like that. If you need a few more days—”

“I’m fine,” Ranma interrupted, returning the punch with one of his own, gesturing with a jerk of his head towards the outdoor set behind them. “And they’re nearly done. I want to make sure before we begin: you’re positive you’re okay with just giving us money after I win? No offense, but I haven’t seen you use anything that I’d be particularly interested in adding to my own style, and Mai’s plans for traveling by ship sound really cool to me. It’s something I’ve never done before and would let us travel faster than we could on the land.”

Ryu snorted. “We’ve got a few ki moves that we haven’t quite mastered that you might be interested in, but you’ve got your own, so I understand where you’re coming from.”

"As for giving you money, I'm fine with that," Ken admitted. "Money literally doesn't mean that much to me, so buying you a yacht is fine."

Ranma shook his head at that way of thinking, but the ki space technique was so useful that he could understand why Ryu and Ken would be interested in it regardless of whether he won or lost. "It doesn't feel as if I'd be winning them. I'd still be forced to teach you something," he taunted.

"Think of it as an investment for our future trip, Ranma," Shampoo said, joining the conversation, flinging an arm around Mai and Ranma's shoulders. "Finished! I'll check my bank account within an hour, and the final check from Fei Long should've cleared by then. After that, he wants me to stay around for another day just in case they need to redo any of the scenes with me in them, but I'll mostly be free."

"Tell me about it, love. I was even more ecstatic than you are now when we left the hospital."

So saying, Ranma put an arm around Shampoo's waist as she giggled and flushed at the use of the 'love' term. That was something that Ranma didn't say all that often. *My love likes to show rather than tell*, Shampoo thought with a sort of complacent joy.

Smiling quietly to herself, Mai did the same from her other side. "He was jumping around like a jackrabbit for a bit. He even raced off over the rooftops without any idea of where he was going. Can you believe that?" When Shampoo replied that she certainly could, and Ranma muttered about feeling betrayed, Mai hugged Shampoo just a little tighter, looking at her closely while Fei Long came over to say hi to Ryu and Ken. He'd gotten to know the two of them over the past few weeks as they stopped occasionally at the set to talk shop with him and Shampoo. "Are you okay? With how big Fei Long is on realism, I don't think he pulled his punches much on you."

"I'm a little bruised, it's true, although I'm thankful that the gun was shooting blanks. I don't think I'm quite bulletproof just yet." Shampoo laughed.

"Yeah, that's another thing that we might want to learn from you guys. That toughness technique of yours. Is it simply reinforcing your skin with ki, or is there something else to it?" Ken asked.

Ranma shrugged. "it's simple, incredibly painful, but effective. Basically, it's just smashing yourself against objects until you can no longer feel the pain of it. Your body's built up a resistance to the punishment."

Fei Long cocked his head to one side, while Ryu frowned, and Ken stared at Ranma as if he was having them on. "That sounds more like some form of self-torture, or rather that you are just killing your ability to feel sensation rather than building up an immunity."

"It might sound like that, but it works," Mai agreed with a wince. "I went through it over this past winter in Japan with these two, and yeah. It's monstrously painful, yet effective."

Ryu frowned thoughtfully. "We should clear any such training with Master Oro first. If he says, there's some truth to that, then maybe. As for being painful, Ken, you have to admit that the two of us can take a hell of a lot more punishment today than we could when we were younger, and not all of that can be attributed to simply growing up. Master Gouken put us through his version of the toughness training, I think."

Ken had to admit that was probably true, although it seemed as if the training Ranma was talking about was on a bit of the larger and more brutal scale than being thwacked with branches while carrying large stone weights. "Anyway, are you sure we can use the set for this? Master Oro doesn't want us fighting on his property."

Of course, when Ranma had told Ken that he would be fit to fight last night, the first person they went to for an area to spar in was Master Oro. However, he had promptly informed them that he had a few weddings Oro would be officiating over in the next few days. Thus, he refused to let them spar on his grounds because of that and the concern that they might damage the property."

"Just let us move the cars, and you can have the space to yourself. The wreck will stay there for a bit, but I don't think either of you should be bothered by that," Fei Long snorted.

"I'm going to add my words to Ranma's earlier ones, Ken. We want to buy a ship for ourselves. A small three-person yacht kind of thing. Those are expensive, and we don't have enough to pay even for half of it at this point, even with Shampoo's money added to the amount we've saved so far," Mai warned.

Ken shrugged nonchalantly for the second time in this conversation. "My friend and I arrived here in Hong Kong on a personal jet, which I own half of with cash my parents have given me over the years that I've invested. I told you, money really is no object. Although, first, Ranma has to win the fight. And I don't like the fact that you both are acting as if that's a certain thing. I think I'm going to have to hurt you now."

His tone throughout this was conversational, but the glare he was giving Ranma told Ranma that he was serious. In response, Ranma simply smirked and led the way forward as the cars that had been used as props were slowly being moved out of the parking lot/stage. With them had gone most of the people from the production team, the director, the screenwriter, and most of the rest of the staff.

Mili remained, looking between Ken Ranma and Ryu speculatively, a look in her eyes that Shampoo didn't like. She quickly moved to stand between Mili on Ranma, glaring back at the older woman. Mili held her gaze before huffing and shaking her head. She turned her attention to Ken and other youth with him, eyeing them up and down speculatively.

“Skank!” Shampoo grumbled under her breath.

“Easy there. You warned Mili off, and she’s known that Ranma and you were together since we first made her and Fei Long’s acquaintance. You and Ranma are a couple. I’m not saying that I would leave him alone in her presence, but looking doesn’t hurt. You have to admit that all three of these boys, heck, even Fei Long, are good to look at, at least,” Mai whispered.

“Sure, but Ranma is off-limits to her! Even for looking,” Shampoo growled.

Mai snickered at that, and forbore pointing out that Shampoo had made that line a little too specific. *That would be silly considering my future plans*, she thought, linking arms with Shampoo. “Come on, if we hurry, we can get that makeup off of you and get you dressed in your normal clothing by the time those last few cars are out of the way.”

The Shiranui heiress was spot-on as by the time the two had returned, with Shampoo looking far more like her normal self than she had for weeks, the last of the cars had been moved out of the lot, and Ryu and Fei Long were standing to either side of the area. Fei Long had agreed to officiate the match and was raising his hand as the two girls raced forward, skidding to a halt next to Ryu.

“This match is a full contact spar between Ryu of the Ansatsuken and Ranma of the school of Musabetsu Kakuto Ryu. You might want to shorten that in the future, Ranma. It’s quite a mouthful,” Fei Long observed.

Ranma snorted and responded in the affirmative, while Mai and Shampoo looked at one another suddenly, both of them miming ‘that’s what she said’ to one another. This caused them both to break down into giggles.

Ignoring the peanut gallery, Ranma concentrated on Fei Long’s words, nodding in agreement when he stated the wager placed on the spar. Ranma would agree to teach Ken the ki-space technique free if Ken one, whereas otherwise he would simply be paying an outrageous amount to learn it.

Put that way, it seemed more fair to Ranma, although after what Ken had just told them, it very much seemed that Ken would win either way. *That’s something to be aware of going forward, Ranma. Always make the other person wager something that he actually cares about.*

Across from him, Ken nodded as well, and Fei Long repeated that this was a spar. “There will be no blows intended to cripple, maim, blind, neuter, or, obviously, kill. If there are, I will call a halt, and I join in on beating whoever it was that broke the rules.”

Ryu grunted agreement at that while the two combatants stared one another down. Shampoo and Mai, though, had no concerns on that score and simply watched, arms folded under their chests as the match began.

Instantly, Ken decided to surprise Ranma right out of the bat by launching a k attack, a spherical blue sphere launching from his outstretched hands as he shouted, "Hadoken!"

This was a technique he had not used during the tournament, not having good enough mastery of ki to project it far from his own body. Nevertheless, he had gained that in the past three weeks of training under Master Oro.

Ranma gaped at the cerulean sphere rocketing towards him, but it was not fast enough to catch him by surprise. He rolled to one side, dodging, then rolled forward under a spinning kick as Ken followed up.

A backward-aimed mule kick nearly caught Ken in turn as Ranma pushed off of the ground, kicking up and into him with both feet. Ken blocked them, lashing out and downward, but Ranma had already rolled away. Kicking up off of the ground, he twirled into a spinning kick that forced Ken to block, grunting under the impact to his forearm.

Instead of pressing forward, though, Ken disengaged, flipping himself upwards and away, gaining more distance and forcing Ranma to land back on the ground, unable to stay in the air and missing Ken with his next few punches. "I'm not going to let you just stay up in the air the entire time we fight Ranma," Ken taunted. "You're going to have to stay on the ground like the rest of us human beings."

"Big talk. Let's see if you can back it up," Ranma retorted, charging forward. Ken did the same, and the two of them exchanged punches and kicks for a time, blocking, disengaging, redirecting, although once more, when Ranma tried to jump into the air, Ken disengaged entirely, lashing out from only a few feet away with another Hadoken.

This one caught Ranma on his forearm as he raised it, blocking the shot, but the impact sent him hurling backward. Ranma was able to roll in midair to get his feet under him, landed and charged forward himself. *Huh, there's next to no heat to Ken's ki attacks, not like with Terry. Weird.*

Conserving his ki, Ken didn't use his Hadoken again, instead meeting Ranma once more.

