

I don't equate domestic violence to romance or think the good guys can't kill the baddies. 'Nuff Said.

I would also like to point out that I had been working on this story for at least a year, probably more, before the DCU tried to make a comeback. I'd like to think I write better than any of those idiots.

Here is the next chapter of *Journey Gone Astray* (temp name; it has now changed on the site where I post this fic several chapters ahead to "*Butterfly's Wings = Wild Horse*"). I hope you all enjoy it, even if it doesn't quite cover as much as I had hoped. Travel/getting to know you time was the main part of this chapter, and I didn't want to cut that down, considering I think the romance aspect of this fic is going to go Ludicrous Speed in comparison to most of my fics once Starfire arrives. Because of that, I need to make sure the attraction/friendship between Ranma, Kara and Cassie all comes off as natural, and this chapter is a big part of making that clear to Kara and Cassie.

I had also felt, I needed to introduce another hero to Ranma before he and Kara meet Cassie again, to make it clear to Ranma that there are a lot of enemies out there he isn't quite prepared for. However, that will happen in the next chapter. I would have had them fighting a throwaway villain first, but instead, it's only Cassie who gets one of those in this chapter.

Ranma: I feel gipped!

Cassie: Hah! Suck it!

This has been Grammarlied and has also been given the full *Hiryo* service. It's also been checked over twice. Hopefully, that means there aren't many errors remaining LOL.

Chapter 4: All Journeys Start by Putting One Foot in Front of Another

Soon after leaving the Kent farmstead, the two teens had sped up to the point most humans couldn't match in a dead sprint, certainly not for any length of time. They kept going at that pace for an hour, putting any Olympic athlete to shame. At that point, Kara began to tease Ranma by going just a little bit faster, pulling away from Ranma as they continued.

After all, running like this wasn't anything new to the young kryptonian. Not in comparison to the speeds that she had trained herself to act and respond to when sparring with Cassie and not in comparison to what she had seen her cousin or a few of his friends in the Justice League achieve.

That, and Ranma had introduced Kara to the joy of smack talk, and she figured now was a great time to practice. "Come on, slowpoke. Is this the best you can do?"

"It's all I can do, unless you want to stop occasionally to let me eat something. Remember, while a lot of this is physical for me, if I tried to keep up with you, that'd change. I'd be forced to help my speed with my ki," Ranma retorted before warning Kara, "And you better watch out, pride comes before a fall."

"Is that some kind of fate thing?" Kara asked, before smirking and picking up the pace just a little bit more. Soon she was a few steps ahead of Ranma. Then, as a pair of cars faded behind them until they were out of sight, she twirled around, facing towards Ranma with a grin. Something about being out on this journey, of the trust that the Kents had put in her and what it might mean going forward, was making her **really** happy.

"You realize that I'm originally from an advanced society, right?" Kara continued, smiling brightly at Ranma. "We don't believe in tempting fate or anything like--"

While he could admit in the depths of his mind that he had been enjoying the view, Ranma still could have told Kara that saying such things aloud around him was a bad idea. Ranma had seen such things happen too often to not notice. He didn't get the chance this time, though, as the world did it for him.

One moment, Kara was facing him; the next, one of her feet hit a pothole where she was still racing backward, and she was falling. Only Ranma's quick reflexes and his grabbing her forearm stopped Kara from an ignominious tumble. Even Ranma had to twist them around for a few seconds to slow their momentum.

When they stopped twirling, Kara blinked, staring back at where they had been a moment ago. "Ummm..."

Snorting, Ranma quipped, "Momentum and physics still apply for even the strongest of us. Better to remember that kind of thing in the future, yeah?"

While that fall wouldn't have hurt, it would certainly have been embarrassing, and Kara, after a little pout, nodded. "I'll remember that."

The two of them resumed their journey; now simply jogging at a pace no horse or normal human could ever match, although nowhere near as fast as they had been sprinting a moment before. At this pace, they could actually talk, though, which was the whole point.

"I know you haven't been in contact with her recently, but do you have any idea what Cassie is up to? And did you like it on the Isle of Women?" Ranma began. "I gotta admit, my memories of the island are a bit fuzzy, although I can still remember a few adventures or... okay, misadventures... that Cassie and I had. Most of what I can remember is training."

"Most of what I did on the island was training, too. I very much needed to get used to being as strong as my race is with a yellow sun around," Kara agreed, before shrugging her

shoulders. "As for our mutual friend, I know Cassie was due to come to Man's World and would stay with Princess Diana in Star City. I think she's arrived by this point, yet other than that, I can't really say what she's up to."

"As for living on the island," Kara paused, watching as a car passed them by for a second. There was a young girl and boy in the back, who looked out the window at the pair of them. "I liked it. It was incredibly primitive, but their public baths were amazing, and I liked the queen, training with Cassie, and even going to the bazaar to see what the Amazons could craft. A lot of the island was fun to explore. It almost reminded me of national parks back on Krypton."

For a moment, Kara's mood dipped at the mention of her home planet, its fate flashing through her mind for a second, but this wasn't the first time that she had been forced to face that reality. After a second, she forcibly shifted that memory to the side, even laughing a bit, if woodenly. "As for adventures, we had a few. While in the forest on an endurance run, we ran into this group of monkeys. They immediately attacked us the moment they saw Cassie. Something she said we have you to thank for."

"Yeah, the fact that those monkeys are still holding a grudge is kind of weird to me, but then again, we humans are supposed to be evolved from monkeys. Maybe I shouldn't be so surprised," Ranma mused.

"Given your curse, I don't think you, of all people, should be allowed to use the term weird at all," Kara joked, elbowing Ranma lightly. Well, lightly for her anyway, a realization that, as Ranma barely let out an oof, made Kara make a mental note. *Don't get into the habit of thinking normal humans are as strong as Ranma. That would be bad. I might not be able to go all out against him in terms of strength, but I sure as heck come closer to it than I ever could with anyone normal.*

"All right, I'll give you that one. But that can't be the only adventure you had on the island," Ranma pressed. "Cassie and me had at least one adventure every two weeks I were on the island."

"I don't think Cassie and I were that bad, heh, maybe you were just sort of cramming all the adventures into a short amount of time. Still, you're right. We did have several adventures. There was this fight we had with this super huge crab. I'd say it was around three stories in every direction, with huge pincers and everything!" Kara explained, throwing her arms wide, her earlier enthusiasm fully back as she started to talk about her time with her best friend.

"No one realized it had moved into this shoal area where the girls our age liked to go swimming, until suddenly, it was pushing up out of the water and attacking. The other trainees all ran for it, because none of them were armed, but Cassie didn't, and because she didn't, I didn't either. We had a devil of a time getting through its armor, but eventually, we hit its eyes enough times for it to get the idea it wasn't welcome there."

“Sounds like fun. Did you ever run into those bull-guys, or the harpies? I’d basically jumped into a fight with the bull-bores before I met Diana. I think it kind of helped me make a good impression.”

“No, I didn’t really have much to do with the minotaurs, although I think Cassie did before I arrived. She never really talked about it much. As for me, there was one time when we were all on a trek, about fifteen trainees and trainers, and we were near their territory enough to see a few of them in the distance but that was about it. Apparently, the minotaurs making trouble is a seasonal issue? I can’t quite remember,” Kara confessed before shrugging and going on.

“As for the harpies, yeah, I did have a few run-ins with them. They **really** resented the fact that I could fly without any magical items. A few of their youngsters tried to challenge me to races and so forth, but the oldsters would simply throw ... er, stuff and eggs at me, shouting out about how it was unfair to be able to fly without wings.”

Kara looked embarrassed for a moment, but Ranma didn’t comment on it. Having met Martha and Jon, he doubted Kara would ever be at home with the idea of cursing, even if she had been back on Krypton. Frankly, given her personality, Ranma doubted it. Instead, he just nodded. “It does kind of go against the law of physics. But I suppose that goes under the heading of things I can’t really talk about, huh?”

That made Kara laugh, and she continued to talk about her time on the Island, going into detail on a few of the times she’d met a race called manticores, and how she and the harpy had several stimulating conversations. All of the stories were dominated by Cassie, and watching Kara’s eyes light up as she spoke about their mutual friend made Ranma happy. It was very clear that Cassie and Kara had become dear friends, and he was pleased Cassie had found someone like that, knowing she had been something of an odd duck among the other trainees.

Eventually, the talk about the Isle of Women, the Amazons and Cassie shifted specifically to the training the girls had gotten. “I will admit, I very much preferred hand-to-hand combat rather than weapons training. A part of that is my cousin’s influence, I suppose, but the rest of it is the fact that I come from a super advanced society. Hand-to-hand combat was seen as a decent way to keep fit, and there were worldwide competitions of various types. But guns and such were the main weapons of choice for any real conflict... of which there weren’t many on Krypton itself. And now, well, we’ve talked about my superstrength and everything. I don’t think I really need weapons.”

“From what I remember of how strong she was, I don’t think Diana-nee really needs them either against most enemies. But the keyword there is **most**,” Ranma warned. “Still, if you’re not comfortable with them, I’m the last person who’s gonna tell you to train with a weapon. I rarely use any, unless I pick ‘em up on a battlefield. But have you considered capture-type weapons?”

“Capture type weapons?” Kara asked, somewhat confused. “I saw some of the Amazons fight with weighted nets. Is that the kind of thing you mean?”

“Something of the sort, although if you were going for that kind of thing, I’d recommend a net gun. I’ve seen guns like that in some science fiction shows, guns that shoot out weighted nets at people. I’d wager you could come up with that, and then store it in a ki space once you build up enough keep to create one.”

Kara blinked, then felt embarrassed at Ranma’s almost automatic assumption that eventually she would be able to do some of the things he could, knowing precisely how long it’d taken him to do such things. “You really think I can learn to make a ki space like you can?” she asked, feeling almost shy for some reason.

Ranma nodded. “I’m almost certain of it. Honestly, given how good a shape you’re in, it’ll probably take you a shorter amount of time than it took me.” Not noticing how those words made Kara beam at him, Ranma went on, his eyes locked on the road ahead of them. “Back to capture weapons, given your basic strength, you could maybe build and use whips made of material that people can’t break out of. Bolas, or rope darts are also a possibility.”

“Bolas... I think I’ve heard of those, er, weighted balls connected by chains, right? But what is a rope dart?”

Humming thoughtfully at that question, Ranma noted that a small forest was coming up. He gestured for Kara to follow him, and the next moment, he was leaping up over the safety railing separating the forest from the road, with Kara following after them.

As they walked through the trees, Ranma pulled out a rope from his ki space and then tied a semi-large stone to the end of it. “This is kind of like a rope dart, only real rope darts are a lot smaller, made of metal, and sometimes pointed. But the idea’s the same.”

With Kara watching, he twirled the makeshift weapon around himself, then lashed out towards a boulder. The two rocks cracked together, a small crack appearing in the larger rock even as the smaller one shattered. He then whipped it up and around a tree branch, not touching any of the leaves sprouting from it. “You could do a lot of damage with one of those, but ya could also capture someone relatively quickly.”

“It’s like a weighted version of the lasso that Diana uses,” Kara mused, nodding her head. “I don’t think I ever saw any of the Amazons practicing with that kind of weapon.”

Ranma had to think for a moment. “It... might not be part of their tradition? I think the original rope darts were a Chinese thing, though don’t quote me on that. But Diana-nee’s using a lasso? That’s just a proof of concept right there.”

"I agree, although I don't think that I'll ever be able to make one that forces the person captured in its coils to tell the truth like Diana's does." Kara snorted, before looking aside, mumbling under her breath. "I still can't believe she used it to force me to confess that I ate the chocolate she'd hidden away. UGH, my bum always hurts when I think of the punishment for that one."

Not having heard that, Ranma frowned. "Oh, that thing! I thought that was something that belonged to the Queen, Hippolyta-baa-chan. She loaned it to Diana-nee?"

At that, Kara let out a peal of laughter that rang through the forest, shaking her head. "Baa-chan, that, that means Granny, right!? I know I've seen that online somewhere. Ha, I dare you to say that to the queen's face!"

"Eh, if I ever get the chance to, I'll take my lumps." Ranma snickered back, although he did truly intend to do it. He had been challenged, and while Ranma had set aside a great deal of the Anything Goes School's typical attitude, he still took challenges and dares just a little too seriously for most sane people. But in Ranma's opinion, calling someone sane was occasionally just another way of saying they were boring.

"Whips are better than lassos if you're trying to do actual damage, while lassos are better at capturing someone or something. Rope darts are somewhere in the middle, but you can do a lot of tricks with them." With the true single-minded concentration of an artist, Ranma turned his attention back to the rope in his hand, looking around the forest for another rock to replace the previous one.

"This rope is a bit too thick to be a good rope dart, but they can be coiled up in small places, like a pouch on your belt or something, and can also be used as a good way of defense. If you make it out of, you know, superstrong material in your case, or in my case, reinforce it with ki."

This time, when the rope darts slammed into the other rock, it was the target rock that suffered, cracking down the middle. "See what I mean?"

Going through her head about various materials, both in terms of metallurgy and in terms of fibers that she could use to create a similar weapon for herself. *Maybe add a small electrical discharge as well to shock my opponent? If I ever need to face some of the big baddies that cousin Clark is always talking about, having that kind of a trick in my pocket might be a good idea. Especially considering it could be literally in my pocket!* "Can I have a go?"

As he watched Kara practice with the rope, Ranma became aware again that Kara was very much a girl. He hadn't forgotten that since they'd set out, not with how her chest bounced just a little bit as they ran, or how, when Kara was ahead of him, his eyes would strain down to her rear, but his competitive nature pushed such thoughts out of his mind until now. Now, watching as she whipped the rope above her head, her chest shifting this way and that a little

under her shirt in a sports bra that very obviously couldn't quite contain her modest curves as much as it should have, Ranma gulped a little.

However, when he saw her having trouble, Ranma couldn't stop himself. He shifted behind her, grabbing her outstretched arm. "Here, let me guide you for a moment."

Both of them blushed for a second as Ranma guided Kara's wrist and forearm into the proper motion to create a whip crack with the makeshift rope dart, and then into another series of forearm and hand movements that would allow her to twirl the rope dart in a circle before bringing it back under control, coiling it around her forearm. "Good! S, s, so what do you think?" Ranma asked, backing away a bit.

Flushing a little herself, Kara hummed thoughtfully, staring down at the rope dart rather than Ranma. "I... I think this could be a good weapon, but I don't think it'd be my primary one. For that, I'll still rely on my own hand-to-hand."

Ranma nodded. "That should always be the way. And in that case, have you ever sparred with Cassie out in the woods?"

"No, when we sparred, it was always in the arena with someone else monitoring us. Why?"

"Training!" Ranma grinned the grin of a fanatic as he leaped up into the air, grabbing a tree branch above his head and flipping himself up further. "Let's see how good you can fly in a forest without damaging things, and in fact, if flying is a good idea in one in the first place."

Shaking her head at her new friend's enthusiasm for all things martial arts-related, Kara lifted into the air and chased after Ranma, a smile on her face.

What followed was more of a game of tag than a spar, but it wasn't one Kara did all that well in. Flying through foliage and having a limit to how much damage she could do before Ranma called her out on it was **tough**! But it was very good training, as Ranma reminded her as he called a halt to it, gesturing them both back down to the ground.

"I've seen a few videos of superstrong warriors fighting it out in cities and everything, and the amount of collateral damage they cause is insane." *And this is me saying it! Me, Mr. I Destroyed Two Mountains in My Time*, he thought ruefully.

"In that kind of an environment, you want to be aware of how much strength you're using when you kick off a building, or land on the ground, or anything like that. If you push yourself off a building and its wall shatters, there's gonna be a lot of debris flying inward as well as around, and that's never a good thing in a crowded area. You need to be able to distribute the energy without damaging things. And for that, practice is the only way forward."

Kara nodded thoughtfully, led the way back to the road, where they resumed their journey. "I didn't actually practice my flying all that much with Cassie. I only flew for fun there, and the stuff of Themyscira is, well, made out of tougher stuff than trees and random houses here."