Their styles are a study in contrast, Mai reflected. When she pointed this out aloud a second later, to which Shampoo agreed. Ranma dodged practically everything that Ken threw at him in close range, and what he didn't dodge, he redirected in attempts to get himself into the air. Meanwhile, his own attacks were fast and furious, with Ranma launching at least five or more attacks for every blow that Ken returned.

This allowed Ken to mainly stay on the defensive and block most of Ranma's attacks, redirecting or blocking rather than outright dodging. It was very clear that Ken understood his own strengths. He had stronger hitting power than Ranma, while Ranma was simply faster and more fluid than Ken, who was more methodical in turn.

At first, Ken thought he would be able to just outlast Ranma, letting him tire himself out before overwhelming him.

Yet it quickly became apparent to Ken that Ranma was adapting to his hard-hitting style. In the first exchange, he'd landed a few solid blows on Ranma's arms and even one to his chest that should have left a bruise but only served to cause Ranma to grunt. Now, most of his attacks were missing. *He's figured out how to read my style! Damn, that was fast. Can I change it up enough to throw that off?*

With that, Ken began to use more kicks in his attacks, but he made a mistake. He didn't pull back one of them fast enough. Ranma used his block of that attack to push into the air, and a kick landed on Ken's face an eye blink later, followed by several punches raining down on his head and shoulders.

He couldn't disengage quickly enough either, as when he tried to back away, Ranma stayed with him, using the momentum of his own punches landing on Ken to stay in the air. Ken had never faced someone who stayed in the air for so long like this, not even the monkeys that Master Gouken had forced him and Ryu to chase off occasionally, and now that Ranma was able to keep in contact, this lack of experience became quickly apparent.

Two more blows got through his defenses, ringing Ken's spell badly and causing a bruise to appear above one of his eyes that threatened to swell his eyeshot before he decided to try to turn the tables on Ranma. Gathering his Ki into his hand and forearm, Ken twisted around, launching into an uppercut. "Shoryuken!"

This attack blew through Ranma's defenses, slamming into his chest and hurling Ranma through the air. *Crap, but that hurt!* Ranma grunted, shaking his head. That was worse than most of the blows I took from Ryuji, if not quite up to getting punched by the hand that Yamazaki had kept in his pocket most of the fight.

Landing, Ranma pushed himself to his feet while Ken shook his head, getting his bearings. The two of them stared across at one another, with Ryu watching from the sidelines, shaking his head. "Damn. I thought taking a full ki-assisted blow to the chest would've put Ranma down for the count."

"Ranma is a lot tougher than he looks. Trust me, the Mad Dragon was simply that much stronger," Shampoo said from beside him, smiling proudly at how well her Airen was fighting.

"Fine, you wanna play with ki, fine by me!" Ranma charged forward, his own hands now glowing a light blue color, and Ken grimaced, his own hands and feet beginning to glow.

When they exchanged attacks now, each blow sounded like a crack of thunder going off, causing Mili to flinch, but she didn't look away, staring wide-eyed at two practitioners of the Art at a level that she had never even considered could be real, not even after meeting Fei Long and

seeing how seriously he took the Art. Before this, she had thought that he had indeed been pulling his punches with Shampoo during the fight scene earlier. Now, she wasn't so sure and was very, very thankful that she had not tried to challenge Shampoo to a real fight.

While on the surface, it looked as if the two of them were even again, with Ken using ki on both his hands and feet and Ranma only using ki to assist his punches that was not the truth. Because, Ranma was once more using Ebbing Flow. *Using this takes too much of my concentration to do it and add ki to all my strikes, but that's a repetition thing. I'll get better at using it in the future.*

At first, Ken didn't notice. But then, a redirected punch somehow stayed connected, forearm to Ranma's palm, just a little too long, opening him up to a right cross to the face, followed by a punch to the chest. A hasty kick caused Ken to cause the same problem as he'd run into before: Ranma was able to bounce up and off of it into the air.

This time, Ken attempted to instantly use his rising uppercut technique. Yet when his fist slammed into Ranma's chest, it stuck there, his ki seemingly disappearing into the other young man as the pair hovered there in midair. "Wha..."

Ranma grinned, and then his hand seemingly disappeared even to Ken's senses, slamming him in the face several times along with the upper chest, hurtling Ken back to the ground.

Before Ken could get up, Ranma landed on top of him with his hurt, his knee extended, causing Ken to groan and arch his back in pain, but before he could roll away, Ranma placed his hand on the back of Ken's head. "Match."

"Match," Fei Long declared from the sidelines. "Ranma wins."

"Damn. That ki-draining technique of yours is effective enough to draw in ki that's already been formed into an attack?" Ken grumbled from underneath Ranma, feeling his bruises begin to pile up after the last pummeling he'd taken.

"Not without some cost," Ranma admitted, coughing a little and raising his hand so he didn't spit blood down on Ken. "That was not pleasant at all. And I didn't exactly do a good job of deadening your actual impact either."

"Good to know. Now get off me," Ken grumbled, shaking his head. He turned from where he was lying, staring over at Mai and Shampoo. "So, what kind of yacht am I buying you three?"

Less than an hour later, Mai and Shampoo hurried off with Ken's credit card, while Ranma, Fei Long, Ryu and Ken headed to master Oro to practice the ki space technique. Fei Long

didn't think he'd be able to get it very quickly, but he wanted to see and hear Ranma's explanation of the technique.

The martial artist/actor understood that he didn't have enough ki to use in such a fashion, but after the fight earlier, he was determined to build up enough to do so. "I thought that I was near the pinnacle of martial arts. Now I see I'm barely in the foothills," he said philosophically as the four of them took his limo to Master Oro's.

He then looked over to Ranma. "By the way, if you and Shampoo are planning to, *ahem* celebrate your being out of the hospital, you might want to take some time to prepare. And I'm not talking about just the romance side of things." At Ranma's blank look, Fei Long sighed. It looked as if this might take a bit to explain.

OOOOOOO

While the limo carried the quartet of men off, Shampoo and Mai went about their own business. First, the pair headed to the doctor that Chun-Li had recommended. He actually had a practice in a building near her apartment and confided to the two girls that had been forwarded to him by Chun-Li that she was on the mend after her wounds from a few days ago. "It'll be at least a month or more before she's able to put much weight on that leg of hers. The attack there nearly went to the bone, and it was only luck that she didn't bleed out. But her forearms should heal without any scarring. Whatever cut her had about as sharp an edge as a razor."

"That isn't exactly comforting news, considering," Mai murmured, waving off the doctor when he made a confused noise as if he didn't understand.

Getting the shot herself took some doing without letting Shampoo know, which might've raised a few awkward questions that Mai wanted to avoid. However, here, the closeness to Chun-Li's place served her pretty well, and a single comment about making certain that Chun-Li remembered she still owed Shampoo a spar had the Amazon leaving the doctor's office rather than waiting there for the appointment. This allowed Mai to take the first appointment, and she was ready to go back out in the waiting room by the time Shampoo had her own.

From there, the two girls headed down to the dockyard area. Specifically, the boat shop that sold the type of small yacht Mai had chosen as the best option for the trio.

There, Mai ran into issues, because it wasn't her credit card and then, because neither of the two girls had a boating license. Once the first issue was seen, Mai was quickly run through a course on piloting a boat, which she passed well enough, and that was all the locals needed. Once the boat was paid for, neither the sellers nor the Hong Kong government would care what happened to them out away from the docks.

At that point, the man tried to talk Shampoo and Mai into buying a larger, more expensive boat for more than an hour, but Mai was firm. She knew the boat she wanted, one of

the newest ones to be built in Hong Kong, a Di-AO Zhi Electrical. It was fifty-five feet long, with four cabins of pretty much equal size to one another, although the two forward-most could have the wall between them removed to create a master bedroom, a galley, and a sitting room on the second deck, with a spare freezer and an engine on the third deck below at the aft underneath. There was only one bathroom, but that was okay, even if the size of the step-over shower was small.

The kitchen was of an okay size, and there was a deck on the aft of the boat that could be used for sunning or sparring if in an incredibly enclosed space. It was also entirely electrical, including solar panels built into the roof. A brand-new invention that hadn't made much inroads into China yet, they were the major draw for Mai when it came to looking for ships.

There were even backup solar panels that could be taken out of storage and hooked up to the electrical generator if the ones on the roof of the bridge area broke. It also had a mast and sails just in case, with the mast sticking up from the center of the ship, the stairs leading downward, which obviously had a hatch at the top, creating a spiral around the yacht as it went down into the ship.

That meant they wouldn't need to worry about fuel, although they wouldn't have as much straight-ahead speed as a gasoline-powered ship would. That was fine by the two women, though. It wasn't as if they were going to be racing their ship. This meant more to be their home as they went around Asia more than anything else.

Shampoo was enthusiastic as she finished checking everything else aboard. It even came with utensils and cooking equipment made for use out at sea: lightweight stuff that could be hooked into place and drawers that could be locked down as well. "This is really nice! I can see why you thought we didn't have enough money for it before, though."

"Yep. Given where we intend to go eventually, I figured we wanted something with a sail, and then I saw this was being built here in Hong Kong and thought one of them would suit us perfectly. But it is sort of brand-new, and brand-new costs," Mai admitted. "I just hope that Ranma is able to at least give Ken his money's worth when it comes to the ki-space technique. I'd feel bad about this otherwise."

Mai then leaned in, nudging Shampoo, only to frown as she winced a little. "Still sore?"

"A little bit. I'll be fine by tonight, and even if there wasn't, there's no chance I'm going to let tonight pass by. I don't suppose I could convince you to find a hotel for the night?"

Mai smirked. *No Shampoo. That is very much not in the cards if I can help it. But this gives me an idea.* "I will give you one better. Far be it for me to get in the way of someone else having a romantic night. So long as the three of us share a meal, I'll head off when you want to switch from friend time to romance time. But only after the three of us have fun, and the two of us go and get a mani-pedi. Sound good?"

The other girl nodded firmly, leaning over and giving Mai a hug, which the other woman returned quickly. "In that case, let's get some ingredients. In fact, let's do all of the shopping for the ship now. That way, tomorrow morning, we can just leave when you get back from your hotel unless Fei Long's called me to tell me he really does need me for the day."

"Sounds good to me. What were you thinking of cooking for dinner?" Mai wondered, the two women walking off, leaving the yacht where it was at the docks, of course, but with the keys to the yacht in hand.

And, admittedly, dire threats delivered to the seller. There had been several times apparently when people who had bought their yachts, then, before they had been ready to actually sail in them, found they had been removed or lost somehow, and the seller had no idea how. *But the fist-sized hole that Shampoo had left in the wall of the office behind them was probably enough to threaten the man*, Mai reflected. *If it's not, I might just kill him. God damn, but I have been looking forward to this for days. I can't even imagine how Shampoo's feeling!*

OOOOOOO

While Shampoo and Mai were making arrangements for what they hoped would be a great dinner between friends and then a romantic evening for Shampoo and Ranma (or so Shampoo thought. Mai obviously had other ideas), Ranma was also making his own arrangements. With Fei Long having informed him of the possibility of Shampoo's plans for the night, he had gone to the same doctor Fei Long regularly went to for shots, receiving one that would have him shooting blanks for thirty-two days.

Allegedly, Ranma wasn't certain he was going to trust the shot for that long, given his ki healing might negate it somehow. But since it just cost a lot of money and didn't need a prescription, this was China, after all. The One Child Law was still in effect. Ranma simply paid for two more needles he could inject into himself in the future with the money Fei Long had paid him to watch Ranma teach Ken and Ryu the ki-space technique.

After that, though, he took some of Ken's advice, the American having piled in during Fei Long's explanation to Ranma. While a lot of what his former opponent had jokingly explained on how to woo a woman had not been necessary or helpful, some of it was, and Ranma decided to go all in. Following Fei Long's advice again on where to go, Ranma headed out to buy a suit. Not a tuxedo or anything like that, but a good Chinese formal attire kind of suit. It cost still more money, but Ranma felt it was a good use of the remaining money Fei Long had paid him. Unlike Ken and Ryu, Fei Long was months, if not years away from making any headway with that technique, and thus had paid him **far** less than Ken had, but still enough to help Ranma with what he wanted to do tonight.

Next, he found a florist, and Ranma once more prodded the woman at the store for some advice, "Hey, er, I've heard that flowers and colors are important, right? So what do they all mean?"

This had led him to get an extremely deadpan, dismissive look from the woman at the counter, but her following bored drawl did actually tell Ranma what he wanted to know. Thus, he bought a bouquet of three roses for Shampoo, with one flower colored burgundy, red and purple. Thinking about it, he then got a larger bouquet for Mai, with mainly yellow roses for their friendship, with a single deep pink signifying gratitude and a green flower signifying new beginnings.

While most of this evening's preparations were for Shampoo, he figured that Mai deserved something, considering how much of a good friend she was. Before Ranma had met Shampoo, he hadn't exactly been used to thinking of people simply as friends rather than friendly rivals, friendly irritants, or just plain irritants. Becoming friends with Shampoo had changed that in a way, but their relationship had deepened so quickly after Shampoo had come back into Ranma's life, so thinking of her as just a friend beyond their time in the cave was tough.

Mai, though? She had come in and had slid into the friend zone so easily, followed by Natsume and Kurumi. The advice Mai had given, the help she'd given, how much fun she was to be around, in a way just like Shampoo but just different enough to be herself, all of that meant that Ranma wanted to do something for Mai almost as much as he wanted to do something for Shampoo now that they had a chance to have some romance time.

Although, kicking Mai off the boat after we eat is a bit... Much. Seems kind of wrong, Ranma reflected to himself as he hopped over the rooftops towards the dockyard area where the small yacht the two girls had purchased was supposed to be according to the map they'd sent him by phone. It was now pushing nine o'clock, but it had taken most of the day to teach Ryu and Ken even the start of the ki space technique, and he'd called ahead to tell the girls he'd be late. They'd replied they were running late too, so it was all good.

Ranma reflected on phones for a moment and how useful they were before setting the phone back into his pocket, wondering idly if it would get a signal in a ki space as he had during their infiltration of the underground tournament, before turning his attention back to the two girls he was about to meet. *There should have been some other way of, well, making certain that we don't bother Mai with our, er, X-rated romance-type stuff without actually kicking her out of the ship she's gone to so much trouble to find for us. And, come to think of it, what about in the future? I mean, if we're so concerned about her, um, hearing us and stuff, then a ship just isn't going to work. Or is the ship and waves going to be loud enough to cover Shampoo and me if she's out on the deck? Ugh, stop that, Ranma. Let's see what happens when I get there, and don't borrow trouble from the future, you idiot.*

A roll of thunder interrupted Ranma, and he stared to one side, scowling in the direction the sound had seemingly come from, then up at the sky. Through the nearly overwhelming lights of the city, Ranma could see clouds blocking out the few stars that would've otherwise been visible. "Oh hell no, you're not doing this to me, Mother Nature. This is one time that the water-attracting portion of my curse is not going to win!" *I still don't like doing more than*

kissing in my female form, and I will not start the night as a woman, even if I can change back later.

With that, Ranma carefully used his free hand once more to reach into his ki space, pulling out an umbrella. He lifted above his head just as rain began to fall. "I will beat the water attracting part of my curse, just for this one night, damn it."

With his umbrella above him, Ranma's thoughts shifted back to the two girls as he moved on, hoping that they would both like the roses and that Shampoo would like how he got dressed up for her and everything. Soon, though, he arrived at the docks, jumping onto a small security wall set between the docks where the luxury yachts were sold and maintained, and the rest of the dockyard area. *Funny how here in Hong Kong, anywhere wanting to get to the yachts, which're like, sources of rich assholes, ya gotta get through the rest of the docks, which ain't exactly rich and exclusive.*

He paused there, shaking his head for a second as he noticed that the wall wasn't exactly all that serious. It was simply a metal fence, without even any barbed wire on top to bother with. But a second later, most of his attention was trained on something going on ahead of him.

There were a few lights on the dockyard area, but this was Hong Kong, and while most of the city was super modern, there were a lot of places within it that weren't or were run down for various reasons. Thus, there was only a single light near the entrance into the area ahead of Ranma. Further, nearly all of the boats sat dark where they rested in the water, gently moving with the incoming waves. The only exception was the one that Ranma had been told to look out for, a sleek little vessel with a roof that looked like it was covered in glass.

From that boat, some American music could be heard playing, and most of the lights within the ship seemed to be one, shining light out of the portholes. The combination gave the boat an almost festive atmosphere. Ranma could even hear Shampoo laughing at something from here, her giggles distinctive to Ranma's ears after so long.

However, Ranma could also see that their new ship was attracting some unwanted attention. A group of nine men were skulking towards the ship, moving quietly through the rain, their faces masked with either bandannas or full ski masks. They were carrying makeshift weapons, machetes, knives and boards with nails in them. Although one of them also had what looked like a billhook, and Ranma had to admit that those things while having been developed for dockyard work, were truly nasty looking. *I suppose I should be glad we're not in America, where common criminals can get their hands on guns easily, at least according to the news. Heh, and it's pretty clear this group isn't part of the Triad, or they would be carrying guns regardless.*

What the men were up to didn't really need any explanation, and Ranma shook his head, glancing up at the rain, which was now coming down fast and heavy. He looked at it, then the roses in his hand before sighing, stowing them into his ki space, before leaping forward,

landing lightly on the ground, then charging forward, moving so lightly that the sound of the rain covered his movements easily. If Ranma wasn't in a hurry, he'd tried to warn the guys off or start taunting them for shits and giggles. However, not only did Ranma not want to mess up his good suit, he didn't want to get wet.

Thus, the first the men knew of his presence was when he karate chopped two of them at the back of the group into unconsciousness. One of them let loose a *UNK* sound as he collapsed to his knees, causing several of the others, including the billhook wielder, to shift around. He swung his billhook without even looking to see what had made the noise, but Ranma caught the blade between two fingers, pulling the man off balance towards the side and lashing out with a kick to the ribs that Ranma barely remembered to pull back in time before he simply killed the guy. As it was, there was a *snap-crack* noise as the man's ribs broke, which was almost drowned out by the sound of the pouring rain and the lightning and thunder that was now washing over the city.

Ranma pulled the billhook out of the man's unresisting grip, flipping it up until he caught it by the shaft, pointing it at the others all around him. *Hell, it really is like a glaive.* "Leave. I not want get wet, else I deals you," he growled out in his pigeon Chinese.

He felt he'd gotten his point across quite well, but it quickly became apparent that the men around Ranma were not the listening sort. They charged forward, although thankfully, they kept silent as they did.

Besides getting wet, Ranma really did want to bother the girls, who seemed as if they were having a good time aboard the boat. Mai's laughter joined with Shampoo's, something about "get your tit off of my elbow" being loud enough to be heard on the docks just as the men charged.