Once on the road once more, the conversation shifted away from weapons and to costumes. "It just seems a sort of necessity if I want to go the hero route, which we've talked about before. That and spandex. I know you said once that you're not exactly a fan of that, but I don't think I can get completely away from it."

Trying and failing to not imagine Kara in a spandex outfit of any kind, Ranma shook his head. "Well, jokes about that guy who wears his underwear on the outside aside, no cape."

Ranma said that so firmly that Kara blinked and turned her head to look at him, her legs carrying her forward. "Really? But everyone but Wonder Woman and the Flash I've met have capes." *Admittedly, I haven't met all of Clark's friends, but still, Robin, Batman, Clark, and J'onn that's four to two right there.*

"You ain't a banner or a flag, and all they do is make ya a bigger target. There was this old comic book superhero. I read a few of those on military bases when I was younger and training with the Marines in knife-fighting techniques. Anyway, his motif was red, white and blue, obviously, because of the American flag. Are you thinking of doing something like that to honor Krypton? Or are you looking for something that will tie you to Earth or America?"

"I don't know," Kara answered honestly. "I, I remember too much of Krypton to really call myself an US American native, you know? So, I do want something to harken back to my past. But I don't know if I'll go the same route as... Well, I suppose at this point, it doesn't matter." She paused, then took the plunge, "Um, the guy you called Mr. Outside Underwear? That's my cousin. And the symbol on his chest isn't actually a S. It's the symbol of our house. It might be a reminder of our past, but I really don't want it to be my label like it became his."

The idea that Kara was related to the same man whose lack of fashion sense had forced him to wear his underwear on the outside of his hero costume made Ranma laugh, but he didn't answer any more questions about the man. If Kara wanted to explain more, she would, but Ranma really wasn't all that interested in Superman or heroes in general. *I'll take 'em as I find 'em, but that's about it.*

"If you don't want to be known as Supergirl or something like that, I'd say stay away from an S. If you want to be associated with yer cousin, I suppose ya could go for a similar color scheme, although again, no cape darn it! I just don't see the point to them at all, and they are just asking for the things to be grabbed and used against you."

"But they're supposed to be a symbol of strength and hope and make you more visible to the people you save," Kara argued back, then scowled, pushing Ranma's shoulder. "And stop

it with the hick accent, drat it. As someone who's been living in Kansas, I find that offensive, and you already admitted it was an act!"

"They're way too dangerous for no gain at all," Ranma retorted, dropping his accent as the two argued about this for a few moments. Eventually, the idea of capes was set aside, waiting for a sparring match when Kara would be wearing one, so Ranma could show her how easy it would be for an opponent to use one against her, even if she was ready for it. For now, the conversation shifted to the color scheme and whether Kara could truly escape the whole spandex thing.

Ranma had his own reasons to be against the spandex thing, and it had nothing to do with how immensely distracting the idea of Kara, for even the image of Diana he still had in his mind, wearing such a thing would be. No, it had everything to do with the fact that the few times he'd tried out the magical transformation he'd gotten from his supposed ancestor, Shazam, he hadn't been able to change what kind of clothing he shifted into. That was immensely annoying, especially since the suit also came with a cape.

At least, in his case, the cape was quickly detachable, yet he couldn't peel out of his spandex suit. He'd tried, and it had canceled the transformation. *I still wonder, which of the gods that old man made deals with is responsible for that travesty. Luckily, I was able to figure out how to change the design a bit, but the dratted cape keeps coming back if I'm not concentrating on making sure it stays away.*

The sun was well up in the sky by the time Ranma began to feel a little hungry. Before he could say anything, though, Kara's stomach began to growl, and she looked down in surprise, causing Ranma to snort. "I suppose that even with your superstrength and everything else, you still need food to fuel yourself. That's honestly a good sign. If you could just keep on using your superstrength and everything else and simply feed off the sun, you really would be more plant than person."

"Hey!" Kara growled, waving a fist in Ranma's face.

Ranma caught it, pointing to the side with their joined hands, a move that had Kara spluttering for a moment. There, a small gravel road lay just ahead of them to the left. "Let's take a break at that corner up there," he said, smirking a bit as Kara kept blinking rapidly, a small flush on her face.

Considering that they were still in the rolling hills and farmlands of Kansas, laying a small blanket out there and sitting down to a meal allowed them a view all around them; although, admittedly most of it was dominated by cornfields. Still, it was nice enough, and Aunt Martha had loaded the pair down for the trip. With two big eaters, the food she had given the pair wouldn't last more than a few days, but even that was nice, especially considering that Aunt Martha had fully grappled with the fact that Ranma's ki space kept things chill.

As Ranma pulled out the food and drinks, Kara looked around them, shaking her head slightly. "I'm still getting used to the idea that so much of America, let alone the rest of the world, is devoted to farmland. On Krypton, farms like that were more seen as well, hobbies of the right rather than real sources of protein, vegetables and fruit. All of those were grown in hydroponic gardens, hanging gardens or vats."

"I really don't want to think about what protein in a vat would taste like." Ranma shuddered only slightly theatrically as he bit into a turkey sandwich with gusto. Ranma would always have a soft spot for the food of his homeland, rice, fish and so forth, but there was something amazingly satisfying about the **portions** in America. Especially portions that could be found on a farmer's table like what Aunt Martha made.

"Hmmm... All right, you've got me there. The various meats I've tasted since arriving on Earth are way tastier than anything like that back on Krypton. I still maintain our fruits and vegetables had way more variety than anything I've seen so far, although I do look forward to trying something called a kumquat," Kara murmured, still looking around them. "Do you have any idea how far we've come?"

"Nope. I know how to read a map, and obviously, I can read signs and so forth. We haven't seen any of those yet, so we're not near a major town or city yet. But I wouldn't worry. We'll get there when we get there."

He leaned back, trying to sound wise for a moment, an impression that had Kara giggling even as she sat down across from him and took her own sandwich. "It is the journey that matters, not the destination. That is why we who follow the Art should always compare ourselves to ourselves rather than to another person for motivation. Are you better today than you were yesterday? If so, you have succeeded. If not, you have failed."

"Why do I get the impression that you just mixed at least two or three different motivational speeches from different people together?" Kara mused.

"Because I did," Ranma quipped, before his hand flashed, and he grabbed at the sandwich that Kara had been about to pick up. Before Kara could stop him, the sandwich was halfway to his mouth.

Kara's hand flashed out, grabbing it out of his grip just before he bit in. "You showed me this game before, and I'm not going to let you take me by surprise again!"

The two of them fought over the food for a bit until a few cars began to pass them by. At that point, they both subsided and dug into the food in earnest. A few of the people in cars waved at them, and both Ranma and Kara waved back; although, one car honked at them, causing Kara to stop mid-stretch, feeling annoyed for some reason without really understanding why. "What was that about?"

“Ehhh, I’ve been in America long enough to know that pretty girls sometimes get honked at. Personally, I think it’s incredibly rude, but it isn’t exactly the rudest thing I’ve seen done around pretty girls,” Ranma said with a shrug. *As long, as they keep to honking at least and don’t do anything else.*

“Wait, that honking was for me?” Kara scowled a little at that, remembering the time Aunt Martha had taken her to the local high school in Smallville, and her running with other teenagers there. “I take it that’s a teenage thing more than anything else?”

“Teenagers or college-age kids. I’m not certain where the line is between the two of them in terms of when they stop honking at girls or making fools of themselves,” Ranma said, treating that as if it was some kind of foreign concept, which, to his mind, it kind of was. *Why make a fool of yourself in front of a girl when you could be practicing the Art alongside one? Or just getting to know her. Either seems a better use of your time. If I have to act different or try to shout to get someone’s attention, it ain’t worth it.*

The two travelers cleaned up after themselves and were soon on their way again, with the remainder of the drinks stored in Ranma’s ki space. They walked for a little bit, as even for Ranma, running on a full stomach wasn’t exactly a good idea. However, he could tell when his body was ready to run again quickly and it turned out to be far faster than Kara was ready.

“Your knowledge of your body is incredible, and the fact that your metabolism is also better than mine is very intriguing on a scientific level,” Kara mused. “It reminds me of an experiment going on in a lab my crèche and I were allowed to observe when I was very young back on Krypton. I wonder how much caloric energy it takes you to create a... what do you call them, a Fierce Tiger Roar? Or, ooh, better, your ki space. How much energy would it create to warp space in so small an area?”

“How do you think you’d figure it out?” Ranma asked, keeping pace with Kara. After all, she had done the same with him. Trying to leave her behind as she started to lose herself in her thoughts would be rude.

“Oh, I’m certain I could come up with some kind of sensor or scanner that could read the proper wavelength,” Kara said, waving that off. “How to connect it to your body would be the tougher thing, considering you’d need to keep moving around for a while to give me enough data. As for your ki space, well, another scanner would work, and just... drop it in, I suppose.”

“It might work. I know that my ki space doesn’t damage any electronics I put in there. My cell phone, my walkie-talkie and so forth are in there now.” Ranma hummed thoughtfully. “It actually might be an interesting idea to figure out exactly how much energy I’m using on my ki space’s matrix at any given point, considering I give it extra umph to make it through the night or when I take my clothing off and so forth. Although I do know that I don’t get a signal from my cell phone when it’s in my ki space. I can’t use headphones or anything attached to my walkie-talkie if my walkie-talkie’s in there. Even if the pocket’s open.”

“That’s a simple fix; just have it be recording as it goes in and set a time limit for how long we keep it in there. A few experiments like that, and we would have a baseline,” Kara answered instantly before smirking at Ranma. “So, we will be experimenting with this in the future then?”

“Yep, sounds like a good idea. Knowing more about your techniques is always a good idea. For the Art!” Ranma exclaimed, throwing a hand in the air.

Kara grinned and did the same, but she instead replied, “For science!” The two laughed, and Kara then looked down at her stomach before saying that she felt enough time had passed since their meal for her to start exercising again.

With that, the two began racing on, in an easy, ground-devouring lope at a speed that would have put any human or animal to shame. Kara again felt a little held back by Ranma’s speed, but it wasn’t so annoying as the no-fly rule, and she understood the reasoning for both, so was willing to put up with it.

A little while later, they saw a sign for a place called Pratt, which made Ranma snicker. When Kara asked, Ranma shrugged. “I read a few books set in the United Kingdom at one point, and prat in old English is a way to call someone an idiot. Language is fun like that occasionally.”

Kara nodded at that, then looked back at the sign as they raced past it. “You know, I bet I could spot this Pratt place if I could fly. That sign said it’s only 10 miles away.”

“Could you do it and not be spotted in turn?”

“Around here? Probably,” Kara said, and Ranma agreed to let her try it.

An instant later, Ranma’s ponytail whipped around a bit in the wake of her takeoff as she leaped into the air. Glancing at the ground where she had been a second ago, Ranma smirked a little, noting Kara had left two footprints behind. “More training required, I think.”

Soon, Kara was back and reported that Pratt looked like a decent-sized town, with a lot of farmlands around it, and what she thought were a series of schools either in the town itself or next to it. “I’m not certain where the demarcation line between town and city is, but it certainly doesn’t look to be a big metropolis or anything like that. Speaking of language, can you believe that there’s a city here in America called Metropolis? Honestly, whoever came up with that one needs to have some imagination inserted into their brain box.”

Ranma laughed at that, and the two of them raced along, seeing more cars now, although not many. As they went, the conversation shifted to heroics, a topic they had talked about back at the Kent farmstead. But once more, Ranma refused to tell Kara what he thought she should do. “That decision needs to be yours and yours alone, Kara,” he stated seriously. “You and Cassie, you’re both your own people. If you want to follow Diana and your cousin into

heroics, that's fine. If you don't, or if you do and want to do it differently, that should be your choice."

By this point, it was evening, and the two raced into town, only slowing down to a slightly more normal pace. As Kara and Ranma went, the pair drew some looks, although not many were censorious or confused. Rather, Kara drew a lot of whistles, this time from a group that Ranma recognized as college-age kids. He made a note of them, as they raced along the streets, looking for a place to stop for the night.

Ranma thought they could keep going, but Kara pointed out that her shoes were starting to give out. "I'm going to need to buy a new pair before we leave. These shoes just weren't up for the pace we're setting and they were already a little battered before I met you."

She blushed a little and then slowed to a crawl as they passed by a little park. "And well, I also need to go to the bathroom."

Ranma nodded, wondering if Kara thought that they would always be able to get to someplace like this town or even a house with nice enough people living there on this trip. He honestly doubted it, but was also looking forward to Kara's reaction when he told her about how they would have to rough it with that and showering and so forth. *I doubt she'll care about living in a tent or sleeping bags, but I bet the whole bathroom situation is gonna bother her a lot, despite her time on the Isle of Women.*

He waited nearby as Kara headed inside the public restroom, leaning back against a nearby tree and closing his eyes, as he felt the evening's sunlight on his face. It was a lovely way to end the day, right up until someone opened their mouth nearby and tried to lay a hand on Ranma's shoulder. "Hey man, damn fine girl you got there, mind sharing the wealth?"

Ranma had shifted away from the man's hand even before it came close to his shoulder, and now opened his eyes to look at him. He was dressed in a leather jacket and a T-shirt underneath it that carried some kind of phrase on it Ranma didn't bother reading. The college-aged man had slicked-back hair and a rich-looking watch on one wrist. He was heavily muscled in the upper body, like someone who seriously overdid arm exercises, while neglecting leg or cardio.

Behind him, a few others were also looking at Ranma with grins on their faces as if they were expecting a show, but Ranma didn't care. He kept his eyes on the first speaker, one eyebrow rising. "Really? Ya just walk up to a stranger and ask to share his girlfriend?" he demanded, shaking his head. *I mean, we aren't dating, but this idiot thinks that, and then thinks I'm fine with him trying to make time with Kara? Fucking really?*

"Hey, don't be like that! A girl like that, she's gotta have been around the hay bale a few times already. Country girls, they're all like that, right?"

“So says the college boy who could only get into the local college in Pratt, Kansas,” Ranma drawled. “Are you trying to show off or just act the idiot? Because frankly, this showing-off thing isn’t really working for ya. Or are you really trying to hassle me enough to make me look the other way when ya try to ‘flirt’ and I use the term loosely, with my friend? Heh, a big frog at the bottom of a well should fear the world beyond.”

At that, the young man scowled and reached across, ready to grab Ranma by his shirt, only for Ranma to grab him by the wrist instead and squeeze. It was an incredibly light squeeze for Ranma, but it pressed into the boy’s wrist at just the right angle to drive him to his knees with a squeal of pain.

“Continuin’ that metaphor, me and Trish are from a whole different forest, not your little well, big frog.” Ranma hastily made up a new name to use for Kara, as it just seemed like a bad idea to use her real name, a little annoyed that in doing so, he’d thrown off his banter, making the rest of that line a bit lame in his mind. *Huh, come to think of it, does she even have a civilian name picked out?*

Deciding not to think on that or attempt to get back into his groove taunting this idiot, as he really didn’t seem to be worth it, Ranma continued. “Now, I’m going to let go, and you’re going to walk away and not bother me and Trish. Take this as a learning moment, my guy: you are very much not nearly as tough as you might think.”

Only now did he look beyond the other guys, who had all frozen the moment their friend’s knees had hit the ground. None of them looked like they could fight their way out of a paper bag, nor did any of them look ready to charge forward to help their friend. Seeing that, Ranma shook his head. *Yep, big frog with a bunch of little ones following him.*

He released the still whimpering guy, with the muscles of someone who never actually used them, turning away just as Kara came out of the restroom. When Ranma moved over to her, she looked over his shoulder at the older boys, blinking at the sight of one of them on his knees, cradling his wrist. “What was all that about?”

“Oh, nothing, we just had a little talk about social hierarchies, and how random passersby don’t always fit where you might think they should in the local one,” Ranma quipped, his lips twisting wryly.