Regardless, Ranma dodged, ducked and slid under several blows, keeping his umbrella between him and the incoming rain with difficulty now that it was pretty much coming both sideways and from directly above. Lashing out with a series of kicks that caught three of the men, he sent them hurling backward towards the fence.

One of them cleared it. The other two did not, slamming back or face-first into the chain-link fence, causing it to rattle so loudly that Ranma could hear it even from here. Worse, one of their weapons had gone flying in a direction Ranma had not anticipated, flipping upwards and smashing into the sole lantern, giving any kind of light to the dockyard area beyond the portholes of their ship. This made an even louder noise as the glass lantern shattered.

Ranma scowled as he slammed the blow into another man, watching the boat intently for a split second, hearing how the music had suddenly cut off. "All right, you idiots, no more Mr. Nice Martial Artist."

With that, blows began to break bones, sending one man hurtling sideways with his shoulder in more pieces than whole and another to his face on the ground, screaming from a ruined hand until Ranma's foot stomp walked him unconscious. Several more were smashed away quickly. Yet despite how quickly he was trying to move, Ranma was just finishing when Shampoo and Mai pushed themselves up out of the hatch that led down into the boat to look toward the docks behind the ship.

From where he was basically standing on the skull of the last man, Ranma shrugged sheepishly at them. "Hey, girls. Sorry, I was trying to be quiet. Really."

"You fought them all off while still retaining your male body in the rain. That's more than enough, Ranma," Shampoo said, giving him a thumbs up, which Ranma could barely see in the light coming up behind the two girls. Shampoo knew that Ranma still had some trouble showing affection in his female body, and tonight, she very much wanted both of them to initiate things rather than doing that all on her own.

"Kick them all towards the fence, and then get aboard and out of the rain," Mai said tartly, shaking her head. "We'd come over and help, but neither of us is exactly dressed for being out in the rain right now."

"No problem." With that, Ranma did as Mai bid him, kicking all of the men towards the fence, most of whom slammed into it back shoulder or head first. Within a minute, they lay there in a groaning line, and Shampoo was still snickering at the curses some of them were saying in putonghua as Ranma hopped aboard the boat.

Mai had pushed herself up out into the sitting area/bridge and, with a few flicks of her fingers, turned on several of the lights there and at the back of the boat. As she did, Shampoo's giggles at the words of the men faded away, replaced by a breathy, "Ai-yah..."

This had Mai turning around, and she soon stopped and stared as Ranma hopped over the plank, landing lightly at the back of the boat, the area that was open enough to have a gentle spar, lined with benches to either side and small lights at the bottom of the bench. Not that Mai cared overmuch about the boat at the moment, drinking in the sight of Ranma and what he was dressed as.

Ranma had slicked back his hair into his typical pigtail, coupling that with a traditional Chinese formal outfit. His pants were made of silk and hung loosely on his legs, while above that, he wore a vest (Mai wasn't certain what they were called) that tied up on the front with silver bars acting in the place of buttons. The dark blue of the outfit set off Ranma's skin and his eyes alike and clung to him almost like a second skin. It didn't show off anything of Ranma's body that neither of the girls had seen before, obviously, but it looked really good on him, and both girls were stunned by the thoughtfulness of Ranma deciding to show up like this. It showed he had taken a lot of initiative from the hint that Mai had passed on to Fei Long. Frankly, it made both of them feel a little, well, silly for not having already dressed up in turn.

We still have some cooking to do, but even so, Mai reflected, dithering a little.

Not that she should have worried. As Shampoo and Mai were staring at him, blushes on both of their faces along with wide smiles, Ranma was taking them in in turn. The pair were both wearing aprons and from where Ranma had seen Mai's backside for a moment, Mai was wearing booty shorts, along with a T-shirt under her apron. It certainly wasn't dressy, but good god, did it look good on her.

As for Shampoo's upper body, which was all he could see from where he was standing as she had yet to push herself out of the hatch leading down into the boat, she too was wearing an apron, although in her case, it didn't look as if she was wearing anything up top including a bra unless it was one of the ones that went around her sides rather than over her shoulders. She seemed to be, well, jiggling a little too much for that to be the case, though. Ranma found his eyes drawn to her chest, and not just because of the words printed in small lettering there in Japanese with the words 'martial artists do', which was all he could see right now.

"My love, you're embarrassing me," Shampoo murmured, shaking her head as she found her voice, her eyes locked on Ranma, drinking him in like a woman dying of thirst given a long glass of water. "I haven't had time enough to get dressed up at all and didn't think we would for this meal!"

Her tone made it very clear that despite her words, she was very, **very** happy with Ranma, in fact. If not for the rain, Shampoo was giving the impression that she would pounce on him right now as she had earlier that day when he and Mai arrived at the movie set. That made Ranma smile, and he stepped forward under the awning, closing his umbrella and setting it on the ground.

Or is it a boat? What's the difference there? I suppose we'll figure out, a part of Ranma's mind wandered, although most of him couldn't care less about such things right now.

"Yeah, well, when I figured that, you know, tonight was going to well go from the three of us to just you and I Shampoo," he said haltingly. Despite the effort he put into making this romantic, Ranma still wasn't exactly great with his words, especially, when he had time to get embarrassed or was conscious enough to be embarrassed anyway. "I figured I needed to put forth some effort. I mean, the two of you said you were going to be cooking the meal, that's one thing, then, you did all the shopping for the boat, buying the boat itself and well, you looked after me when I was in the hospital and everything there. I just figured I needed to do something for both of you, and um, dressing up for you Shampoo was one of them. T, this is the other."

Reaching into his ki space, Ranma prayed with all his heart that the flowers would be okay, and when he pulled them out, thankfully, they were. There was frost on the petals, a sure sign that any longer, and the cold of the ki-space might have killed them, yet this just made them look better when Ranma handed the first one over to Mai. "Here. I, um, I talked to the

florist, and she recommended yellow for friendship, but I figured one rose for affection and thanks, and green for new beginnings, since you were the one to find our new home, so, and um, yeah, you just mean a lot to us both so..."

Listening to that, Shampoo nodded her head firmly. If she was forced to put into words what she felt toward Mai, that came kind of close. *Although there should also be a rose that says to someone you find them sexy as hell somewhere*, she reflected before shaking the thought off, putting it down to the fact that she and Chun-Li had been in the ship's galley cooking in close contact for a while before Ranma had shown up. This had led to a few mishaps and squishy encounters, as Shampoo had called it after the second time it happened. This had made Shampoo far more aware of her friend's body than well she really wanted to be at the moment, with her boyfriend right there in front of her.

Shakily, Mai reached forward, taking the roses in her hand, bringing the bushel to her face to smell, using all of her willpower to not pounce on Ranma, just as Shampoo had a moment before. *Remember the plan, remember the plan, soon. Not just yet, soon*, she thought with all her might.

Despite winning that internal battle, all Mai could say was, "T, thank you, Ranma. This, this means... a lot to me." *And oh boy, I really, really hope that this is a sign that you're feeling more towards me than just friendship, regardless of your words and the colors of these flowers. I really, really do.*

Seeing Mai so overcome, Shampoo smiled tenderly and pushed herself up out of the hatch, moving over to give Mai a hug, drawing the cup taller girl down into a hug, nestling her chin against the other girl's shoulder. "My Love's words are mine! There was no one among my fellow Amazons I was as close to as I am to you. Not even my childhood friend Mousse or rival Perfume was ever as precious to me as you are, Mai. You deserve those roses and **far more** for the help, for the companionship you've given us!"

Hugging Mai was not something that, upon reflection, Shampoo should have done, given her earlier thoughts about how aware she was of the taller girl's body while they were cooking. Now, she couldn't get out of it quickly and found herself blushing as Mai hugged her back while Ranma looked on, smiling at the closeness of the girls, a feeling of deep joy rising within him for some reason.

Eventually, Shampoo pulled back as a hissing sound from below reminded her that she and Mai had left some of the cooking to be done. "But you, Husband, you're quite brave, giving flowers to another girl in front of your Amazon girlfriend?"

Smirking, Ranma shook his head, pulling out the bouquet of three flowers he'd prepared for Shampoo. He even had a verbal answer ready for this, having worked on it while leaving the florist's. "And what can a flower would someone give a jewel, Xian Pu?" he said, moving forward to hand her the flowers, then pull her into a hug.

A hug that became a kiss as Shampoo handed her flowers over to Mai. A kiss that became a tongue-intensive make-out session, as Shampoo responded ardently to his trio of declarations held within those flowers.

After a moment, Mai was forced to basically push them to one side to head downstairs, carrying the flowers as she went to make certain that they didn't burn dinner. "I would say come down when you've had your fill of one another, but I'm afraid the food would probably have gone bad by that point~," she caroled over her shoulder. "But take your time, Shampoo. I can finish up the cooking."

At that, Shampoo made a moue of displeasure against Ranma's lips, unwilling to let the other girl do all the work but also unwilling to remove herself from Ranma at the moment. So she indulged herself for a bit, then slowly pulled back, with Ranma's hands firmly on one breast and the other on her rear, her own hands both on his rear, squeezing. "Come on. Mai shouldn't be forced to finish all of the cooking. And I think she wants to show you around the boat."

When Ranma looked into the galley and sitting room, he shook his head. "How the heck did both of you fit in there?" he demanded, staring at the small kitchen area and not at all at Mai's body, no matter who said otherwise. Nor did it have anything to do with being still turned on from making out with Shampoo less than a minute ago. It was just he couldn't look at the kitchen without taking in Mai's body at the same time.

"With a lot of bumping and laughter," Mai snickered, smirking over her shoulder at Ranma, a shiver going through her that was far more than friendly, as was the look Ranma was giving her in turn when her back was turned. He shook his head quickly and banished that look, but Mai had seen it in both his and Shampoo's faces for a second and exalted in it. *Yep, I've seen enough to know that Ranma is at least attracted to me, and the roses and everything else, ooh boy that was a sure sign of affection if ever there was one. And hopefully, before the night is through, both he and Shampoo will realize it, and all three of us will be very, very happy.*

That Mai loved both Ranma and Shampoo was something she no longer even questioned. She had been pretty certain of that even before the past few days. But now, with the roses, with the flirting that Mai and Shampoo had done with one another occasionally in the kitchen, with simply how much Mai loved being around both of them, she knew. What she had felt for Andy was infatuation. What she felt for these two was a lot deeper. **A lot.** And she could not wait to express that.

"It's true. Mind you, we were also having a lot of fun," Shampoo giggled, looking between her friend and boyfriend for a moment and then down at her body, wondering aloud if she could take a chance and change before taking over for Mai.

Ranma though shook his head, gesturing down to himself and saying, "Don't bother about it. You two have been a lot busier than I have, and dressing like this was for you. You don't

have to dress up for me. After all, I've seen you both in a lot of different outfits over the past few months."

Why Ranma had said 'you both' rather than simply Shampoo, Ranma really couldn't see, but neither girl seemed to take umbrage at it, instead simply smirking and nodding respectively, and then Shampoo leaned in, whispering, "Hmm... looking at your totem pole down there, I think I just found your fetish, Ranma. Naked aprons are a Japanese thing, right?"

"I can't tell a lie on that one," Ranma said, grinning down at her, then swooping down before she could do more than smirk back, kissing her hard on the lips again.

"Ooh, a floor show," Mai called out, even as she continued to cook. "Nice."

Shampoo raised a hand languidly and wiggled her fingers towards Mai. What that was meant to imply, Mai had no idea, simply watching the show for a bit while continuing to cook until it was time for them to sit down at the bar to eat.

The ship didn't have any kind of dining area, with the galley and below-deck seating area separated by a low bar that doubled as the only place to sit down and have a meal at a table. Mai explained this, then pointed upwards, saying, "There was an accessory that could come with the boat that would stick a table on the aft porch area, but I figured that we didn't really need it, and it would take up too much space." *And I made certain I could return the removable wall that'll let us have a master bedroom, too. Thank goodness, Shampoo was too busy inspecting the kitchen utensils.*

Ranma nodded his head firmly. "From what I've seen so far, that's the only area that is open enough for us to do kata without worrying about bumping into something."

"Speaking of, you wanted to show Ranma around the boat, right? Why don't you do that while I dish out the meal," Shampoo offered, still holding Ranma around the middle as Ranma held her around her shoulders.

"You sure you can tear yourself away from him?" Mai snorted before maturely responding to Shampoo's sticking her tongue out at her with her own tongue, noting out of the corner of her eye how Ranma stared first at Shampoo's tongue, then over at Mai's, before shivering slightly, and stepping away from Shampoo and the bar. That this allowed both girls to see his visible sign of arousal was something that Ranma seemed to have miscalculated on, but he quickly turned away, moving to head back out into the small hallway. "So, show me what this ship of yours is like."

Snickering, Mai moved around the bar, exchanging positions with Shampoo, both girls smacking their hips lightly against one another as they passed, exchanging lower-lip-biting smirks. Mai then did her best to turn the tour of the ship into a subtle case of how 'red can you

go' moving her body in little ways that drew Ranma's attention to her and away from the boat as often as she could.

Thankfully for Ranma, the tour didn't last very long. Soon, all three of them were sitting at the bar, needing to turn sideways to one another to talk, with Ranma in the middle and both girls on either side of him. It should've been awkward, needing to twist around in their seats to look at one speaker then the other, but surprisingly, it worked.

As the conversation shifted away from the food, which consisted of Chinese dim sum, Asian salad and orange beef, Shampoo and Ranma heaped praise on Mai for the purchase of the ship, with Ranma promising to study what he could learn all about sails and stuff going forward. "I doubt I'll ever get to the point where I can actually pilot the ship, but if we have to rely on the sails, someone's got to be on them all the time, right?"

Mai accepted that, and Shampoo then changed the subject to the TV built into the opposite side of the sitting area from the kitchen. They had to turn entirely away from the bar to look at it, or be sitting in the sitting area, obviously, but it was easily the same size as the TV they'd had in the hotel room they'd been staying at prior to the underground tournament. "Even better, we can hook up Mai's laptop to it and play movies through the TV."

"And my laptop can take a charge from the ship's electrical generator. Which in turn is powered by solar panels. The ship cost a lot, but we should be relatively self-sufficient going forward," Mai added to Shampoo's words with a grin. "Although obviously, if we were trying to access the Internet or something while out at sea, that's not going to be very easy."

Ranma shrugged at that, saying that he'd probably just find what he could about sales and download before they left port sometime in the morning, to which Shampoo laughed throatily, and Mai shook her head with a wry grin. "In the afternoon, Ranma. Unless you really think I'm going to leave you with enough energy to get up early tomorrow."

Ranma blushed wildly at that, looking over to Mai, squeaking and gesturing between the two girls, but Mai simply giggled, shook her head and stood up, moving back into the kitchen. *If that isn't the perfect opening to initiate phase 2 of my plan, I don't know what is.* "Shampoo told me what she wants to be doing tonight Ranma, don't worry. I'm not offended, or embarrassed or jealous. I'm pretty much the exact opposite of jealous, really. Seeing you two together it makes me really happy."

Shampoo smiled widely, fighting the urge to hop up and run around the bar to give Mai a hug for that, while Ranma simply smiled back at her, a smile, which faded a little as he realized that Mai hadn't just refilled her bowl with more orange beef. She'd also brought out a glass of wine. Or at least he thought it was wine.

It was indeed a liqueur, and Mai rested the bottle on the bar, waggling her eyebrows at Shampoo. "You remember that drink we shared a few weeks ago? Well, I figured out what kind

of alcohol was in it. This kind. I've even got the recipe. How about just for tonight, we have a few drinks to celebrate our new ship and the next stage of our world-hopping adventure?"

Inside, Mai tensed, hoping that this would go over well. Liquid courage would help a lot when she started to blurt things out later on. If, however, Shampoo and Ranma both declined, then she'd have to rely on her own courage, and despite how much she was certain of her own feelings towards the pair, that seemed an intensely daunting task.

Thankfully, Shampoo simply grinned and nodded before holding out a fist for Mai to bump over the bar. "Heck, yes! That was so tasty, peach and strawberry, yum."

"Er, I don't know girls. My old man, he..." Ranma tried to demure.

"Your father probably never drank much in the way of cocktails. He looked like a beer guy to me, complete with a beer belly. Don't worry. Neither of us is going to grab a bottle of wine or sake or a six-pack of beer. This is just a nice little fruity drink," Mai said, her voice soothing. *Although I won't tell you about the actual alcoholic content. Still, split three ways, a single bottle shouldn't be that much.*

Ranma frowned, but Shampoo grinned, leaning into them. "Don't worry. Mai and I had them before. We had something like five or six of them one night with our meal, and we were only a little tipsy. And it tastes really good."

"So'd a smoothie made of peach and strawberry," Ranma protested.

This was a losing argument. Soon, all three of them had the fruity cocktail and were drinking, joking, and eating all at once. At one point, Shampoo got up to put on some music in the background. She then pulled Ranma up to dance before laughingly pulling Mai up to do the same.

Outside, the police, who had finally been called in by the loud moaning, groaning and crying of Ranma's victims, could only stop and stare from the job of loading up local thugs and drunks towards this sole ship at this particular quay that seemed to be occupied at present. They all shook their heads at the noise coming out from it a sharp contrast to the near torrential rain coming down on them all. "Some bastards have all the luck."

Inside, Ranma wasn't certain how, but somehow, the three of them had moved from sitting at the bar to sitting in the sitting area. This was set a step below the rest of the lower deck and was lined with cushions, only a small walkway separating the two sides, with the sofa continuing under the TV set into the wall. There, he was sitting down, with Shampoo in his lap, laughing at something Mai had said as the Shiranui heiress leaned her head partially against Ranma's shoulder, partially against the back of the sofa, which in turn was built into the inner bulkhead of the ship.

What Shampoo was laughing at, Ranma had no idea, having been completely distracted by the extremely nice, extremely bouncy armful in his lap. Eventually, though, Shampoo's giggles subsided, and she leaned her head against Ranma's other shoulder, simply breathing in deeply and staring across him at Mai, then leaning up and kissing Ranma on the cheek.

Her words came out a little fast and slurred as she spoke, but even so, Ranma was good enough with Chinese to understand them and winced a bit. "Shampoo really, really does not want to do this. But she also really, really wants some Ranma time. Some slow Ranma time, some deep Ranma time, some hard..."

"I think we get the point," Ranma said hastily, looking unapologetically over at Mai. Thanks to how much work he'd put into his ki healing during his convalescence, the alcohol really hadn't done much of anything to Ranma, whereas it was very clear that both girls were feeling it judging by their slightly flushed faces and overall giggliness. Not that Ranma was complaining. Shampoo had been right. The cocktail had tasted pretty good.