“I see... I also see that I’m onto your hick accent, you’re going to try to use big words to bamboozle people? It’s a unique strategy, at least, and it doesn’t annoy me. I approve,” Kara chuckled, and Ranma smirked, elbowing her lightly, causing her to do the same back to him as she made a face at him.

By the time the three other college-age kids had gathered enough courage to help their leader, Ranma and Kara had already left the area, putting several blocks between them and the

park. After doing so, they started window shopping, wanting to buy better shoes and a better bra for Kara, as well as a few more pieces of clothing and camping supplies.

"We're gonna need a tent for ya. My tent's big enough for two since it's the same one me and my Pops used, but I figure Aunt Martha or you wouldn't be happy with that," Ranma admitted. Actually, it wasn't that specific tent, but for some reason, telling Kara he had shared a tent with Lara while on adventure with her, and that in his male body, did not seem to be a good idea. "We also should buy a portable cooker. You can't always rely on it being nice enough to make a fire, let alone having enough wood to do it."

"And you don't already own one?" Kara questioned.

"Eh, I did. It kind of didn't make it off Yamatai. Since then, I've been lucky enough to not need one," Ranma admitted, before wincing. "Um, I need to replace a few other cooking utensils and supplies too. But first, clothing for you."

When they entered the clothing store, Ranma disappeared for a second, causing Kara to blink, and waited near the doorway, staring out the door. The next moment, Ranma was back, but this time in her female body.

"What...or rather, why, I suppose, is a better question," Kara muttered as Ranma rejoined her.

"I figured I won't look so out of place in the store with you like this. You might also feel a little more comfortable asking questions about, er, support and stuff if you're asking those questions to a female face," Ranma admitted with a bit of embarrassment, trying to keep her eyes on Kara's face and not the hundreds of frilly things all around them. "I mean, I'm still me inside, but at least I don't look like a guy now."

Thinking it was nice of Ranma to go out of his (now her) way to make Kara comfortable, even in such a small way, she smiled at her, then turned back to the sports bra section. Kara really did need help, something she proved as she opened the changing room's blind a bit, showing half her covered chest as she poked at the underside of her boob. "I don't know. It's the right size, but when I bounce or run in place, I still get a little too much jiggle. I don't get how the Amazons dealt with that," she added in a low tone, only heard by Ranma as the redhead stood directly in front of her.

"Um, magic, I guess?" Ranma guessed weakly, looking away quickly. *Mistakes have been made!* "Or, or maybe something built into their armor?"

"We wouldn't go on endurance runs in full armor all the time, and I still didn't see any of the others bouncing then or even just going around the capital as much as I did today. Heck, I didn't bounce as much then either," Kara grumbled, poking herself again, causing a nearby teenager to shake her head and mutter about how some girls had all the luck.

While most of Kara's body looked like that of a gymnast or swimmer, her chest was just a bit too big for that kind of shape, her breasts jutting out proudly from her chest bigger than Ranma's. Kara was a low C-cup, as Americans measure, while Ranma, who had thought she was busty before meeting Kara, was a B. With her overall appearance and general understated good looks, Kara looked like the perfect example of the innocently sexy girl next door.

"Um, if you need more stability up top, might I recommend this line of bra?" the local woman suggested, holding up another one with far more fabric than the other. "It's a sports bra designed specifically for sprinters or other kinds of cross-country athletes."

"Sounds perfect!" Kara announced gleefully, moving over to the woman. Soon, she had three of those and exited the shop wearing a fourth, smiling a bit as she couldn't feel any kind of jiggle as she moved.

As they made their way to the next store on the road, Ranma had to ask, "What did people back home do about that kind of thing?" she asked obliquely, only remembering that talking about Krypton might be painful a second later. "Er, that is, if it isn't too painful to talk about," she added hastily, before gesturing down to where he was carrying Kara's bag. "And do ya want me ta stick that in my ki space?"

Nodding, Kara watched intently as Ranma, as if performing a magic trick, held up the bag, then somehow slid it into her pocket. Staring at the point of entry, Kara became even more baffled. *Is, is that some kind of gravity field?! The bag began to shrink as soon as it came into contact with the pocket!*

While several other pedestrians around them had seen the little trick, that was all they thought it was: Ranma's grandiose moves and over-the-top bow towards Kara making it seem as if she's just put on an impromptu street show. *Yes, indeed, Ranma's a lot smart than you'd think with his blunt, straight ahead damn the laser batteries attitude.*

This let Kara answer her question in peace, glancing to make sure none of the pedestrians were close enough to overhear. "That kind of topic isn't close enough to hurt, Ranma, don't worry. As to your question, back home, shirts and undergarments weren't separate items. Rather, they were worked into a single garment. They're actually form-fitted to the individual at the time of purchase. I had been given my first such shirt a few years before the destruction and being sent here."

The shoes they got from the store next door also fit Kara better than her older ones and had more built-up soles. Ranma wondered idly if she would need another pair before they reached California, since she couldn't run ki through her shoes like Ranma could reinforce them, but Kara seemed happy enough with them.

When he went to pay for the shoes, though, Kara shook her head, pulling out her credit card for the second time. "You can pay for food and other things; I'll pay for clothing and other personal things. I'm allowed to use the family credit card for that kind of thing."

The credit card was actually not from the Kents, but rather her cousin, the big-time Daily Planet reporter and superhero. Clark's civilian job paid very well, and Clark always sent at least half of his check home to the family account. *I wonder how much of that is because he can save so much on flights?* She thought with a snicker, grinning over Ranma as the redhead picked up her bags.

Moreover, much like the cell phone Kara had, and the phone back on the Kents property, the credit card was a Justice League special. Designed by Batman, Aquaman and the Martian Manhunter, the credit card was untraceable, automatically changing the ID of the user and the bank it was supposed to be associated with every time it was used, linking into the Justice League's Civilian Persona Account, something made for the various young heroes and sidekicks. Similarly, the cell phone and the Kent's phone were extremely high-tech, and acted more like satellite phones, bouncing the signal up to a JL satellite built by the Martian Manhunter.

Seeing Ranma take the shoe bag, Kara chuckled as they exited the store. "Now, this part of Earthen culture I know. I've seen it a lot in commercials and TV shows. The boy is supposed to carry everything, right? I've never understood why, though." Kara figured that whatever his body, Ranma was fully a guy and preferred to treat him like such.

"I think it depends on circumstances, but most of the time, guys are stronger than most girls." Ranma shrugged her currently-feminine shoulders, before the box disappeared into her ki space to join the bag with the various bras Kara bought. "Not that it matters here, heh. Although we might want to think about getting you a piece of luggage rather than just a backpack for hiking, with bags like that stuffed in my ki space. If we keep all your stuff in a single piece of luggage... and mine, come to think of it, er, different ones, obviously, that'll make things easier when we pull stuff out of my ki space."

Kara nodded at that but had something else she wanted to buy. "Did you see any place selling notebooks and pens?"

After a quick stopover at a bookstore, Ranma directed them down the town's main street again. "Let's head to a hotel first and get a room."

Kara nodded, looking quizzical, but Ranma pointed at herself. "Going in as two girls will avoid us needing to answer odd questions." *Of all sorts. While I might look my age in my male body, Kara looks a few years younger than she is. That thing'd be illegal in the states, right?*

They found a hotel easily enough, though there Ranma found the prices were good enough that they could both get their own rooms, sort of defeating the point of his being in his female form. Regardless, the pair checked in and then headed back out to find a restaurant.

They still had food from Aunt Martha, obviously, but Kara was interested in trying different kinds of food, and Ranma had zero objections to that.

Thus, the pair found themselves at an Indian restaurant, which in Ranma's opinion served pretty decent curry; although, it was really nothing like what a Japanese person would call curry. They also had a kind of flatbread that was really tasty. So much so, the duo ate several helpings.

However, their fun ended as they exited the restaurant and a loud voice that Ranma recognized from earlier in the evening shouted, "There you are. We couldn't talk before because of that slant-eyed Jap. Heh, gotta say the current Jap's way better than the original version."

Groaning, Ranma raised a hand to her forehead, while Kara blinked, looking over to where the shout had come from before snickering. "It looks as if your little lesson in social hierarchies didn't take, Ranma."

"Yeah, well, I have another phrase for ya that covers this scenario. You can't cure stupid," Ranma grumbled, shaking her head. *Or is this a sign of all the performance-enhancing drugs this guy's on?*

The same man as before moved towards them along the currently empty side street, a smarmy smile on his face even as his eyes flicked all around them, possibly looking for Ranma's male body. "Now, are you two up for a good time? Want to be shown the sites around here?"

Kara stared at him, then looked over at Ranma. "Is he serious? He's older than us and doesn't exactly seem all that attractive given how he looks like a misshapen triangle. I'm not one to judge solely by someone's appearance, but his words aren't exactly helping matters."

"I think he's a little serious. I also think he's had a little brain damage in the past," Ranma quipped, smirking the same kind of smirk that always seemed to drive her opponents crazy. *I suppose the asshat's friends deserted him. At least they were smart enough to cut their losses.*

"Okay, that's it! First, that punk this afternoon gets lucky, and now you two bitches are talking down to me?!" The man looked around and seeing no one else on the street still he then reached behind him. From under his jacket, the local wannabe tough guy pulled out a large dirk of all things, pointing it at the two girls. "I've had it! You're gonna learn that around here, I---"

Ranma's laughter broke out, far too loud for the man to continue, as she nearly doubled over, grabbing at her stomach and laughing her head off as she pointed at the knife. "What," she gasped, "what kind of cursed role-playing, mad fantasy writer's monstrosity is that?! Oh my God, why does it have so many points going in every direction other than on the dagger's actual tip? It also looks as if it's made of iron! Does that thing even have an edge?"

While she was no real connoisseur of weapons, Kara had seen a vast multitude of them among the Amazons. As such, she could also tell that the dirk in the would-be-tough's hand was next to useless. "That strange, irregular edge will catch on the first blade that it hits. There's no guard on it, except those spikes that look as if they're in danger of stabbing into the wielder's hand if he makes the wrong move with his wrist. Ugh, I wouldn't use that thing as a paper weight, let alone a real sword."

At those words, the young man scowled even harder and took a few lumbering steps forward, horrible piece of junk in hand, but Kara took a few steps before he could even shift his weight and flicked him in the forehead. It was a very light flick from the kryptonian as Kara had carefully calculated the power. Thus, instead of his head coming apart like a watermelon hit by a bullet, the young man simply slumped, unconscious before he hit the ground.

When Ranma looked at her, Kara shrugged. "What? I didn't do any permanent damage." She paused, her confident look fading for a second. "At least, I shouldn't have. I did just enough cranial trauma for his own brain to knock the buffoon out. That, that's alright, isn't it? I've never been in this situation before."

"Not bad, but in the future, just disarm the idiot. Brain damage can be tricky, and this guy already was a few apples short of a barrel," Ranma advised. "Given his body type, I think he's been taking performance enhancing drugs or something. I think they mess up with the user's brain too."

With that, she grabbed the older boy, hauling him toward a nearby building.

Ranma propped him up there, and then, with a smirk, covered the piece of what she thought of as mall ninja trash with ki. Once she was done, the redhead stabbed it into the ground in front of her driving the thing deep into the concrete of the walkway. "Heh, that'll give the police some interesting questions to ask when someone calls them about an unconscious man."

Rolling her eyes at that, Kara continued on the way back to the hotel, with Ranma joining her quickly. "Are things like that normal?"

"I hope not but I can't say, since I've been traveling in my guy form since arriving in America. In places in Asia..." Ranma grimaced, her teeth bared in a snarl. "Yeah, depending on the country, it'd be **way** worse for a blonde girl like you, or even a redhead like me who looks foreign."

Hearing the low growl in Ranma's tone, Kara understood what he wasn't saying and scowled. "Lovely."

The pair fell silent, both of them hoping that was the last idiot they had to deal with, but knowing intuitively it probably wasn't.

The next day, as Ranma had thought, one of the local newspapers had run a story about a 'dagger in the stone' incident. Not that either he, Ranma had changed before getting into bed, or Kara cared much.

Ranma and Kara were both up early, or rather, what would've been early for larger towns and cities. Most of the people in Pratt or around it lived on 'farmer time' as the woman who served them breakfast in a very crowded Waffle House put it. "Not like those college students. Ugh, up all night, drinking, eating, or what have you. The professors and the Dean need to do a better job of making sure those young'uns don't cause trouble. Like that idiot last night and his weird dagger thing."

Ranma nodded politely at that, tipped the woman, and the two of them took their breakfast on the go, heading out and going shopping for camping supplies. By the time they had everything they wanted, the duo had reached the edge of the town, and they picked up pace again, leaving the town of Pratt behind quickly.

Ranma controlled the pace they set and began to speed up the moment they started to see fewer cars, with Kara easily keeping pace next to him. Soon, they were zooming along, with Ranma enhancing his speed via his ki to reach a speed that pushed Kara, if only a little bit. She wasn't yet as fast as her cousin, but speeding bullets still had nothing on the speeds she could move at.

Hence why, after a bit, she asked, "What do you think about a small flight? I can carry you, and we can make much better time in the air."

"Let's wait until evening for that, but at that point, yeah. I took the opportunity this morning when ya were showering to look over where we are in relation to where we want to go. The US might not be as big as China, but it is still a huge place, and we've got a lot of miles to go before we get to Star City."

Kara snorted at that. "Really, America's a big place? You don't say. It isn't as if they have to take commercial flights from one side of the nation to another that lasts for the better part of half the day. Whereas, from what I found in Japan, you can go from one end to another in the same time by car."

"No one likes a smarty-pants, Kara," Ranma said, the sheer sophistry of the phrase making Kara laugh aloud.

However, later that day, it turned out that flying wasn't a good idea, at least not without checking the weather first. They were barely in the air for an hour after evening fell before they were hit by a storm. Rain washed over them drenching both of them quickly and blinding Kara. As good as her eyesight was, she wasn't exactly used to moving in this kind of weather and was forced to drop them down to the ground as Ranma, using her body to shield the map, checked

where they might be from the roads and other landmarks. "I think that might be Crooked Creek down there. We're still on course, let's land and get undercover!"

Kara nodded and headed down towards the creek, landing lightly on a small road that led up to a few farms abutting the creek itself. It was off the main road they'd been following all day, thankfully. Ranma somehow had kept them on course after the storm hit, but there was no sign of any kind of cover.

Luckily, Ranma had come prepared and quickly threw up the tent she'd bought in Pratt for her, telling Kara to get in and get changed first. The tent itself was nearly hidden by a wheat field, but despite that, Ranma put up a sign, hanging it on top of the tent pole. It read Apologies for using your land without your permission. We'll help around the place if necessary for half a day to pay for the use.

When Kara called her in, she found that she had changed into the same kind of clothing that she had worn back at the Kent Farmstead, a flannel outfit with a top and bottom, the bottom loose around her hips but going down to her ankles. The top covered her just as much, but had a few buttons undone at the bottom.

It wasn't supposed to be sexy, but on Kara, it looked fantastic, showing off her toned stomach and belly button, especially clinging to her still-damp skin. She also wasn't even trying to show up, which made it all the sexier to Ranma. Ranma had gotten used to Lara's over the top sexiness and before that the flirtations of some of the Amazons, girls from Furinkan and a few of his would-be suitors. But not only did none of them have Kara's body, but the fact she wasn't trying to show off made her more attractive.

Because of how damp Kara's skin was, it definitely hugged her body far more than it should and showed Ranma at least a hint of nipples underneath. Ranma again had to look away for a second, grateful for the fact that she was in female form at the moment herself, not noticing her own 'points' were showing.

Kara waved her in, gesturing to the small heater that she had set up, one of the other supplies they bought in Pratt. "Warm yourself up and get changed. I'm going to call home. I promised Aunt Martha that I would call every other day."

"I think we're still in the same time zone, so you shouldn't have to worry about it being too late," Ranma answered, shifting to the side of the tent and turning her back on the other girl. It was bigger than the one Ranma had on him (at the time) before meeting Kara and made of far better material and with a far better bottom to it than the tent Ranma had spent so much of his life in with his Pops. In fact, Ranma could already feel the air warming up slightly from the heater, aided by the fact that it actually was a nice day out rather than cold even in the storm.