"I get it. You two want me to go," Mai mock-pouted, and Shampoo hastily reached across Ranma and grabbed her arm, declaring loudly that no, she didn't really want Mai to go, but she did want some Ranma-time. Mai laughed, squeezing her hand and leaning forward to give both of them a hug, before pulling away, staring at the two lovers with a sudden amount of seriousness that caused Ranma's breath to catch in his throat. The look she was giving them, the warmth there...

"You know, I'm really happy for you two. I was happy for you two when we first met when you were just this martial artist couple that were friendly enough to get along with and whose romance seemed like something out of a fairytale storybook. But as time went on, I just grew to enjoy seeing the two of you interact. It made me happy. Even more fun as I felt just being around you, being with you. You said it yourself Shampoo, the three of us, we have a lot more fun when we're together. This journey's easier and a lot more fun when it's the three of us. And that, that feeling, the feeling that I'd rather be with the two of you than with Andy, even when I was infatuated with him, that got me thinking. It got me to think that... that love isn't something that you just declare. It's something you build over time. And maybe, just maybe, it isn't just between two people..."

Shampoo and Ranma were both still processing her words when Mai leaned halfway across Ranma's body to kiss Shampoo where she had been leaning against his pec. Without any hesitation, Mai pressed her lips against Shampoo's, trying desperately to get the depth of her emotions across in one kiss.

At first, Shampoo was just shocked. Mai's serious words and tone hadn't deadened much of the buzz she'd been feeling, yet Shampoo's heart had begun to patter hard as she stared at Mai throughout her speech. Her words hadn't sunk into Shampoo's mind, yet the touch of Mai's lips to her own caused Shampoo's eyes to widen in shock. Thanks to Ranma's female form, she was no stranger to kissing another girl, but this wasn't the redhead. This was

Mai! Surely, this was wrong, a small part of her mind shouted. Yet that part was drowned out by the rush of emotions filling her mind, or rather emotions that had always been there rising to the surface, coalescing into a single emotion she could consciously recognize at last: love. *Blessed Athena, I've fucking fallen in love with my best female friend on top of already having my Airen! How strange is that!?*

Evidently, though, judging by how much passion Mai was putting into the kiss, she was feeling the same. *Oh, that's what all those words were about. Good.* Setting aside questions about how this would work for later, Shampoo, horny and now with her heart and mind bursting from this revelation, kissed back.

For several minutes, as a wide-eyed Ranma watched on, the two girls kissed. Mai had never kissed a girl before this, but she was fueled by an almost desperate need to convey her emotions through this one kiss, and Shampoo, although kissing back, was still a bit sluggish. Neither girl opened their mouths to let their tongues out to play, but Shampoo and Mai both were soon panting, little whimpers leaving their joined lips as their left and right hands found one another, fingers twining together where they met on Ranma's stomach.

Pulling back, Mai opened her eyes, staring into Shampoo's, who stared back, biting her lip but doing nothing. Saying nothing right now, simply staring, breathing in deeply as she slowly nodded. Yet that was enough, and Mai smiled, causing Shampoo to bite her lip, her eyes flicking upward to the stunned Ranma.

Hesitantly, Mai also looked up at Ranma. He had simply been watching on, somewhat poleaxed but not angry or jealous. In fact, judging by the tent pole just below where Shampoo and Mai's hands were still intertwined on his stomach, he was even more turned on than he had been when Shampoo was giggling and bouncing in his lap. And looking into his eyes, Mai saw understanding there, as well as hope, desire, and dare she say it, love.

The kiss she had given Shampoo had given Ranma enough time to marshal his own thoughts about Mai. At first, he'd really tried, he really did, to concentrate solely on the feeling of friendship he felt for her. Yet his appreciation of her, of her body, of her wit, her drive, her attitude, intelligence, and sense of humor, changed the feelings he'd already acknowledged with the roses earlier to something beyond that into the realm he had thought only Shampoo could occupy.

Now, he looked down at where Shampoo was leaning against his chest, staring unceasingly at Mai, a flush on her face from the kiss she'd just ended. When she looked up at him, instead of seeing any flash of anger as Ranma had feared when Mai turned her attention to him, all he saw was acceptance. Acceptance and love in equal measure for both him and the girl she'd just been kissing.

Leaning up, Mai moved slowly only for her eyes to widen as, after a final look at Shampoo, Ranma leaned down, meeting Mai halfway, kissing her in turn. As their lips met, he

could feel her other arm, which had been on the back of the sofa, move until her fingers began to work into his hair. Not undoing the Dragon's Whisker, thankfully, the disaster he'd had with that during his date with Shampoo back on Sado Island had sunk in during their talk afterward, just as it had Ranma and Shampoo's during the actual event. The feeling of her fingers in his hair was still nice, though not even a shadow of the feeling that Ranma was getting from the kiss.

Lemon Start:

Just like with Shampoo, Mai attempted to get across all the feelings she possibly could into that kiss, giving it a semi-desperate feel to Ranma for the first few seconds until she realized that Ranma had not only met her halfway but was actively kissing her back. The desperation faded then, although Ranma could actually feel wetness coming from her eyes as their mouths pressed against one another, a lone tear of joy escaping from Mai as she realized that both Ranma and Shampoo were returning her affections. After a few seconds, she hesitantly opened her mouth, allowing her tongue out.

A portion of Ranma's mind, although at the time he'd desperately tried to ignore it, had noticed earlier that night that Mai's tongue looked a little longer than Shampoo's, a little thinner. Now, Ranma felt that slightly longer tongue slide across his own. He could tell it also had a slightly smoother texture than Shampoo's, something that Shampoo had once complained about having come from a piece of childhood drama when she ate something that had proven too spicy for her. Yet despite that, the way the girls moved their tongues was similar, not passive or aggressive, but slightly demanding, wanting to enter Ranma's mouth and explore while also eagerly allowing Ranma to do the same.

Eventually, they had to slowly pull back, whereupon Shampoo pounced, kissing Ranma hard. Ranma eagerly matched her, his mouth open and waiting, their tongues starting to duel in mid-air to the delight of the watching Mai before Shampoo's lips nearly crashed against Ranma's.

When they parted again, Shampoo found Mai licking up her chin to her mouth, where it was the two girls' turn to put on a bit of a tongue to play for Ranma, who watched, a flush suffusing his features as he began to shift in his seat. His hands moved down from where they had been gripping each girl's hair, then down to their rears, squeezing and then back up again. Similarly, the two girls' hands were getting into the action. One hand each was reaching across Ranma to touch and explore, while the other met behind Ranma for a moment, moving up into his hair, then down, their fingers lightly touching one another before moving around and then back down his body.

By some unspoken signal, the two girls left off exploring one another to pull it Ranma's jacket. Ranma tried to remove his hands from around them, but he was too slow, and several of the silver bar-pipe buttons were pulled entirely off his suit as they literally ripped it open, causing him to growl a little. "OY, that suit was expensive."

“With Ken paying the entire amount needed for the ship, we get the money for it,” Shampoo growled, leaning in to kiss him hard to silence any further complaints. “Besides, I can repair it,” she continued between kisses.

Mai on the other hand, was also beginning to push up against his undershirt, which was similarly silk like his pants. Once she had it high enough to begin to feel Ranma’s stomach muscles, she did so, running her fingers up and down it, breathing in deeply. “Damn, I’ve been wanting to do this for a few days now.”

That told Shampoo, now sober thanks to the amount of endorphins rushing through her system, precisely when Mai had come to the conclusion that she had fallen for Shampoo and Ranma, and her smile warmed noticeably even as she continued to kiss Ranma. *My words were what gave Mai the final clue. That’s kind of nice, even if this caught me by surprise.*

Shifting a little bit backward to allow her arm to come up in between herself and Ranma again, Shampoo reached over to slowly run the fingers of both hands into Mai’s hair, then down to her neck, lightly caressing her ear, neck and collarbone. Turning slightly in Ranma’s lap, she sat half-on and half-off of it now to watch what her hands were doing even as her mouth was busy kissing Ranma.

Mai shivered at the touches, glancing up at Shampoo, seeing her looking down at Mai and smiling quickly before slowly pushing Ranma’s shirt further up his front, leaning down to kiss and lick at his abs now as she went. Understanding what Mai was up to, Shampoo reluctantly disengaged from Ranma, pushing up and almost all of his lap for a second so that they could pull his shirt up and over his head, tossing it to one side.

For a moment, as Shampoo continued to kiss Ranma, Mai simply ran her fingers up and down his body. Ranma had put on a bit of muscle since they’d first met, but he was still slimmer and far less muscled in the shoulders and arms than Andy had been when they’d broken up. But the definition on him was simply crazy. Andy had the body of a boxer and weightlifter, Ranma had the body of a gymnast and swimmer combined, and Blessed Amaterasu did it show in his stomach and side muscles. At the moment, she couldn’t even remember what those were called, only that on Ranma, they were magnificent. *That isn’t even counting what’s underneath his pants and what that tent is doing so very little to hide at the moment.*

Pulling away from Ranma’s grip on her rear and Shampoo’s hand that was currently somewhat haphazardly fondling her chest, Mai decided that one good turn deserved another and reached behind Shampoo. Her apron was secured around her with the traditional two ties, one behind the neck and one at the lower back. The lower back Mai released first, then the upper, allowing the apron to slowly fall down Shampoo’s body before she pulled away, pulling it sideways out from between their bodies, tossing it haphazardly over her shoulder.

Ranma had felt what was going on even as his eyes were closed, as were Shampoo’s as they were kissing. Now, as Shampoo pulled back from her kiss, Ranma opened his eyes, knowing

what he would find, and he dove down. His lips went straight to work, kissing me Shampoo's breasts, then nipping and sucking at one of her nipples, causing Shampoo to moan, her hips beginning to shift forward and back where she rested on one of Ranma's legs.

Seeing that as a good idea, Mai shifted forward as well, pulling Ranma's other leg to the side a little bit so that she had room to sit on it, one leg on either side of his just like Shampoo was, crouching there on his leg, which he began to lift, slowly shifting it this way and that against her booty short-clad core. And just like with Shampoo that stimulation began to get to Mai quickly. She moaned a little, then leaned down and kissed Shampoo again, the two girls making out furiously for a few seconds, letting loose little whimpers, moans and smacking noises as their lips met, parted, tongues met and snaked around one another.

Even as Ranma feasted on Shampoo's chest, this left Shampoo's hands free. One of them remained where it was, pushing Ranma deeper into her cleavage, while the other arm snaked around Mai for a hug first. Then, slowly, that hand went to work, pulling, tugging at each of the strings holding Mai's apron in place. A moment later, Mai's apron fell, sloughing down her body swiftly without anything to stop it.

Pulling back from her kiss with Mai, Shampoo giggled a little, staring down at Mai's chest unashamedly. "MMM... Your skin isn't as glisten-y as it was in the shower, but you still look magnificent, my Mai."

"Ooh, I like that, 'my Mai' mmm," Mai said enthusiastically, smirking just a little as she rocked her body a bit more than she had been up to this point, thanks to Ranma's legs shifting and moving underneath her pussy.

With Shampoo no longer pressing his head into her breast, Ranma was able to pull back just a little bit. As he did, he just stared.

Shampoo's breasts were a high C cup, with so much perkiness to them that even gymnasts might've been a little jealous despite their size. They bounced and wiggled adorably, but not overmuch, and were capped with light purple nipples surrounded by large areolae.

Beside her, Mai's breasts, one of which was now pressing into one of Shampoo's as the girls hugged one another tighter, kissing again and then moving to lick and nibble at one another's necks, were larger than the Amazons. Ranma had known this before, but bared like this, he was certain Mai was at least a size D, maybe even bigger, and despite having started to learn martial arts at around the same age as Shampoo, the pair having long since compared notes on that score, they drooped just a little bit. Yet that did not take away from how good they looked at all. They were perfect, round, a little fuller than Shampoo's as well as bigger, with bright pink nipples, somewhat larger than Shampoo's but with very small areolae around them.

"Damn... How the hell am I supposed to think with two pairs like this in my face," Ranma muttered. "I'm only freaking human!"

Shampoo pulled away from kissing Mai's neck to smirk a little at Ranma. "You don't need to think. Just go with the flow."

In turn, Mai pulled back a bit, adding her own words to Shampoo's. "Like you do so well. Like you're doing now with your leg underneath ussss!" her words ended in a hiss as Ranma dove into her own chest, switching from one of Shampoo's nipples to one of hers, going back and forth for several moments, simply worshiping their chests while their hands explored Ranma's chest, neck face and one another's.

However, Shampoo had gone into tonight with a mission. While having Mai involved in the relationship was exceptionally nice, and frankly, at this point, she was wondering how she could've missed the feelings growing between them, Shampoo wasn't about to give up on that mission when it came to Ranma. Whimpering a little, she slowly began to pull down at his pants, tugging them ineffectually.

Seeing what the other girl was up to, Mai understood quickly, and slowly pulled away from Ranma, Shampoo doing the same. They were soon kneeling down on the floor of the sitting area, tugging at his pants. Ranma stared down at them uncomprehendingly for a moment until Shampoo smacked his side, then indicated he should get up for a second. He lifted himself off of his chair, and both girls tugged hard, pulling his pants down around his ankles where they lay for a moment as Shampoo and Mai took in what was revealed.

At one point when they were younger, Mai and Andy bathed together regularly until they were around eleven. That was the last time she'd ever seen a live dick. She had seen porn, but in Japan, all pornography was pixelated to a certain degree. You could still tell the size and shape of a dick, whether or not a pussy was shaved, but nuance did not come through.

In comparison, Ranma's dick was a little less veiny than she thought they normally were, and his balls looked a little heavier too. His shaft was thick around, maybe a little bit below that of a sword hilt? Mai wasn't certain, although she felt he was wider around than her fans were when closed, and he was just about as long as one of her fans, too. "Good grief. Martial arts, it does a body good," she murmured, leaning in to give Ranma a kiss on his thigh, then his abs, while one hand began to play with his balls.

Shampoo was also comparing Ranma's manhood to a sword hilt again, and she leaned forward eagerly, her fingers around his shaft above where Mai's hand was playing with his balls. "Ranma's staff like sword hilt," Shampoo said, using pigeon Japanese in order to sound even sexier. "Shampoo going to wield you too-too good!"

Ranma had been just about to reach underneath their bodies to start to play with their breasts but now paused, as did Mai, pulling back slightly from where she had been kissing and licking at his abs to stare at Shampoo along with Ranma. "No. Just no. That visualization just does not work at all, Shampoo."

"I knew it as soon as I said it," Shampoo acknowledged morosely, back in her native tongue. "Finding things to compare your dick to is hard, though!"

At that point, Mai leaned forward, kissing Shampoo. "Like Ranma, I suggest you just go with your instincts."

Shampoo returned the kiss eagerly but soon began to take Mai's advice. She slowly moved upwards, pushing herself up off the floor until she was sitting next to Ranma again. As Mai repositioned herself to be directly between Ranma's legs behind Shampoo, Shampoo shifted to the side, lifting her leg over Ranma's waist so that she was straddling him again as she had before all this had begun. Only now, there was nothing in between their bodies, and she moaned loudly, hissing out, "Oh, yes!" between nearly clenched teeth as Ranma's shaft began to scrape and slide along her pussy lips.

Ranma glanced between them around his shaft, noticing that Shampoo had apparently either gotten waxed or something else, which had removed all of her hair down there, allowing him to see her pussy completely. It was almost like a small flower, a part of Ranma's mind reflected, while another part thought it looked more like a closed clam or something. Neither image really did it justice, though. What he also saw was how wet her pussy seemed as Shampoo slowly began to work her hips against his shaft, moving her pussy up and then down, rubbing their privates together.

Underneath the pair, Mai spent a few seconds playing with Ranma's balls, then Shampoo's rear, one finger going down the crack of her rear, bypassing her ass, causing a slight flinch from Shampoo that Mai noticed, making a note to stay away from that area in the future, before her finger found the bottom of Shampoo's moist cleft, rising up to flick at it a little bit, entering just slightly, then back out causing Shampoo to gasp at the dual sensation of that and Ranma's cock pressing upward against the rest of her pussy and her clit.

Moving to sit beside Ranma, Mai leaned in, kissing him on the lips, then he pulled back, pulling her into him with one arm, leaning down to nibble and suck at her neck, then her breasts again, causing her to laugh lightly. "So would you say you're a pressed man, Ranma?" she moaned, beginning to feel her arousal starting to appear through her booty shorts.

"I think I'm just a Shampoo and Mai man," Ranma said, causing both girls to oooh at him and for Ranma to mentally pat himself on the back for that line. *Don't know where that came from, but I'll take it!* he thought, then his eyes widened as Shampoo lifted herself upwards by her hips for a bit.

Shampoo hesitated for an instant, reached down and positioned his cock so that his head was pressing directly against her pussy instead of scraping along it. Biting her lip, Shampoo then lowered herself, wincing a little at the unusual sensation.

Back in her old village, vibrators or dildos and suchlike had not existed, so this was the first time she'd ever had something inside of her like this beyond her own fingers or that of Ranma and now Mai. There was no comparison. It was simply a much fuller feeling, one that was just on the edge of being painful, but she persevered until her hips connected with Ranma's, sheathing his shaft fully inside of her.

Shampoo held herself there, little whimpers coming from her mouth even as Mai leaned forward, kissing her neck, shoulder and nipples, one finger going down to slowly circle her clit, hoping that the extra sensation would help Shampoo get through whatever pain she was feeling. It worked, too, and soon, her eyes opened, and she smiled, leaning over to give Mai a kiss.

For Ranma, he had scrunched his eyes tightly and thrown his head back, gritting his teeth at the nearly overwhelming sensation of heat, tightness and wetness. He'd never felt anything like it, never imagined anything like it. He began to buck upwards, causing Shampoo to hissing pain, but he was far too turned on to care, as was she, the pain of his sudden movements simply adding to the sensations that Ranma and Mai were causing her.

For a few moments, the two of them simply rocked back and forth, both of them too overwhelmed by what they were feeling to get into any kind of rhythm. But soon, nature took its course. Ranma slowly got used to the sensation and began to match his movements to that of Shampoo, while she began to do the same, pulling away from Mai to kiss Ranma hard on the lips, whispering his name against his lips, getting a return of Shampoo from his.

Then Ranma began to pick up his tempo, thrusting upwards faster and harder, and Shampoo nearly fell backward, reaching forward to wrap her arms around Mai to remain upright. She buried her head inched Mai's chest, nipping, biting, licking kissing, causing Mai to moan in turn, and a moan that became even louder as Shampoo, like Ranma before her, latched onto one of her nipples and began to suck, all the while Mai's hands were busy on Ranma's chest, on Shampoo's chest, around Shampoo's back down to her rear, squeezing and exploring.