Changing quickly, Ranma, remained in his female form, listening to Kara talking to Aunt Martha. She was **not** happy when told they were both in the same tent. "I don't like it, you're

only two nights out and already sharing a single tent!? I was young too, you know. You're a good girl Kara, and you seemed trustworthy, Ranma but this is too fast!"

Normally, Martha wouldn't have any concern about Kara protecting herself. But she'd seen that Ranma could challenge Kara with his large bag of tricks, particularly the Neko-Ken.

Kara somewhat agreed with that idea, but said, "It's raining cats and dogs out, Aunt Martha. I don't want to send Ranma out in that now that she's already changed. The tent is more than big enough to give us enough space to not need to be too near one another."

"I'm in my female form, ma'am, and I'll stay in this form until tomorrow," Ranma added. "Er, I can also promise not to do anything or come near Kara, ma'am."

"That's a good boy," Martha said, a smile now evident in her tone. "With that, her strength and you knowin' Miss Diana, I suppose I'll allow it for one night."

Aunt Martha had a **lot** of respect for Diana, either the princess or her alter ego, having met her in both identities in the past few years. Far more respect, if she was honest about it, than Lois Lane. "But I will have that promise on your mother's heart, young... man. My, but that is annoying."

To that, Ranma just nodded and made the promise.

With Ranma's promise given, Kara turned the attention back to the farmstead and what Uncle Jon was up to. When Uncle Jon interjected and said that he was enjoying having a working radio, it reminded Ranma of her own walkie-talkie, and she resolved to use it the next day. *Running around with Kara and talking to her was well and good, but some background music would be nice.* In her travels through Asia and her adventures with Lara, Ranma had developed a pretty diverse musical interest, and there were several bands that Ranma really enjoyed, especially, oddly enough, a few European bands, which he wondered if Kara would get into.

Eventually, Kara ended the phone call and the two had a meal before turning in. The sound of the rain outside, hammering down on their tent, lulled them into sleep quickly.

A little too much, it turned out. Because Kara liked to move around a lot in her sleep.

Normally, this would've been a recipe for disaster for anyone near Ranma. Ranma had developed Sleep-Fu to a degree that he could stave off Genma, let alone someone who wasn't prepared for it, and even Kara, as strong as she was, wasn't strong enough to stay asleep when Ranma smacked her or tried to get her in a choke hold, as he routinely did to anyone trying to sneak up on him when he was asleep.

There was something that none of Ranma's adversaries or even his old man had figured out about Ranma's Sleep-Fu. It was an entirely automatic response to detecting any intent to harm Ranma. And in her sleep, Kara had no desire to do so. What she did have a desire to do was to find the nearby source of heat. Back on the Isle of Women, that had always been Cassie, but here, it was the currently redheaded Ranma.

This is why Ranma found herself locked into what could only be called the softest, most arousing full nelson the next morning. There wasn't a lot of skin-to-skin contact given what Kara was wearing, but Ranma could still feel her breasts pressing into his side, her breath on the transformed man's ear, with Kara's legs wrapped around one of hers. Her knee was dangerously close to what would've been Ranma's man bits in her original body, but at the moment, Ranma wasn't certain if he wouldn't prefer the danger of that to the weird feeling of Kara's knee shifting along her thighs.

Yep, definitely going to keep on sleeping in my female form for a while, and maybe start wearing pants rather than boxers. Thank Kami those nightmares I used to have in my female form after meeting Kuno faded once I left Nerima behind. I don't think there's any ghosts around here looking to possess me or anything when I'm in female form, either, Ranma thought to herself as she debated how to get out of Kara's grip.

A problem that became more immediate when Ranma detected movement outside their tent, a grumble turning into a grunt of amusement. This was followed by the mutter of low voices.

Moving her hand lightly, Ranma tickled Kara behind one of her knees, causing her to shift her leg away. This was followed by Ranma's other hand rising up to Kara's armpit, tickling there lightly with Amaguriken-level speed.

This made Kara roll away as much as she could with one arm underneath Ranma's body but didn't wake her up. Ranma quickly rolled in the other direction before Kara could resume her cuddle/death grip. A moment later, she poked her head out of the tent, looking up at a man who stood there. Nearby, a middle-aged woman was also standing, looking around at some of the damage done to the fields during the storm.

The man blinked at the face of Ranma, scowling a little. "What's an Asian gal... no, better question, is your sign serious? You and whoever else is in there are willing to work on the farm for a bit to pay for using my land?"

Land ownership was a **big** deal for farmers, ranchers, and so forth. This man was also armed, with a gun over his shoulder. If that was normal or not, Ranma didn't know, nor did she care. *It ain't a threat to me where it is. I'd be up and, in his face, before he could pull it off his shoulder.*

Despite that, Ranma just nodded and pushed her way out of the tent. "Yeah, sure. Kara's a farm girl, and I'm a lot stronger than I look," she said, before sticking her head back inside and shouting, "Kara, there's a cockroach on ya!"

That worked, as Kara screamed and leaped so hard, she nearly put her head through the tent's roof, causing Ranma to laugh as he pulled back. "That'll get her up. What do you want us to do?"

"Well," the woman nearby drawled. "First, you can take down that tent o' yers, and then, we'll have to see how strong you are."

The answer was quite a bit. While Kara still felt that she should not show off her strength, Ranma had no such restraints. When the farmer took them out to the fields to help repair some of his fencing, Ranma saw the real reason why the man was armed with a rifle: a rogue bison had wandered into his fields and was eating his crop after smashing through his fence.

Ranma dealt with the bison in question by leaping ahead of the others, charging forward as the farmer shouted in shock.

The bison saw the redhead coming and turned, charging in turn, but Ranma caught it by its horns just before impact. She then ducked to one side and flipped the creature onto its back, before wrapping her around its neck.

She held it there, pinned against the ground until it weakened to the point where the man came over and shot it with a tranquilizer. "One of my neighbors down the way lost this feller. He'll be right happy to get him back, and I'll be right happy for the man to pay for the damages to my crops and my fence," the farmer said happily. "You weren't kidding about being way stronger than you look, stranger. Don't suppose you're one of those superhero types?"

"What is it with Americans always jumping to that answer? You don't have superstrong individuals who just go their own way?" Ranma joked, shaking her head. "In Japan, we've a lot more superstrong people or martial artists who just want to be left alone to practice the Art than who want to go around in spandex solving crimes or attackin' people randomly."

The farmer laughed at that, while Kara rolled her eyes, deciding not to mention Ranma's hick accent in front of the two farmers. Instead, she inquired politely if the farmer what else they wanted to be done around the farmstead.

By midday, the farmer decided that the duo had paid for spending the night on his land. He even sent the pair of girls on their way with a hot meal in their bellies and some biscuits to eat on the way.

Midafternoon they found themselves walking along the road again, eating the biscuits as they went. Ranma decided to bring up the way she had found herself waking up that morning. "So... I think we need to talk about putting up a barrier if we're ever forced to share a tent in the future like we did last night..."

To say that Kara was blushing by the second sentence of Ranma's explanation was an understatement. She apologized profusely, explaining that she had gotten into the habit of cuddling up with Cassie at night. The pair just enjoyed the sensation of cuddling next to one another after training and taking a bath and had sometimes fallen asleep like that. That explained it to Ranma but she was still adamant that the two of them needed some distance.

"Whatever my body is right now, I am a guy, and while I like to think we're friends, Kara, we haven't actually known each other for longer than a week. There needs to be some distance, you know? And ow wow, does it feel weird being the voice of reason!" Ranma trailed off, staring ahead of her, a look of shock on her face.

That caused Kara's blush to fade away as she laughed, and the two of them decided that from now on, two tents would be the way to go despite whatever conditions they were faced with. Ranma then reached into her ki space, pulling out her headphones and walkie-talkie, handing one of the earbuds over to Kara. "Sounds good. But for now, I think we deserve some background music."

With that, Ranma hit play and began to run off, with Kara hastily racing after her, listening to the beat.

Much to Kara's dismay, with so many houses nearby and more car traffic on the highway they were running alongside, the two travelers were forced to stick to the ground for the rest of that day even with their current speed. The kryptonian teen had long since decided that she much preferred flying despite the fact that she and Ranma could keep to a pace that would have had any horse or endurance runner staring in pure envy. The fact that the journey was supposed to be, as Ranma had said, part of the goal of setting out like they had was a bigger draw to this method of travel but not all that much bigger.

Thankfully, Kara had Ranma's music and their conversation to keep her from getting too bored. Kara had heard country, rock and a smattering of classical before this, but diving deeper into rock, along with jazz was fascinating. Luckily, Ranma kept the Japanese music to a minimum, so she could even follow most of the lyrics. Although she did have to occasionally ask for some clarification on the places they were talking about, specifically when songs from the band Sabaton came up.

Listening to both those explanations and the music in general was fun and also showed Kara some more of Ranma's character. Depths that, that, she felt, most in his life had probably missed before this. As much of a meathead as Ranma **attempted** to act, and despite his semi-frightening devotion to The Art, Ranma did have a few other interests. Music was one of them.

So was history, and listening to his take on sones where those two interests overlapped was fascinating.

Almost as fun as listening to Ranma's adventures around Asia. They weren't the hero-type adventures that Kara was used to from listening to her cousin, or speaking to Diana or even J'onn, the only other hero she's spent much time around. But they were still fascinating and at times hilarious. Especially, when Ranma's mouth, attitude or skills got him into trouble that a bit of diplomacy or common sense would have allowed him to avoid. Despite O-sensei and several other teachers, Ranma's general attitude hadn't ever changed.

Despite the fun she was having, Kara could have done without the revelation of what roughing it really meant, which she learned later that day when a certain feeling crept over Kara. She began to look around, but while there were still cars or trucks passing by every few minutes, they had left most of the farms well behind them. To the point she hadn't seen any farm or indeed any structure for what Kara estimated was more than an hour.

"Um... Ranma, um, I don't suppose, er, that is, do you know where we are? Are we coming up on a town? I missed that last sign. Is, is there a truck stop ahead of us? Say in the next few miles?" she asked hesitantly. *This is so embarrassing!*

Smirking just a bit, Ranma shook his head. He'd taken the chance a few miles back when there was no one on the road to transform, but even then, he'd almost been caught as a pair of cars came up from behind them. "Nope. I haven't seen any sign for the next rest stop yet. I don't know how often those come up around here, either. And we haven't seen any houses or anything for a bit. I'd say you've got the option to head out into the grassland out there or try and hold it."

"I could fl-" Kara's voice broke off as a car appeared behind them once more, moving past them a few minutes later. At the speed the two were running, it took the car a bit to catch up, let alone pass them by, but that wasn't as important as the car's simple presence right now. "Drat. I'm beginning to see why being on the road like this is called roughing it now."

"Hah! That, and a bit more. You're lucky you're traveling with me. Thanks to my time with Pops, I've made living on the road into an art form. Better, we've got money enough to buy supplies that I never had when I was growing up," Ranma chortled, before taking pity on the now uncomfortable-looking Kara. *Funny, but just like Kara's need to eat, that actually makes her seem more human.*

Ranma gestured to the side and out into the rolling grasslands they were passing through at the moment. There didn't seem to be any kind of water source out here, hence why it wasn't farmland. Or at least, Ranma thought that was the case. While Ranma was a lot more well-read in terms of history and travel than most imagined, he didn't know much about farming or agriculture. "Come on, Plant Girl, time ta give back to the soil."

"Ugh, that made no sense! And I'm not a plant girl. Photosynthesis isn't necessary for me to live, it's just necessary to give me superpowers, and even then, only under the yellow sun," Kara grumbled, but she willingly followed Ranma as they left the road behind. "Honestly, if you ever met this one supervillain, she's part of Batman's normal group of enemies, you'd never call anyone else that name."

"Huh. I didn't run into anyone like that when I was in Gotham," Ranma muttered as they began to leave the road behind, pushing further into the tall grass. "I hate ta use the word lucky, but the more you and the Kents spoke about that place, the more it seems I might've been lucky ta only run into that clown guy and his little sidekick."

He blinked, then. "Wait, the bat fetishist has a normal group of enemies? Why? Shouldn't you hero types keep getting new enemies after you toss the old ones in jail?"

The fact that Ranma had been the one to have accidentally caused the Joker's death had come up in conversation before. He had also told Kara about how Harley had gotten away and how Batman had attacked him after the fact.

"Unfortunately, a lot of criminals, especially in Gotham, can use the fact they're crazy to not be thrown into a real jail, and Poison Ivy is one of them," Kara shook her head. "Although, from an outsider's perspective, I really don't think insanity should be a good defense. If such creatures tried to prey on the innocent on Krypton, they would undoubtedly be tried and executed post haste, which is another issue I have with the local laws. It takes farrrr too much time to go through the justice system."

Much like her overall education didn't match that of a normal American girl, Kara's sense of justice and law was **very** different. While Krypton made a lot of allowances for those with mental issues, be it through trauma or other reasons, that largess ended the instant such people attacked their fellow citizens. Krypton's laws were entirely based around first proving guilt, then making certain whatever crime occurred did not do so again. Once guilt was certain, there was very little allowance for the rights of the accused, especially for capital crimes like murder or rape.

"Don't get me wrong," Kara hastily explained. "I don't know everything about how my judicial system worked. I was a teenager following an engineering-based educational program. But I do know that murderers were themselves put to death very quickly, and that jails were only used for low teer crimes. I remember reading a report about a kleptomaniac being kept in prison for life to keep him from stealing things, and a megalomaniac who had attempted to create a cult being executed within a few weeks of his capture. Here in America, it seems to take far longer than that to even assign guilt, and then it's off to jail or a psychiatric ward."

"Huh, yeah, I can't say I understand that either. I've dealt with a lot of crazies in my life, but most of them are generally harmless to civilians or normal people. If they weren't, well... I'd hate doing it, but removing someone like Kuno who became a real molester, or a Saffron who

decided to wipe out a few cities rather than chase after old grudges, yeah... I'd do it," Ranma said, somewhat grimly.

At that point, deciding they were far enough from the road, Ranma stopped. His hands glowed for a second, and a ki blast flashed down into the soil, exploding it upwards. "Still, tell me more about this Poison Ivy gal. Is she a literal plant girl who makes anyone who touches her itchy?"

As he spoke, Ranma pulled out a small tool from his ki space, mentally thanking Mousse for the 'training' he'd gotten sparring with him during his time with the Amazons on ki space and how to organize them. While they certainly hadn't been friends, and they had certainly had their clashes, fighting with Mousse had given Ranma a lot of idea about his ki space and how to use it he wouldn't have had with just his father's example to go on.

With the small collapsible shovel, which he'd had for years at this point, Ranma widened and deepened the hole. He then began to mold the sides up into a kind of U-shape as Kara looked on.

"Hah! No, she excretes some kind of poison, but not itchiness. Ivy **is** a literal plant woman, green skin, can control plants, gets power from sunlight and everything. As for being a villain, Poison Ivy's more of an ecoterrorist than a real supervillain in my mind. It's not as if she doesn't have a point about humans doing a lot of damage to Earth's environment. I don't approve of her methods and think she looks too much at the macro level, but... what... are you making a kind of outhouse?" Kara voice trailed off as she suddenly realized what she was seeing. "That's so..."

"Primitive?" Ranma smirked, shaking his head. "It's better than squatting down in the grass, Kara. Just be thankful mosquitoes can't bother ya, or else moments like this would be truly annoying." He stared off into the distance for a second. "Greatest moment of my life up until then was realizing my training with my dad meant my skin was tough enough to stop those little bastards."

"I, I suppose..." Kara sighed faintly, then shook her head, her innate politeness rearing its head. "Um... thanks, I guess."

"It's all good. I'll head back to the road and wait for ya there. When ye're done, collapse the sides of the hole back in with the shovel and bring the shovel back with you. We'll want to clean it off before I stick it back in my ki space." Finishing his work, Ranma pushed to his feet.