This went on for a few moments, before Ranma decided he wanted to have a little more control, wanted to thrust into Shampoo just a bit harder. Gripping her hips with his hands, he slowly twisted them around towards Mai, forcing her to back away a little as he laid Shampoo down on the sofa. Still connected at the hips, he instantly began to thrust harder into her into the missionary position. Shampoo's legs latched around him, and she yelled out "Yes, yes!" several times in Chinese. Meanwhile, Ranma and Mai began to exchange kisses while one hand shifted from Shampoo's hips, moving around Mai, pulling her into him.

Shampoo wasn't willing to just lay there and take it, though. She slowly pushed herself upwards, then pulled herself slightly away from Ranma. When he looked at her quizzically, pulling away from a kiss from Mai, she grabbed his head and jerked him down towards her, even as she shifted to the side and off the sofa. Landing on her knee, Shampoo pushed to her feet and then moved to sit astride Ranma again as he lay down. Ranma's hands found her chest as

Shampoo once more, causing her eyes to roll back and the first 'little death' of the night to take her.

She moaned even louder than before, and then slumped down onto Ranma's chest even as her hips continued to slowly move. Ranma allowed her to control the rhythm for a few moments, then, as she slowly pushed herself back up off of him, Mai leaned in to claim her lips. Seeing this, Ranma began to thrust into her harder, causing Shampoo to moan louder.

A sudden thought occurred to Mai, and she smirked, pulling back away from Shampoo, pulling her booty shorts down and off her legs, kicking the extremely sodden piece of clothing away, then moving forward, sitting down on Ranma's abs, blocking his view of Shampoo a bit, but replacing it with a closer view of her own backside, which Ranma thought was a fair enough exchange. Mai began to rock her hips so that her pussy, equally bare of hair in comparison to Shampoo's, slid across his abs as Mai leaned forward and kissed Shampoo hard. Shampoo returned it, the two women embracing, the breasts pressing against one another.

Ranma removed his hands from Shampoo's hips, shifting them to Mai's and pulling her lower body backward until her cleft was directly above his face, whereupon he stared for a moment. Unlike Shampoo's smaller pussy, Mai had noticeable, if still small, lips, and they were literally weeping with her arousal. Leaning out, Ranma ran his tongue along Mai's lower lips, up and down at first, causing her to moan his name and shudder, then more and more, leaning in, thrusting his tongue into her.

The build-up to this point had taken who knew how long, and all three of them had been supremely aroused even before clothing had come off. Thus, in this new position, with Shampoo in full control, it was but a matter of moments before Shampoo felt a greater climax come upon her. She began to yell, "Wo Ai, Wo Ai, Wo Ai, Airens!"

Her pussy clenched Ranma tighter and tighter as her orgasm approached. A second later, she came, and her convulsions had Ranma also spasming, thick gloopy masses of cum, shooting out of his cock deep into Shampoo.

This had stopped Ranma's ministrations on Mai, but Mai couldn't find it herself to complain. Shifting backward off of him for a moment, she leaned over him to stare at where he and Shampoo were joined, her eyes wide. "God, I am really glad we got the shot Shampoo," Mai murmured, seeing the sheer amount of cum leaking out of her around Ranma's shaft onto his pelvic area.

"No way, it too-too soon," Shampoo said, her native language suddenly sounding almost as pigeon as her Chinese, her brain was so fried from her second orgasm. "No little ones for twenty years or more, just fun, just fullness, mmm..."

Ranma smacked Mai lightly on the side, causing her to push herself upwards and look between her hips toward his face. He looked back at her, smiling slightly. "Your turn."

“Thank Amaterasu for a martial artist’s stamina,” Mai whispered back, pushing herself off his body for a moment, then slowly reaching forward and pulling Shampoo off his shaft, ignoring the mewl of protest from the girl, shifting her down onto the floor for a second. Then, it was her turn to straddle Ranma.

Unlike Shampoo, Mai had access to toys, and she showed no hesitation whatsoever in raising her hips, then lowering them slowly, wanting to savor the sensation, her eyes locked with Ranma, his hands on her hips, her hands on his chest, that look conveying just as many emotions as their actions, as Mai slowly began to rise up and down Ranma’s shaft. Ranma leaned up, kissing her, and the two of them began to make out, shifting from a sitting upright position to Ranma being on his back, to Mai being underneath him, then back with Ranma underneath her in turn, as they slowly worked themselves into the same kind of frenzy that Ranma and Shampoo had been gripped by. With the edge taken off of his from his earlier orgasm, Ranma proved that, yes, a martial artist’s stamina was a lovely thing, and not just for his ability to bounce back, but his staying power.

Shampoo soon came back to herself, reaching down between her legs to slowly drag her fingers through the nearly crazy amount of cum that was still leaking out of her onto the deck below. Raising her hand, she stared at how much covered her fingers and palm, then slowly licked at it, wrinkling her nose just slightly. It wasn’t bad tasting, but it wasn’t very good either. Mental note, look into what adds to that flavor. She thought before looking upward, staring at the sight of Mai, her hair in disarray, her eyes nearly rolled back in her skull as she bounced on Ranma’s lap, Ranma’s hands fondling her breasts.

Grinning slightly, Shampoo slowly pushed herself to her feet, wobbling a little in place, which had nothing to do with the motion of the ship underneath them, tied to the dock as it was. She then moved behind Mai, who looked to the side as she did, feeling the other girl’s body pressing into her back, twisting around to kiss her.

The two of them spent several moments kissing as Shampoo took over fondling Mai’s chest from Ranma, his own hands moved down to Mai’s rear between them. Shampoo began to work her clit against one of his knuckles where it gripped Mai’s rear, but most of her attention was on giving Mai pleasure as Ranma started to thrust up into her faster.

Whether or not it was half an hour or several minutes later, none of them could say, but Mai began to reach her climax. Unlike Shampoo, she wasn’t a screamer but rather a thrasher. Mai’s entire body seemed to lose control for a second, spasming in place, shaking, quivering, causing her chest to jiggle so much that Ranma’s eyes widened, a low groan coming from him. The sight of that, Shampoo’s fingers pressing deeply into the soft flesh, and the sensation being inside Mai was giving him, just as tight, just as wet as with Shampoo, caused him to reach his own second climax of the night. Thrusting hard up into the taller girl, Ranma had to grit his teeth to stop from bellowing as he came deep inside her, flooding Mai as he had already done with Shampoo.

Shampoo allowed Mai to escape her hold around her waist, the taller girl flopping down on Ranma's chest, the two of them sharing a kiss as Shampoo looked on. For several moments, Mai and Ranma simply kissed, not deep kisses, but heartfelt ones, looking one another in the eyes after each kiss.

Then Mai smirked a little, glancing down between them, wiggling her hips this way and that. "Again, martial artist endurance for the win. It feels like you're good to go again."

"Heh, with you two to inspire me, how couldn't I be?" Ranma said with a chuckle before leaning in and kissing her again. He then pulled back, running his hands up and down her back, looking between her and Shampoo. "I love you," he said to the Amazon before looking back at Mai. "I love you too. It just, well, it just..."

"It took me a while to realize it. Don't worry, Ranma. And when I did, I realized I needed to hit both of you with the truth as hard as possible before you could try to put up walls or argue." Mai smiled a little complacently as she looked back over her shoulder at Shampoo. "I love you." She then looked back at Ranma. "I love you too, and I don't think either of you are complaining about how I went about it, are you?"

"Nope," Shampoo and Ranma chorused before Shampoo added her own words of love to the declarations going around before getting back to more important things right now.

Shampoo then twisted around, leaning against the far wall, which, given the narrowness of the sofa area, was easily within reach. Sticking her ass out towards the other two, Shampoo wiggled her hips a bit, grinning over her shoulder at Ranma. "And now that that's out of the way, I think it's my turn. Get over here, love, and rock your wife's world! No need to be gentle now."

For a second, the word wife registered in Ranma's mind in a way that Shampoo using the term 'Husband' hadn't for some reason and a portion of his brain wanted to panic at it. But the rest of his brain quickly dogpiled that part, tying it up with a weight on its legs and throwing it into the ocean. *After everything else, Shampoo calling herself my wife is the least of surprises. And besides, we were heading that way anyway, right?*

Mai gave Shampoo a light slap on the rear, even as she pushed herself off of Ranma, shifting around then underneath Shampoo, where she began to lick and nuzzle at Shampoo's pussy, then up to her breasts. "Come on, Ranma. Don't just lay there watching," she joked before engulfing one of Shampoo's nipples in her mouth.

Ranma stood up with a grin, moving forward wondering internally what he'd done to deserve having these two in his life, before he slowly embedded himself inside Shampoo. *Whatever it was, it was worth it,* he thought, and the night continued on.

End Lemon

End Chapter

Setting up that lemon took a while. I think it's good, though, as is the lead-up and the revelation without beating a dead horse about it. Anyway, from here on, with the trio established, we will have one or two scenes in Hong Kong, the open sea, and then some more random martial arts stuff, causing some more issues with Ranma's past, Cologne showing up along with a runaway blind boy, and Mai and Shampoo figuring out new techniques of their own, and Genma causing trouble, before the trio leave China and continue their journey abroad.

And for those wondering, NO. I will not have Sagat and Ranma meet. I think that Sagat and Ryu's antagonistic relationship is an integral part of both of their stories, and I am not going to mess with it. The next time we meet Ryu and Ken will be near the end of Ranma and the girl's India Adventure. Which, yes, will be a full arc, at least as long as the Hong Kong Arc.

Oh, and Chun Li's one named attack – She's supposed to be Chinese, so I changed the Japanese-name of her attack, then added a bit more of a description for that version of her move.