Pulling out a roll of toilet paper and handing it over to a now-visibly embarrassed Kara. So embarrassed she didn't think to comment on his hick accent coming back.

Instead, Kara hesitantly took the toilet paper, then watched as Ranma pushed out into the tall grass back the way they had come. She continued to watch until he was well out of

sight, then sighed and reluctantly moved to pull her exercise shorts down before placing herself over the hole, sitting down gingerly on the lip that Ranma had provided. He'd hardened it somehow without her noticing, so the lip acted more like rock than dirt and could take her weight, but it still felt like sitting on dirt. A mildly wet dirt after last night's rain, too. "Gross..."

As Kara did her business, Ranma waited by the road, pulling out a map and a compass to try and figure out where they were. The compass was an old thing, battered and dented, made of heavy brass and about the size of his palm. It was one of only four gifts Genma had ever given Ranma that didn't have anything to do with the Art. He didn't really treasure it because of that, too many things had happened since then between father and son, but he had to admit it was useful.

Several cars zoomed past him, with a few honking their horns, although this time, Ranma knew they were just trying to annoy rather than get his attention like Kara. *Although, if anyone tries to do that stupid stop and offer help then race away thing, I might just Moko their ass.*

Ranma's thoughts cut off as he looked up, hearing a loud *yip* in the distance. Turning, he stared in the direction of the noise, noting it was in the same direction as where Kara was doing her business, and saw a small dot flying up from the ground. It wasn't human-shaped, from what he could see, and Ranma shrugged, turning back to the map. "She can handle whatever that was."

Kara appeared a moment later, a thunderous expression on her face as she flew through the tall grass, only setting her feet down when she landed on the road in front of Ranma, holding out the shovel and toilet roll. "You didn't mention I'd run into what I have to assume were wild dogs!" she hissed.

"Er, I didn't think ya would," Ranma answered, somewhat apologetically. "I didn't think wild dogs were an issue anywhere in America. They weren't wolves, were they? Most wolves are smart enough to give even a lone human a wide berth unless you go looking for trouble. Like my old man and I did when I was younger as part of a training exercise."

"That sounds disturbing but given what else you've mentioned about the man doesn't surprise me. As for the critters who attacked me, they were both short-furred, lean but medium-sized bodies and wild-eyed. There were also just two of them, although I couldn't stop myself from er... squishing the first one rather than just sending it flying," Kara grumbled, doubly embarrassed. "Let's, let's, just move on, please."

Ranma nodded, and within a few moments, the twosome was on their way once more. As they ran, sharing an earbud each again, Ranma could hear Kara muttering under her breath about plans to make some kind of high-tech bathroom or something. What anything to do with going to the bathroom had with sonic scrubbers and whatever they were, Ranma didn't know.

Refuse incinerators were self-explanatory at least and sounded like a good idea in some ways. *Guess she missed the whole 'giving back to the soil' thing, heh.*

Thankfully, it was far too nice a day out for Kara's bad mood to linger for long, and after Ranma had to stop an hour later to go number one (the ease of which was, in Kara's opinion, **so** unfair), the pair set such alimentary issues behind them. Indeed, Kara was soon bopping her head to the music as they raced on, sometimes trying to trip or otherwise bother one another as they did. Though they didn't ever get a chance for Kara to take to the sky as she had hoped. Traffic was just too heavy, alas.

Around evening, they started to see signs for a city or town and passed by what looked like a large trailer park to one side of the road. This was accompanied by several other roads coming in and meeting the highway they were on, with more trucks and cars visible with every mile that passed.

A brief rain squall had passed by soon before that, forcing Ranma into his female body and them into cover at one point. After that, with so many cars on the road, Ranma opted not to transform back.

"I don't understand why you want to hide the curse and not your strength. Aren't both unusual enough to draw attention?" Kara mused, staring across at her companion as they continued on their way towards the city.

By this point, Kara could see a few tall buildings and other things in the distance, although she hadn't picked up on the name of this place just yet. The overall impression she was getting was also more sprawling than built up.

"Eh, magic is a touchy subject. I don't want Catholic priests after me to try and exorcise the demons, or perverts trying to splash me all the time," Ranma answered with a shrug, "Magic like that, there's no way you forget it once ya see it. Someone being way stronger than they look, that's just an 'oh, okay' kind of thing. I'm not always so careful with my curse, mind ya, but these days, I tend to be if I'm thinking about it."

The redhead waved at a police car sitting on the side of the road before going on. "I wasn't always so careful. Back in Furinkan, the guys saw me do martial arts stuff every day, including superstrength and speed. Not a day after they learned about my curse, all that stuff didn't matter. All they'd care about was 'ooh, there's a guy who can turn into a naked girl in the next shower stall,' which was freaking annoying."

Ranma scowled as she remembered the numerous times hormones had gotten the better of the boys at Furinkan. "Why the hell it was such a problem for so long, I don't know, but I blame either something in the water or the Kunos. It only ended when I went through with my threat about breaking fingers and more."

"I suppose that makes sense. Hmm... we talked about differences between your forms; how your taste buds change a lot and your sense of touch just bit. If I were you, I think I'd always want to be a girl if sunlight feels better on that form—"

"Plant girl~," Ranma interjected, smirking.

Kara rolled her eyes at that, continuing as if he hadn't said anything. "But are there any other differences?"

"Well, yeah, duh. I mean, I've trained in both forms differently, I figured I could turn my curse into an even better tool that way. Mobility is the same across the board, but I've trained my female form to be more agile, to be generally faster in terms of kicking and punching and to be more flexible. My male body's been trained to be stronger and have a more offensive style. Thankfully, the toughness technique carried over, because ooh boy that would've been..." Ranma trailed off as he caught Kara's deadpan look, and the redhead sighed. "That's not the kind of differences yer talking about, is it?"

"Nope." Kara responded with another eyeroll. "I meant more about how you, for example, perceive colors and such. I've read that men and women observe patterns differently, and a few other things like that. Although, I don't know if that's just an excuse to explain why men aren't interested in fashion most of the time and women are. Which, I will say, was just as true on my homeworld as it is here on Earth."

"Hah, yeah, there's a good deal o' that. I think women and men just solve problems differently, but if you're asking me for stuff like that, then no. There's no mental change, like I told ya back when my curse came up. Beyond the whole sunlight feeling better and taste buds being different I'd say the only real difference in how my body differs between one form and the other is that I can hold a tune in my female body."

"Huh, does that mean you can actually sing?" Kara looked at Ranma in some confusion at that. "I just can't picture that, not even in your female body."

True to form, Ranma rose to the challenge and began to sing along to the song on their earbuds. "First things first, I'm gonna say all the words inside my head..."

A few lines later, Kara had to admit Ranma did have a really nice voice. She wasn't the only one who noticed as they raced into the city (or town, Kara still wasn't certain where the line between the two was) as several people paused to look after the singing redhead as they passed by. But while they got some wolf whistles and a few shouts, no one tried to accost them.

With night coming on, the two pushed through the town and into the outskirts on the other side before they found a small hotel with a built-in bar where two highways met, one being the one they were on, the other heading north to south. Looking at the bar/motel, Ranma

suddenly smirked as she saw the sign on the window asking for part-time help. "Well, at least we won't need to pay for a room tonight."

"What?" Kara blinked, confused.

Her answer came in the form of Ranma getting a job at the bar for the night. After seeing the redhead in action, the man who owned the bar had no trouble hiring her for the night as a waitress in return for a room, although Ranma's attempt to argue for two failed due to the fact that the hotel didn't have many rooms to spare. Truckers, farmers, and others came and went all the time here, as it was a place where a town had popped up to serve such more than for any other reason.

That caused Ranma and Kara both some issues, but they figured getting two separate beds would be good enough. And by this point, Kara trusted Ranma not to turn into a guy during the night and... do anything. That thought had her blushing a bit even as Ranma headed off to change into the bar's uniform.

Well, what the bar called a uniform, anyway. A tight white shirt with a wide-eyed owl below her breasts and short orange shorts wasn't anything Kara would call a uniform. No matter how much Ranma rocked it, another thought that had Kara flushing a bit more.

Not wanting to just retire to her room, Kara, as a friend of the new waitress, was allowed to take over a corner booth that didn't have a good view of the various TVs around the bar. Soon, she had ordered something to eat, more in the interest of scientific inquiry than anything else. When she had first been introduced to American food, the idea of eating anything fried had kind of disturbed her, but she had gotten over it before this. Now, after her first taste of the onion rings dipped in ranch, she was hooked.

The blonde girl didn't notice the looks she was getting as she dug in, watching idly as 'Ranko' moved around the bar for a few moments before pulling out her notebook. Soon, the evening rush began, followed by more locals and truckers coming in for drinks and food.

At that point, Ranma began to make a show of it, dancing through the crowd, juggling trays of drinks and occasionally hopping up and over tables or people. This gave the men and scattered women in the crowd a nice view of her legs, but nothing too scandalous. Although as she watched this for a second, Kara noticed that Ranma had removed her bra for some reason.

I am going to have to ask about that later. And what she meant by mumbling about Living off the Land Version Two. I would have thought that kind of thing would mean more living in the tent, hunting, reading maps and so forth.

Shaking that off, Kara turned her attention to the notebook she'd bought a few days ago. Flipping to a new page, she wrote down a few notes, then began to work on some mathematical

calculations, humming thoughtfully as she tried to work out both the number of variables and the overall shape of the theorem for the ki spectra analysis device she wanted to build.

Kara had been very serious about wanting to investigate Ranma's strange abilities from a scientific perspective. From their discussions over the past few days, she knew that no one had really taken what the humans called the scientific method to ki, and Kara was **deeply** intrigued by the ramifications of what he could do.

Not so much Ranma's magical curse, his ki attacks or ability to reinforce his body in various ways. No, it was Ranma's ki space that was laws of physics-defying fascinating. *Because, if you can expand space with ki, then doesn't that have implications to both time and space, let alone gravity? I saw what happened when he put stuff that definitely shouldn't fit in his ki space did, and that is... there are a lot of implications there.*

To that end, Kara began to plan out what she needed to make a sensor probe like the one she and Ranma had talked about a few days ago, as well as what Kara thought might be a few examples of the energy transfer calculations needed to create a gravity well strong enough and **controlled** enough to do what she had seen. She then turned her attention to metallurgy, humming thoughtfully as she nibbled at her pen, wondering what kind of metal would be best for both the probe and idly any kind of rope dart or whip she could use. *I might need to buy a few books about human metallurgy. See if they have anything like titaniosmium.*

As she worked, Kara didn't notice that she was garnering some interest herself. She was still wearing what she had been wearing on the trip, and despite her semi-shy, quiet attitude, that was enough to draw the eye of young and older men alike. Indeed, with Ranma and the other girls moving around and interacting with the whole crowd, her being quiet and withdrawn only served to make Kara seem more approachable.

The first she knew of this was when a voice said, "Hey, girl, ya mind if me and my friend sit here?"

She looked up in some annoyance, already mentally connecting that voice to the idiot back in Pratt and the sight that greeted her matched this presupposition. Both of the young men across from her looked college-age, one being of Hispanic heritage, the other African. They both wore leather jackets and had jean pants on, along with a shirt that had some kind of symbol underneath the jackets. Those jackets were festooned with metal studs and chains, reminding Kara of the bad guys in a show she'd seen back on the farm.

The pair had lean, decently fit-looking bodies, so weren't doing performance enhancing drugs like the moron of Pratt. Both were taller than Kara, not that that was saying much. Kara was barely 5' 3", although that made her several inches taller than Ranma's female form, who stood a little shorter than five feet.

That didn't matter any more than the rest of their outfit did to the young kryptonian, and annoyance tinged her voice as she questioned bluntly. "If I said no, would you go away?"

Both bikers blinked at that, with the black man scowling a bit, before his companion spoke up, his voice having a twang to it that the first one lacked as the two men slid into the booth. "Hey now, don't be like that. We're just trying to be friendly. You're not from around here, are you? Are you staying long, or just passing through? On the road looking for some adventure? Hells Angels are good at providing that."

Kara was at a bit of a loss. She'd seen TV shows and such moments like this, but how exactly to deal with these two without becoming violent was lost on her at present now that blunt words hadn't worked. *I've made my disinterest plain. Why isn't that enough? If they had maybe asked me questions about what I was working on or what I had been mumbling about, which I know I was doing, I could see the point of continuing this conversation. As it is, no. And why the heck are they interested in me anyway? Ranma and the other girls here are dressed to impress. I'm not.*

Worse, Ranma was in no position to help at present. She'd just gone back into the kitchen with a load of dirty dishes and cups piled so high on her trays that it had caused a round of cheering from the crowd to see the redhead lift the stack, let alone balance it.

This left Kara falling back to the simple, if all-encompassing, "I'm not interested and I'm busy. Go away."

Unfortunately, the pair of bikers took this as more fear than anything else and the black man smirked a bit, although there was now a slight sneer to his lips rather than a regular smirk. "Now, now, we'd never get anywhere if we lost interest at the first cold shoulder. Give us a chance, yeah? You might like us or at least enjoy it."

Kara rolled her eyes at that and turned her eyes back down to her notebook. but the man seemed to take that as a challenge. "What're you working on there anyway?"

With that, he reached forward to try and pull her notebook across the table. Kara stopped this by placing a hand on the notebook, and when the boy, who Kara could no longer think of as a man given his attitude despite the fact he was older than her, tried to pull it away, all he did was tug at one of the corners.

Blinking, the black man stared at the hand on the notebook, then, gripping the corner between a few fingers, he tried to pull harder, only to not shift the notebook a centimeter, instead tearing a segment of the corner off. "What the..."

Scowling just a bit, Kara thought about how to convince these two to go away and suddenly had an idea that she remembered from what Ranma had been telling her about her powers earlier that day. She gathered in her breath for a moment and then surreptitiously blew

it out, as if exasperated by the two young men across from her, aiming her breath down underneath the table.

Kara didn't try to put any real power into it, simply chilling the air a little bit, causing both men to shift uncomfortably. It was a very warm day out even inside the bar, and it must've felt as if someone had just turned on a fan directly underneath them.

This might not have been enough on its own, but a middle-aged man turned away from the bar. A middle-aged woman sat next to him, and there were a few other such couples around the bar, all of the men and a few of the women wearing uniforms. It took Kara a second to deduct it looked like off-duty army uniforms, as they matched some of the clothing, she had seen in Uncle Jon's closet when hanging up laundry. He'd never worn it around her, but Kara recognized it.

"Hey," the man's voice was gravelly, almost like someone who had gargled with rocks. "You two and your little friends over there should move on. This is our off-duty time, and if you wreck my date with my wife, I'm going to have to apologize for getting your blood on her dress."

"W, the fuck you say, old timer?!" The two younger men surged out of the booth, but by the time they did, the man was looming over them, with several others having turned away from the bar to watch events. Nearby, a few other bikers had pushed to their feet, but looking around, they suddenly seemed to lose any desire to make trouble.

"My husband said get out," the middle-aged woman announced firmly. "There're other bars, boys."

"And if the police are called in to deal with a bar brawl, you both know whose side they'll be on," another man warned. "Leave the girl alone."

The two bikers tried to look tough, but as several more soldier types entered the bar, they and their fellows realized they were decidedly outnumbered. In ones and twos, they made for the door, trying hard to not look like they were retreating, although the two who had been flirting, if that was what they'd been trying to do, with Kara looked back at her, their eyes narrowing as they left.

"Are you alright, miss?" the middle-aged woman asked, shifting from the bar to sit across from Kara for a moment. "You handled those two pretty well for a short young thing like yourself."

"Er, thanks. I'm not used to, well, that," Kara mumbled, waving towards the door. "But, well, they weren't really all that threatening to me."

"Really?" The older woman looked at her closely, as did her husband, who, after a second grunted in approval.

"You believe that, hmm? Don't suppose you're looking to join up, are you?" the man asked.

"Hah, um, no. I, understand, um, duty and structure and all that, but er, my friend and I..." Kara gestured this time towards Ranma, who had just come back out from the kitchen with her arms full of trays again. "We aren't... well, she's not the fit-in type, and I'm still figuring out what type I am, I guess you could say. Um... that's, that's sort of why we're both here, er, passing through, I mean. We're, well, **I'm** more like trying to figure out what I want in life going forward. Er, normal doesn't seem to fit me."

"Good," the man grunted again, causing Kara to blink. "Never do something that makes you uncomfortable in your own skin, little miss."

With that, the married couple smiled one last time at Kara before moving back to the bar as Ranma came by with their food. The redhead looked at them, then at Kara, one eyebrow rising in question. "You alright?"

"I'm good. Just saw some proof that it takes all sorts, you know?" Kara answered, smiling faintly.

That night, as Kara opened the door to the motel room Ranma's work had earned them, she blinked, embarrassment rising from within her. "Eep."

Ranma shifted to look around Kara's body into the room, then sighed. "Damn it. I thought we told them about a bed with two rooms. Why do I get the feeling that hotel owner just stuck us in the first room he had available and figured we wouldn't check until it was too late?"

"I'd say that's a certainty. Do you want to go complain? And by the way, why did you remove your bra earlier? Were you told to?"

"HAH!" Ranma snorted. "Nope. That just made getting some tips easier." Seeing Kara's confused look, she shrugged. "I agreed to work there for the room, but any tips are mine. I made at least three hundred in tips, mostly because of the jiggle and lack of bra. It's part of how I learned to live off the land since getting this form. Just another way to make it useful," Ranma said, gesturing to her body. "As for trying to get him to change our room, well, are you okay with this?"

"Er... considering my sleeping habits, um, are you okay with the floor?" Kara asked, feeling guilty as she looked at her friend. Despite that guilt, though, she didn't want to wake up hugging the redhead again. They weren't nearly close enough for that, despite Kara's appreciation for Ranma both as a person and his body(ies).

“Sure,” Ranma shrugged, taking in the rest of the motel room, which indeed only had one bed. It was a queen-sized bed to be sure and would normally have more than enough room for two people, but that wasn’t really the point. “Just give me some pillows, and I’ll be good. In comparison to a lot of places I’ve slept over the years, a hotel room’s floor doesn’t even register in the top hundred worst places.”

That caused Kara to breathe a sigh of relief, even as she muttered, “We are never mentioning this to Aunt Martha. One night in a tent while it’s pouring out is one thing. Two nights in a row and this time a hotel room? She’d have views on that for sure.”

The pair entered quickly at that point, with Kara heading into the bathroom to change, coming back out to find Ranma had already changed. Just like when they had shared the tent, Ranma remained in his female form. She had made up a small bed for herself on the floor using her sleeping bag unzipped and used as a cover blanket. The pair stayed up a bit longer talking but were soon heading to bed. Ranma was an early riser by choice, while Kara had learned to be so while with the Amazons, having that learning reinforced with her time on the farm.

Despite being the one to get the bed, though, Kara woke up the next day with a groan. Reaching up to her neck, Kara cracked her neck this way and that forcefully, grumbling, “Note to self, beware pillows that only look soft, but do not in fact feel it. Good grief...” That had been one of the worst nights’ sleep she’d had. *I still feel I should be immune to sores and aches like this with my superdurability, blast it all.*

Kara reluctantly pushed herself to her feet, still a little bleary-eyed. The noise of the shower didn’t register until she opened the door, and by then, it was a little too late. Inside, Ranma stood in the shower, his eyes closed as the hot water cascaded over his head, fully male.

For a moment, Kara just stared, her face flushing a little as she watched the muscles on Ranma’s back moved, then her eyes began to trail downward. *Good grief! I, I saw some things on the internet before this, but that, I didn’t think a guy’s rear or back could be so provocative.*

Only when she realized what she’d be seeing if Ranma turned around did Kara regain control of herself. When she did, Kara hastily closed the door as silently as she could, hoping Ranma hadn’t noticed.

Thankfully, he hadn’t, and she ran back to her bed, slamming her head down into one of the pillows that had so tortured her during the night, squealing aloud in embarrassment, a mantra of, *Oh my God, I’m so glad he wasn’t facing towards the door!* Going through her head several times before Kara slowly began to regain control of herself. *I thought it was girls who’d walked in on boys in the bathroom! That’s the way it is in all those TV shows anyway! Good grief, if this was embarrassing on this side of things, I can’t imagine what it would be like the other way around!*

Noticing how red she was over breakfast, Ranma asked what was wrong, but Kara refused to answer, only insisting they get going. "I have an inclination to use my heat ray on those damn pillows, and I really want to put some miles between us before the temptation becomes too strong," she said, not looking in Ranma's direction.

Shrugging even as he wondered what had really happened, Ranma agreed, and the two were soon off again.

Much to Kara's consternation, they weren't done with a local biker gang just yet. As they raced out onto the highway, they passed a group of bikers, most of whom had been there the night before. Spotting Kara, many of them got onto the bikes and roared after the two runners.

Glancing over her shoulder, Ranma cocked an eyebrow. "Don't look now, but your fan club from last night brought reinforcements. Should we step up the pace and just leave them behind if we can?"

"Sounds like a good idea to me. I don't really want to see if idiocy like that is contagious, and I don't see any helpful soldier types around this time," Kara chuckled.

With that, the two of them sped up. Soon, they were racing down the road so fast that the bikers behind them had to rev their engines to the max to keep them even in sight.

"What the hell?! How are those two doing this?! That little blonde, I thought she was just a mousy nerd with a rocking body, and where did that guy even come from?" the Hispanic-looking man from the night before grumbled. "Think she had a boyfriend?"

"Shut up and floor it! It's a matter of our club's pride now, not just yours. No way two people on foot are going to leave behind Hells Angels!" the local gang leader shouted. An older man, he had long hair and looked far more weathered than the younger pair. But even at full gallop, their bikes began to lose distance in comparison to the two runners.

Ranma was now actively using ki to speed himself up and was enjoying the exercise. This was fun, and frankly, beating on the weak wouldn't give him nearly as much exercise. "I think I can keep this up until evening, what about you?"

"I can keep going for way longer than that, obviously...my shoes, though, not so much. How are your slippers surviving this?!" Kara grumbled, not enjoying what this was doing to her shoes. Even specialty running shoes couldn't keep up with the pace they had been setting, and at this enhanced speed, Kara could feel the soles of her shoes starting to come apart.

"Oh yeah, never told ya that, did I? I reinforce them with ki. I do that to a small extent to all of my clothing," Ranma explained. It was a trick he'd come up with soon after leaving the Amazon village for the first time. "I can teach you that when we figure out if you can use ki in the first place, I guess."

"As interesting as that sounds, my shoes are going to come apart soon, and I really don't want to keep running on just my feet. While the ground won't hurt my feet, running on bare feet is going to kill them." Kara had large arches, so she needed built-up shoes in order to keep her feet from becoming sore. *Which, again, I shouldn't have to deal with thanks to my yellow-sun given durability!*

Alas, when it was her own body doing the damage, it didn't. "Any ideas about how to deal with them other than violence so we can slow down?"

"Can you control those eye-beams of yours so that they're invisible?" When Kara shook her head, Ranma shrugged. "Then I'm afraid not. And if it's down to violence to solve this issue, I suggest we pull off the road a little way up ahead. There's a small copse of trees there. We can deal with this lot, leave them, and head on without anyone the wiser but our victims. Who certainly ain't gonna brag about being beaten down by a foreigner and a blonde girl."

Knowing all too well how accurate that was, Kara grumbled a little at that but nodded. "Fine, let's do it."

Seeing the two mad sprinters peeling off the highway into the trees, most of the bikers whooped. "I bet they're trying to go to ground, but if we spread out, come at them from every direction, we'll find them!"

A few of the bikers looked at one another, wondering if perhaps they might've bitten off a bit more than they could chew here. The sight of those two running along like gazelles on steroids without a hint of slowing for more than an hour now had caused some second thoughts, and more than one biker had enough imagination to realize that kind of ability could imply other things. But the majority were enthusiastic about the idea, having spent the last hour and a bit staring at the blonde's rear from behind.

This faded a little bit more as the group of twelve bikers entered the forest, only to find both of their supposed targets simply waiting for them deeper into the small copse of trees. Something about this setup began to ring a little off in most of the more experienced bikers' minds now, but they had come too far to quit.

The leader opened his mouth to say something, but before he could, something slammed into his forehead with enough force to cause him to fly backward end over end. He crashed into two of his fellows, taking both to the ground and even slamming one of them into a tree.

"We don't really need to listen to what they have to say or anything, do we?" Ranma asked, looking over Kara.

"No, I don't think we do," Kara giggled, and charged forwards. *Just above normal strength girl, remember just above normal strength!*

What followed was a beatdown of epic proportions, one that ended almost as abruptly as it began, with the last of the bikers dumped onto a pile of groaning bodies in the center of the small copse of trees. Several had attempted to run away, showing that they might've been smarter than their fellows, but they hadn't even gotten out of the trees before Kara cut them off with a burst of speed.

Looking at the pile of ten groaning bodies, Kara frowned a little as Ranma made to go through one of their pockets, then stopped himself, shaking his head and backing away. "What were you about to do?"

"I call it the idiot tax back home. If anyone like this was dumb enough to pick a fight with me when I'm in my girl form away from Nerima, I thought it was perfectly fair to take all of their money. However, I'm trying not to do that any longer, especially since you've got your credit card, and I can do so many other things to get money as we travel like I did last night. These bikers aren't dyed the wool criminals either, or we don't know if any of them have done anything too bad."

Kara stared at him, and Ranma stared back, a small sweatdrop appearing at the look on her face, before Kara smirked and said deadpan, "You're afraid that in America you won't get away with it, aren't you? Even if these idiots were attempting to assault us, there's a limit to what you can do to them under the law after they've already been knocked out. And they are citizens, while you're not."

"Aheh, yeah, there's a bit of that," Ranma admitted sheepishly. "Even if I don't care about local laws, I don't want the police after me for so stupid a reason. Besides, I don't think Diana-nee would approve."

That final thought was actually a bit more pertinent to him than the idea he'd be breaking local laws. Ranma had always preferred to follow his own Code, but if things like this got back to Diana, which they might with a witness like Kara, he didn't really want to do anything that she would find dishonorable.

"Well, I wouldn't approve anyway. Not for something this stupid and low-key," Kara said dryly, frowning a little. "Although making the punishment fit the crime is fine. Hmm... we want to make certain that these guys understand that not only did they pick a fight with the wrong people, but also that actions have consequences. Just taking all their money doesn't seem enough for that, and yet also wouldn't really fit."

Ranma blinked at that, then, slowly, both of their eyes turned to the bikes lying out just inside the tree line. "Stealing them would be wrong," Ranma said slowly. "On the other hand, those bikes can cost a heck of a lot. But..."

"Yeah... but. Something these biker assholes will remember and need to fix before doing anything else. That sounds like a justifiable punishment." With that, Kara went over to the

nearest bike. With ease, she used her finger to puncture the gas tank, letting the gas trickle out onto the ground. It was obvious that she had made the hole in the side of the tank.

Ranma blinked, then shrugged, and began to do the same thing, snickering all the while. "This way, they'll have to walk back to town, as well as pay for the repairs to their precious bikes. Lesson learned, I think."

OOOOOOO

While her friends were trekking across several states to see her, Cassie Sandsmark was dealing with the issue of not quite understanding how to use certain modern appliances. This led directly to a need to deal with the aftermath. In this case, that meant airing out the apartment after disabling the fire alarms momentarily so that they didn't go off because of the smell of excessively burned bacon when she opened the microwave.

"I am so glad that I remembered what kind of plate could go in the microwave this time," Cassie grumbled, waving a hand into the microwave a bit and thankfully not seeing any actual damage or anything she needed to clean up there. "Yet still bacon eludes me, drat it! And do not get me started on what happened to those sausages. You need the knowledge of Athena to use this infernal device for anything meat-related!"

Despite her complaints, Cassie was actually somewhat proud of herself. Since Diana had left, she had figured out how to make bread with the oven, and bread, oil and olives were enough to keep her fed along with cereal and some ready-made meals.

Which, admittedly, all had written instructions on them that she could follow when placing them in the microwave. But every time Cassie tried to add some kind of protein to her diet, be it fish, sausages or what have you, it failed miserably, whether she was using the microwave or the stove.

Eventually, the smell and the bit of smoke began to clear. Once it did, Cassie replaced the batteries in the fire alarms and, setting the idea of bacon aside for now, headed into the TV room, pulling out some of her history texts.

Five minutes later, the Amazon teen felt like she wanted to smash her head into a steel girder. Cassie had truly begun to hate how history was taught in Men's World. The textbooks were frustrating. Where was the passion, the fire, the tales of the common man rising up and going above and beyond simple duty, passed on so that others could look up to their story and emulate them? Why was everything just a dry account of dates, times, and the random picture thrown in!? Did the educators in this world truly think that teenagers were supposed to find some interest in this?

Cassie did not have a problem with the idea of classrooms or group learning, of course. The Amazons taught many things in a similar setting. Astrology, math, science, animal

husbandry, knowledge about wood, rock and soil were all taught in a classroom, along with a few other disciplines. They even had their own equivalent of textbooks for such things.

But history? History was passed on almost entirely via oral tales among the Amazons, teaching the young of those who had gone before. Each campaign was spoken of by those who had been there or knew those who had, giving such history a personal touch that made the tales stick in the brain far more than any textbook could. In this way, their tales were passed down and remembered, each battle or event gathered together to make a greater whole.

That was a far cry from the dry, unattached stories in the textbooks. *It's almost like the authors don't care about making us connect to the history being discussed.*

No, Cassie decided, she wasn't interested in trying to dive into those books again. "I know that I need to get better at those classes in order to go to this high school place that Diana thinks is such a good idea for me, and I know that I'm supposed to be learning more about Men's World from them, but honestly! They're so boring." She glanced at the TV for a moment. "And Diana did say something about there being educational channels on TV..."

Why Diana had also said that the TV had something called the parental lock on it, Cassie didn't know. She'd looked for the lock, but couldn't find it, and so figured that it was something to do with the strange 'programming' thing that Kara had mentioned so often back on the Isle of Women. Regardless, Cassie wasn't interested in anything adults-only like certain shops back in Themyscira, unless dead bodies and blood counted as adult content on the television.

Cassie powered up the TV, and having learned long since using the controller, she began to look for anything history related. She found the History Channel quickly enough and when she went to it live, Cassie smiled in interest as the pictures of pyramids came up. Cassie knew several Amazons who could trace their lineage back to Egypt one way or another, but none of that magnificent ancient nation had been preserved on the Isle of Women.

Several minutes later, Cassie leaned back, frowning in confusion. "Aliens? Really? This is supposed to be the History Channel, right?" She kept on watching, but frankly, what little evidence was proposed did not persuade her that the talking heads on the screen had somehow cottoned on to some kind of deep, mysterious conspiracy to hide 'the truth' as one of them put it.

"Still, I suppose it is something I could ask Kara about," she murmured. "Her or the Martian Manhunter."

At the thought of her friend, Cassie smiled, her eyes no longer seeing the TV, but rather Kara's time with her on the Isle of Women, the warmth and simple pleasure Cassie had gotten from having a friend who could push her so hard in training. Cassie **really** missed Kara these days and wished that Diana and Superman had set up a meeting between them since Cassie had come to Man's World.

She understood their plans had been derailed by issues in outer space, and Cassie also knew she had been completely overwhelmed by new information and generally getting used to Man's World, at first but still. Not being able to even call Cassie because she didn't know the girl's phone number or vice versa was annoying as heck.

Having all this technology at my fingertips and not being able to use it to contact the one person in Man's World I actually want to contact is frustrating!

At that, Cassie's mind drifted from her current best friend to her old best friend for a moment as she remembered her first brush with Man's World in the form of the Japanese boy, Ranma. The two of them hadn't been together nearly as long as Kara and Cassie had been, but he had still made a distinct impression on Cassie, and Cassie hoped that she and the other Amazons had made as profound one on him.

He had some really unusual ideas about men being stronger and tougher than women that we needed to kick out of his head for him, for certain, she thought, smirking a little at the memory of several spars they'd had. Ranma had always been tricky, but when it came to sheer physical strength and speed, Cassie had always been at least a little bit better. That gap had shrunk a bit while Ranma was training with the Amazons, but now? Even if he somehow kept up the training, I bet I could beat him hollow!

Chortling at the idea of doing just that, Cassie's mind only slowly came back to the here and now, and she concentrated on what was on the TV again. Seeing it had once more gone to those irritating commercial things, she turned it off with a huff and looked over at the piled-up textbooks. Cassie really needed to do at least some work today, but with history out of the question, given her present mind, that left math. "And thank you again, Kara, for your help on that subject."

Science and math did not come easily to Cassie, and worse, she'd never honestly seen the point of it. Cassie didn't want to be a sailor. Such were very rare on the Isle of Women anyway, as they were constrained by the Veil of Poseidon. Nor had she ever wanted to be a bursar, banker or merchant. Why then did Cassie need to know much about math at all? Kara had made their lessons fun in a way that the classroom had never been able to do, mixing it in with training and various exercises to keep Cassie moving while also thinking about math.

This she took to heart now, hopping to her feet and standing next to the table as she worked through a few problems. After each problem, she dropped to her chest and did some push-ups, before following it up with some sit-ups and stretches. Not enough to work up a sweat, she'd already had her serious exercise session for the day in the apartment's personal gym but enough to keep her blood moving.

Cassie was just about finished with her math studies for the day, when a small clock she'd set up rang, and she gleefully turned on the TV again. Today was a replay of a game in what Diana had insisted on calling American Football, although why Diana had insisted on

calling it American, Cassie didn't know. Cassie had gotten into the game early on in her stay with Diana, enjoying the violence of it.

Really, she thought of it as war by any other means: disparate tribes sending out teams of gladiators to do battle for pride and honor. As such, it interested her immensely more than most of the other sports she'd seen on TV. Tennis, Cassie could see the point of; there was a lot of hand-eye coordination necessary for that sport, not to mention speed. Basketball was just meh in how little contact you were allowed, baseball was just boring, and Cassie just couldn't get into the cross. *Although that might be because I'm not a spear wielder or all that good with a slingshot*, Cassie admitted as the football game began. *So that could be just me.*

Cassie continued to work on her math for what bit while watching the game, finishing it up, then, with a groan, deciding to move on to reading what passed for a classic here in Man's World. "Honestly, this Shakespeare person writes good comedy, but I refuse to believe that **anyone** can take this romance seriously the way he wrote," she grumbled, before looking up at the screen again.

She hoped that the commercial had ended, only to stop and stare. This particular commercial was one Cassie hadn't seen before, and she blinked, staring at the scantily clad women who came on screen one after another, apparently advertising the nightwear that they were all wearing. "Victoria's Secret!?! I very much doubt that this Victoria woman has very many secrets left if she goes around dressed like that! That is almost as confusing as why there are so many explosions in TV commercials that deal with food products or cars. Do they honestly expect you to what was it, taste the explosion, or need to run away from car thieves?"

Honestly, Cassie had seen so many weird advertisements that they tended to blend together in her mind these days. She truly understood why Diana told her not to watch too much TV, or else it would rot her brain. Sighing, she flicked the mute button and turned her attention back to the book she was trying to read.

Later that night, with the sun having long since fallen, Cassie tossed the book to one side, hopping to her feet. She had forced her way through half of it, and that was enough for the day. *Honestly, I don't get what I'm supposed to be learning from that story. How not to be pathetic? Is it a cautionary tale about letting your emotions drown your brain, making you stupid?*

Cassie looked at the time, then grinned a little, and quickly raced to her bedroom, coming back clad in her exercise gear. This consisted of a pair of yoga pants and a crop-topped shirt, along with her wallet, headphones, and phone.

Within seconds, the headphones, the large, ear-covering variety that had the capacity to block outside sound, were on her head, and she was out the door, already bobbing her head to the music. If there was one aspect of being in Man's World that Cassie had truly come to love, other than the variety of food that Diana had introduced her to, it was their music. *In this area,*

they've certainly left us Amazons well behind. I've got time to get in a good, solid run today, and I can even see more of the city, she thought, as she exited the apartment complex, taking a few seconds to decide which direction to go today, before racing off.

Keeping to what Diana told her was a pace a normal young woman could achieve was a little hard for Cassie, and she felt more like she was simply trotting rather than jogging, but it was still a nice time. It was a warm night, traffic had died down, and her headphones kept out any extraneous sounds, letting her race along in her own world, taking in the sights, but not really interacting with anything or anyone, regardless of the reactions of anyone around her.

Diana's apartment complex was in one of the richer segments of the city, but not the richest. There were a lot of different parks around, small, well-cared-for areas that had about as much to do with true nature, in Cassie's opinion, as a poodle did with a wolf. Still, some of them did have nice water features, and Cassie enjoyed those, even the various sculptures. Of the various art forms, it had always been sculptures that Cassie had found herself drawn to more than painting, poetry or any of the other types of art that the Amazons practiced.

Soon, her jog through the city brought Cassie out of the area where Diana's apartment was, into a far less affluent area of the city. Here, there were far more people still around, many of whom shouted or whistled as she passed. But Cassie ignored them, racing on, her headphones doing a magnificent job of keeping out any kind of background noise. That, and Diana had told Cassie she couldn't just go around punting men for being rude or crude around her.

Racing along a road with thin but clean townhouses, before running past what looked like a far more rundown apartment complex, Cassie found herself once more in a park area. Star City had a lot of those, although this one didn't look nearly as well-kept as the ones closer to Diana's apartment.

As she passed under the trees, Cassie chanced to look up and spotted movement to one side. Turning her head in that direction, Cassie saw a man leap from one building to another outside the park, followed by an arrow flashing above his head. *Arrows, I suppose that means whoever that was, he was being chased by that Green Arrow fellow?*

Cassie knew the Green Arrow was a local hero, and one that Diana, as Wonder Woman, respected and had worked alongside a few times, thanks to the Justice League. However, they didn't interact all that often, since Wonder Woman dealt with large-scale issues and enemies most of the time, while Green Arrow was very much a local hero here in Star City. Wonder Woman's alter ego might be living in Star City, but she didn't make it a base of operations or anything.

Still, Diana had said that she and Green Arrow got along well enough, so long as he kept his flirting to a minimum, and Cassie suddenly decided she wanted to see the man in action. *I doubt I need to worry about him flirting with me, after all. I'm way too young for him, right? I*

know that Man's World takes the age of such things into account far more often in these modern times than they have historically speaking.

With that, Cassie turned back slightly, keeping her one eye on the activity above, while the rest of her followed on foot for a few moments, then, ducking into an alleyway, she leaped up over the head of a homeless person, another strange thing she'd needed to get used to here in Man's World. Ignoring the man's mumbling or the sight of several youngsters further back into the alleyway who were passing something between them, Cassie grabbed an emergency fire escape, then hauled herself upward easily, landing on the roof a second later.

From there, Cassie raced along parallel to the activity on the other side of the street, ducking low and keeping herself hidden as best she could. This was remarkably easy for someone who had been trained to hunt in the forests of the Isle of Women, where many of the predators (and some omnivores) had evolved to the point where they would try to turn the hunt back around on any unwary hunter. And the rooftops here always had something to hide behind, be it a service entrance, a large ventilation shaft or other things of that nature.

In this manner, she observed the two combatants. The pursuer was closer, and it was indeed Green Arrow.

He was a thirty-something man with a blonde goatee and curled mustache visible under a half mask that kept his eyes and upper face hidden. Why anyone thought that would be enough to keep his identity a secret, Cassie had no idea. But apparently it did work, as no one had ever gone looking for Green Arrow's civilian identity. *I wonder, if that's some kind of enchantment, like Diana's to keep her own secret identity hidden from the public?* she mused, before realizing something else.

Green Arrow wasn't using any of his special arrows, the gadget arrows that were his calling card. Rather, he was taking careful potshots at whoever he was pursuing, not really trying to attack just yet, but instead herding him somewhere.

Shifting her observation to the man Green Arrow was attacking, Cassie felt her huntress instincts tingle for a second. *He is not fighting nearly as much as he should be to get away if he's a regular sort of person. Not that he actually looks like a normal person now that I can see him better.*

The man was tall, although since he was stooping his head forward as he ran, Cassie couldn't be certain of his height in comparison to the Green Arrow. He looked somewhat lanky but had broad shoulders. He wore combat boots, matched with black combat pants, although from here, Cassie wasn't so certain about that, or what kind of shirt he was wearing underneath a long coat the likes of which she had seen on one of Diana's favorite shows, often enough worn by the detective in it. This cloak was black instead of brown, streaked with bits of green and white.

The man also wore a full mask, not a ski mask or something similar to that. This was a mask that was form-fitting around the neck and face to the point where it was obvious, he was wearing some kind of voice changer underneath and might well not have any hair to speak of, as the mask made it look as if he was bald. On the front of the mask was a simple white spiral, standing out sharply against the black of the rest of the mask.

Is he some kind of supervillain? Cassie mused. Diana had shown her pictures of a few of the supervillains she'd fought in the past, as well as some of the bigger threats to the world in general that the Justice League had fought together, but this man certainly wasn't one of them. Still, Cassie certainly wasn't naïve enough to assume that meant he was no threat.

And as she watched, it became clear to her that Green Arrow wasn't actually driving this man. Rather, this man was directing the fight in the direction he wanted it to go. This became clear when, instead of ducking away from another arrow shot and continuing on to another rooftop directly away from Green Arrow's pursuit, he ducked to the side and hopped to the next rooftop in a northeastern direction. This let the Green Arrow land an actual hit for the first time, but it seemed as if the arrow didn't penetrate the man's coat as he kept running.

Frowning in thought, Cassie continued to follow them discreetly before realizing that if either of them spotted her, she didn't have anything on her that would hide her identity. Frowning, she paused for a moment, thinking, then looked over at a line of laundry that had been left out overnight.

Moving towards it, Cassi grabbed at a worn, torn shirt, tearing it into pieces, and wrapping a portion of it around her lower face. *Sorry, but it's for a good cause. My curiosity.*

As she resumed her pursuit of the two combatants, another strip of cloth with holes for her eyes went over her upper face, leaving just Cassie's nose visible between them, although Cassie honestly felt she probably looked ridiculous. Still, it would help protect her identity and thus Wonder Woman's, so that was fine. Cassie then added to this by pulling her hair out of the ponytail she had it in while running, redoing it into a series of pigtails rapidly.

She just finished her work on her hair when the two combatants entered a junkyard. The noise of their passage was remarkably light in her opinion as she followed them at a safe distance, watching as Green Arrow used some kind of scent-based arrow on four dogs that had raced out of a kennel to one side. The small pack scrambled backwards in a way, yipping at the smell, and then Green Arrow twisted around and fired another special arrow towards the man.

This close, Cassie realized that it hadn't just been Green Arrow's choice that had been forcing him to use simple arrows up to this point. He couldn't carry an infinite amount of them, after all, and it looked like he was down to his last three.

The next one he shot was a glue bomb, which exploded with sending glue in every direction, including onto the man's coat, hardening quickly enough to cement him to the side of a rusty, falling-apart pickup truck.

Instead of pressing his advantage, though, the Green Arrow ducked back, sliding down into a car for a second through an open sunroof just as the man pulled out a gun from underneath his coat, opening fire on where Green Arrow had been a moment ago. He adjusted aim quickly, putting several bullets into and through the car, but the Green Arrow had already kicked his way out the other side, falling down two more cars underneath the one he had previously entered, before coming around the pile.

When he was in view again from Cassie's perspective, he had seemingly somehow refilled his quiver and fired two more in quick succession towards the man, who had already freed himself somehow. Cassie hadn't seen how, concentrating on where Green Arrow would appear next, although she was very surprised now when Green Arrow shouted, "Do you think you're the first criminal to assume that you can play keep away and simply outlast my store of arrows? Most of my arrows are telescopic, I always have more than show in my quiver!"

Wondering what a telescope had to do with arrows, Cassie watched, but it seemed as if the man that Green Arrow was fighting had other plans. Nor did he seem inclined to bandy words. Instead, he let loose a series of popping noises, "*blam blam blam!*" as he shot the arrows Green Arrow was shooting at him out of the air. He was then ducking aside and pressing something inside his coat.

The next second, there was a dull *crump* of some kind of explosion going off to one side among the piles of junk cars, sending several of them down towards Green Arrow's position. This was followed by a few grenades hurled in Green Arrow's direction as well, with the man shouting, "Boom!" at the same time.

Green Arrow shifted quickly, firing more glue guns up into the wave of cars, shifting down to try and crush them, halting their collapse for a few seconds, then rolled away from two of the grenades, but he couldn't move fast enough to avoid the third, when it exploded mid-air from a bullet from the man he was fighting.

That explosion sent Green Arrow sideways, singing him on that side, but he still fired two more arrows towards the man in the white-marked mask. One was a flash bomb that went off a few seconds after he fired it, followed by some kind of noise-creating arrow, which caused Cassie to be very grateful that she had put her headphones back on after doing her hair for some reason.

She continued to watch for a few seconds as the fight continued, with Green Arrow now trying to keep the range open but being foiled by small traps that the man had apparently set ahead of time in this specific area. A few of them were explosive in nature, but many were small

tripwires, and two of them simply shot out daggers, making no noise before they were launched.

They didn't seem to be entirely under his control, unlike that first one the villain had used. Rather, Green Arrow was being forced into them one after another, which allowed Green Arrow enough time to react. But Cassie removed her headphones, stowing them to one side of her for a moment, along with her walkie-talkie, as she realized the Green Arrow was starting to slow down a bit. Whether or not his opponent was simply in better shape or a metahuman, she couldn't tell, but his preparation of the battlefield was definitely telling.

I know Diana didn't want me to do any heroics or anything for at least a year as I got acclimated to Man's World before going out with her as an apprentice like Donna, but I doubt she'd argue that I shouldn't step in here. With that, Cassie began to close on the fight slowly, keeping hidden as much as possible, which, given the attention both combatants were giving one another, was remarkably easy for the trained huntress.

As she did, the man in the blank mask turned the tables slightly on Green Arrow. He had feigned a foot being stuck between two cars, which had moved due to a missing arrow from Green Arrow exploding on contact and shifting the mass of cars behind him. Now, as the Green Arrow shifted forward, shouting at him to surrender, the man suddenly pulled out another grenade. The Green Arrow showed no hesitation and launched his arrow, but the man rolled it forward, ducking under the arrow.

The Green Arrow was caught completely flat-footed, having shifted away to avoid what he thought would be an explosion, but not the wave of glue, and found one of his feet stuck to the ground suddenly. This caused the green-clad hero to overbalance, going down to one knee and almost losing his bow, the arrow he had on hand shattering on the ground halfway along its length.

Two bullets followed in quick succession, and even then, the Green Arrow was able to flinch away from one, but the other struck him in the shoulder. That alone would probably not have hurt much, because much like his opponent seemed to be wearing, Green Arrow's outfit was far more armored than it looked. Yet the pain of that made Green Arrow miss what looked like a kitchen sink coming out of a pile of junk to one side. Whether or not it was simply due to the pile of junk shifting or an actual trap, Cassie couldn't tell.

Regardless, it crashed into Green Arrow's trapped leg, breaking it and pinning the man's leg down.

"ARGGH, you bastard!" the Green Arrow cried out in pain, trying to reach for another arrow, only for the man to shoot him again and again in the chest and side. Pinned down and with a leg broken, Green Arrow couldn't get away as the man charged forward behind his bullet storm and was only able to fire off one arrow, which the man dodged, the net exploding behind

him rather than around him. The next second, a collapsible sword shifted into view from under the villain's coat, cutting into the Green Arrow's bow, slicing it in half.

By that point, Cassie was already moving, racing between two piles of trash, all thought of holding back her speed gone. Before the would-be killer could bring his sword to bear on the Green Arrow's unprotected neck, Cassie slammed into him bodily, her arms going around the man as she carried him up and away from Green Arrow.

The man surprised Cassie by responding quickly, bringing his sword in to try and stab her, but Cassie wasn't just an Amazon. She had some divine blood in her, no matter how much Cassie detested the method through which she came by it. The sword went skittering off her stomach, causing nothing but her breath to gasp out for a second, and even that was more because of his own momentum. The man then dropped the sword and flicked out a knife from some kind of wrist device, trying to stab her in the eye.

That was a far more dangerous threat, but before he could try and stab her eye, his back slammed into and through what looked like some kind of square warped metal. Such was Cassie's strength that despite the fact that they had hit an almost solid object, her charge carried the pair of them through it. Bits and pieces of debris shredded the man's coat and armor, and he grunted and groaned in pain, the first real noises he'd released the entire battle. Up until then, he'd simply been shouting out weird noises that seemed to match what weapon he was using at the time.

Blasting out the other side of the pile of rubble, Cassie hurled him to one side, watching as the man tried and failed to roll with the landing. It slowed his rolling a bit, but not enough to avoid his already battered back slamming into another pile of garbage.

Cassie thought that the man must have some kind of superhuman durability to him as he rapidly pushed himself to his feet, wavering only slightly. He flicked out another dagger, as well as what looked like some kind of holdout gun, although the holdout gun came apart in his hand, having evidently been pounded into pieces by their charge through the pile of junk.

He sliced out at Cassie as she moved to attack, but Cassie blocked it with the forearm, her hand grabbing at his own forearm and pulling him in. He blocked her punch, but not her kick, which caught the masked man in the center of his chest, and Cassie's earlier supposition that the man might have some superhuman durability seemed proven as she felt armor plates crack underneath the blow but not ribs.

Setting that thought aside, Cassie ducked under a punch from the man, then perfectly executed a shoulder throw, and then, without releasing her grip, whirled him up into the air, to send him headfirst into another pile of garbage. This time, the man's head sank into what looked like an extremely ill-used dishwasher of some kind, causing his upper body and head to become stuck for a second as Cassie released her grip on his forearm.

Before the man could try to pull himself out, Cassie grabbed his ankle, hauling him out. She then proceeded to slam the masked man headfirst into the ground several times.

Even now, the man's durability allowed him to try and pull out some other gadget, a small square box of some kind. It exploded with light, blinding Cassie and causing her to release her grip on his ankle, both of her hands going up to his head in instinctual response.

The man tried to race away, but there was so much junk all around, his footsteps made noises enough to make Cassie aware of where he was. Before the man, badly battered by this point despite his durability, could do anything, Cassie was on him again, a punch catching him in the back. And this time, she hadn't held back nearly as much. That punch cracked ribs and might've ruptured something inside, she wasn't certain, but the man was hurled off his feet to slam into and through another pile of junk in the direction where the Green Arrow lay.

As that junk pile began to collapse and settle down anew, Cassie shook her head, waiting for her eyesight to come back, then raced after the man, climbing up the shifting pile of junk as if it were so much scree. A second later, she was jumping down to where he lay, trying to pull himself along despite blood beginning to seep out and down through his mask where it had been cut in several places.

Looking around, Cassie paused for a moment, then wrenched out a piece of pipe. Looking at the semi-sharp end of it, she nodded, and moved over towards the man, bringing around the blunt end of it into the side of his face, sending the masked man skidding to the side and almost undoubtedly shattering his jaw along with several teeth. The teeth exploded with enough force to have the teeth actually burst out of his mouth, shredding the mask around his mouth.

That caused Cassie to shake her head before kicking out lightly, sending the man onto his stomach on the ground. Keeping her foot there on his lower back, she raised the makeshift spear again, intending to finish the man off.

"Stop! You don't need to kill him!"

Pausing, Cassie turned to Green Arrow, who had just shouted that, her brows behind her makeshift mask furrowing in confusion. "Why not? I mean, I'd agree if he were just a simple gangster or thug; they're not worth it. But this man, he's obviously something special, some kind of assassin, I presume? Why keep him alive?"

The Green Arrow, Oliver Queen, stared back at the blonde girl with the rather childish-looking pigtails in some shock. That hairstyle had made him think she was rather young, but her sheer power and ability had made him rethink things. Now, though, he realized that she really was that young and had to shake his head. "Heroes don't do that. We don't kill."

“That seems remarkably shortsighted. Unless you’re assuming that he can be put away for life, the man will recover.” Cassie smirked a little as she looked down at her opponent. “Except for his teeth, maybe.”

“Yeah, well, shortsighted or not, we don’t decide who gets to live and who dies. That’s part of what separates us from the villains. We let the courts and the system take care of that for us. And considering that this ass killed at least two local vigilantes tonight, along with three witnesses, he’s going to be going away for a long time,” Oliver stated grimly, pushing through the pain in his leg.

Seeing that, Cassie sighed, then very deliberately broke the assassin’s leg, causing him to cry out in pain, then even more pain as his jaw and mouth screamed at him. Certain that the man wouldn’t be able to crawl away, she moved over to the Green Arrow and began to methodically break the glue holding his foot to the ground, before shifting the broken kitchen sink off of his broken leg more than he already had. “So long as you’re certain about that, I won’t do anything more to him.”

“I am,” Oliver said, groaning a bit at the pain in his leg. “I’ve got video evidence of his murders. I can call in some police who will be more than happy to pick him up for me. After I call my own getaway car anyway.”

“Well, it sounds as if you’ve got a system to handle such things at least,” Cassie muttered, helping the Green Arrow to get more comfortable on the ground for a moment, before examining his leg, splinting it with some bits of debris nearby.

As she worked, Oliver stared at her, taking in the extremely makeshift mask covering her face, as well as thinking about her abilities. “You’re Wonder Woman’s girl, right?” he asked in a low tone, making certain that it wouldn’t carry over to the still whimpering Onomatopoeia. Just because the assassin was in no position to continue the fighter’s getaway didn’t mean that he was completely unconscious after all.

“ER, apprentice,” Cassie said at the same volume, blushing hotly behind her mask. Being the daughter of the Princess would, well, that would’ve been amazing, way better than her parents, given everything going on there. But it felt like something she hadn’t earned. “We’re not actually related. All Amazons are as strong as me.”

That was a bald-faced lie, but she figured the Green Arrow wouldn’t have any way to check up on it. Further, Cassie in no way wanted the source of her personal superstrength to come out. It was humiliating enough to know about it as it was.

“Whatever, Wonder Girl,” Green Arrow muttered.

Cassie made a face behind her mask. “If that name sticks to me at any point, I’m going to blame you!” she growled before finishing with his leg. Leaving the Green Arrow to pull out his

phone and some small tube thing, she moved over to the prisoner, reaching down and wrenching his mask off despite the man's feeble attempts to raise his arms to block her. This only earned him a few broken fingers, and Cassie quickly pulled out her phone, snapping pictures of his face.

The Green Arrow looked up from where he had been sending off some text messages, staring, and catching his look, Cassie shrugged. "What? Just because you seem to trust the system doesn't mean I'm not going to take precautions."

With that done, she asked if the Green Arrow needed any further help, and he tossed her some handcuffs, asking her to put them on the prisoner, naming him for the first time aloud. "Onomatopoeia, is that why he was making all those weird noises? Goodness, supervillains and heroes alike, you all have some very unusual quirks, don't you?"

"Is that another way of saying that all of us are just a little insane? If so, I might well agree with the accusation, even if it's coming from a so-called Amazon from the magically hidden Island of Women," Oliver chuckled. He'd stabbed himself with the painkiller, and the pain of his broken leg, badly wrenched ankle, and other wounds weren't getting to him now nearly as much. He knew those wounds were small change to what could have happened. *For which I have this young woman to thank.*

"You should get out of here before my ride arrives, or the police. I'm not certain at this point which is going to arrive first, and given that you're not a well-known hero, you might get in trouble for stepping in like this."

Twitching at that, Cassie nodded and bid him farewell before heading over to pick up her headphones. Within moments, she was out of the junkyard, hopping up over the outer wall away from the scene of the battle. *So, that was my first brush with superheroing. I suppose that went quite well,* she thought complacently, before deciding she had earned a treat, reaching into her pocket for her wallet and the map of the city that Diana had given her.

I think this calls for some Rocky Road ice cream. And maybe some horrible comedy movies. Hmm... I wonder what kind of movie Kara would like? We never talked about it, but I can't picture her liking anything too serious, although maybe not slapstick. Something like Spaceballs? That was hilarious the other night, Cassie thought, planning out her route for a moment. With that done, she put the map back and began running through the city back to Diana's apartment, the music drowning out the rest of the world once more.

OOOOOOO

Two days later found the pair of travelers deep into Colorado, and well away from most cities at the moment. They had stopped in at a diner that served truckers, sleeping there that night, before they were up early the next day. As Ranma settled up the bill for their breakfast,

Kara took the opportunity to call home for the third time that trip, telling Martha and Jon where they were, and what they had been up to over the past two days, before joining Ranma outside.

As she did, Ranma looked over and fought back a blush and a full-body shudder. He had no idea why, but Kara had decided to change out of her normal exercise shorts into Daisy Dukes that morning. The cut-off jean shorts were far shorter than her somewhat long gym shorts and hugged her rear and thighs more than the exercise shorts had to boot. *Good grief, but that is... one heck of a view.*

Shaking that thought off, Ranma smirked at Kara, gesturing down the road, not noticing how Kara had a shy but pleased little smile on her own face. While being stared at or flirted with by strangers was annoying, Kara found she appreciated Ranma looking at her like that. It felt... nice.

“So, we’ve got a choice. We can either follow the road or go several days out of our way. Or we can start following the compass and head up into the mountains and beyond,” Ranma explained.

“Considering that if we go that way, I’ll be able to fly more, that gets my vote,” Kara agreed instantly.

This caused Ranma to fight back another blush at the realization that if they did go flying, Kara would be carrying him, either in her arms again or on her back. And given what she was currently wearing, neither image was good for Ranma’s blood pressure, something that Kara could tell with her superhearing.

Still, he had come up with this plan and had to follow through. He did, however, have another reason for suggesting this idea. “Actually, come here for a second.”

Moving over to a picnic table, Ranma laid out the map, then pointed to where they were, then went up into the Sawatch Range of the Rocky Mountains. “There are a lot of rivers up there, and some of them are going in the same direction we want to go. What would you think about swimming some of the way there?” Ranma grinned suddenly. “Well, I say swimming, it’ll be more like white-water rafting without the raft.”

“What’s white-water rafting?” Kara asked blankly.

“What I will be introducing you to then,” Ranma laughed. “Before that, let’s grab some snacks and a few water bottles. If we’re going to go the mountain route, that means there won’t be any more civilization-type stops for us once we hit the mountains.”

Half a day later, found the pair high up in the mountain range, looking down at what amounted to a two-story waterfall that cascaded down into a river below. An incredibly fast, very rocky river that, according to the compass, was going in the direction they wanted to.

Any normal individual, expert white-water rafter, expert swimmer, or what have you, would've looked at that river and felt it was a step too far. On the other hand, Ranma had already transformed into his female body and put on her bathing suit. Kara had stepped behind a rock nearby to do the same. When she came back, Ranma snorted, trying hard to not stare at Kara's chest. "I see we both go to the same school of thought when it comes to bathing suits."

Kara blinked, then shrugged as she took in Ranma's outfit. Both of their bathing suits were one-piece swimsuits. Ranma's was a simple swimsuit designed for competitions, while Kara's was much the same but with a few small bits cut out, the edges marked in gold. Both basically looked as if they were designed to be completely nonsexual, but in Ranma's opinion, it failed miserably when it came to Kara.

She wasn't about to say anything about it right now, though. "I want to make sure, are you okay with this?"

At that, the kryptonian grinned, looking over the edge of the waterfall. "It looks like fun. We've already used my flight ability before this, so I don't see an issue with using my durability or anything else to speed us on our way. Besides, I have to admit this looks like fun."

"Cool. Let the current take you, don't destroy any rocks or anything you don't have to, and stay afloat as much as you can. It's more fun when you just let the river push you how it wants to," Ranma said, strapping a backpack to herself. It was a watertight backpack, another thing she'd for several years up to this point. She'd expanded the inside via ki with enough energy to go a few days without refill and pushed all of their clothing and everything else in there now.

After all, there was no place for a ki pocket beyond the very infinitesimal area that could be called the décolletage on her current bathing suit, and Ranma refused to use a boob window. There were just some things that Ranma's male mind refused to do, and acting like she was an anime side character who could hide things with her tits was one of them.

Kara nodded, watching Ranma at work for a moment. When Ranma was done, the two of them leaped off the edge and into the water below. Although, Kara did have to stop her new instincts to simply fly rather than let gravity have its say. This was actually harder than it should have been but Kara did it well enough.

An instant later, the pair crashed into the water. The current was so strong both girls were instantly pulled away down the river, the rapids here being so strong that even an Olympic-level swimmer would have found it impossible to fight against. Nor would the Olympic swimmer have survived the experience very long, as both of them found themselves battered against the rocks.

Kara and Ranma, on the other hand, simply allowed it to go on, sticking their heads out of the water occasionally when they needed a breath, but otherwise enjoying the ride,

whooping as the water carried them on. Kara didn't know how far they went before the rocks and crags stopped trying to injure them, but both of them were grinning as they found themselves floating along at speed, going over a small shallow area before heading into deeper water.

"That was amazing!" I am so glad that Aunt Martha and Uncle Jon let me come on this trip! Just this has been worth it, to say nothing of the fun we've been having.

Ranma grinned back, and the pair continued on their way, the current pulling them along. They would've made better time if they had simply flown, or just raced along on level ground, but here in the Rocky Mountains, that last wasn't exactly going to happen. And this was, as Kara had said, immensely fun.

The river took them into what Ranma thought was the Blue Mesa Reserve, judging from the map. There, Kara flew them out of the water and over the mountains. The next day, they slept in for a little bit, each in their own separate tents, something they'd done only twice so far on this trip for various reasons, before sparring in the morning.

Ranma would have honestly preferred they spar more often, but Kara had vetoed doing so around anyone else, and had wanted to get used to traveling 'Ranma style' as she put it before doing so. Thus, this was the first time they had time and space available.

Once done with a morning of training, the pair headed down the mountainside that afternoon, climbing or simply hopping over ledges and so forth towards yet another river. The fact that they ran into a bear that tried to chase them didn't honestly matter at all, except that Kara was tempted to see if the grizzly was as fluffy-feeling as it looked.

By this point, they had gone through Aunt Martha's cooking and most of the supplies in terms of food they'd bought along the way. But Ranma supplemented what they had left by hunting up some rabbits on their third day in the mountains. Kara surprised him a little when she helped to skin and prepare them, but he reminded himself that she's probably done that many a time with the Amazons.

In this way, the pair followed as straight a line as possible as they could through Utah and into Nevada, heading down to the south of California.

On the second day out from the mountains, Kara and Ranma found themselves in a canoe on the Reese River, following it further southwest. When it started to shift straight south, they left it, heading through some woods and backcountry areas until they came upon a major road leading in the direction they wanted to go. Here, they found signs for the town of Tonopah directing them onward.

Little did they know, at the time that this town would offer far more than just food and local idiots biting off more than they could chew...

End Chapter

So, there we go. Not much happened on Ranma and Kara's side beyond getting to know you type fun and some shenanigans. The next scene, which I had hoped to put in this chapter, would have had more excitement on their end. But for two and a half fucking days, this is a pretty good place to stop, and this way I can introduce another hero as well in that little dustup. Regardless of the lack of true combat from Ranma's perspective, I hope that you all enjoyed this!