

Good Morning (technically) people. Sorry this wasn't out sooner, but Sundays are now once more Football days alas. So much time on task wasted. Anyway, Making Waves is done and has been sent off to the second of its two editors. I will post it the day that it is back in my hands. I will also post the winner of the large story poll tomorrow (or rather, later today). Anyway, here is the poll. And as was usual until the last one, there was a clear winner all the way. All that changed after a weighted the votes was the numbers involved.

A measly 48 was the fate of Another person tries to mess with the wine with poison rather than a love potion (drama, character deaths, Ranma becoming angry). I should have realized the characters death bit would cause people to be somewhat wary of this choice.

At 408 votes, Makoto wonders if Ranma is her sempai and flirts with him in front of Henrietta. (some drama, comedy, embarrassment, verbal catfight) surprised me. I thought the idea of comedy and adding a possible new love interest would draw more interest.

Sheffield's master decides that eliminating Karin and the Princess is too much to pass up (combat, fighting, world-building) was another shock bringing in 418. That's the best any so-called antagonist POV has done so far.

But it wasn't enough. Montmorency decides to use a potion on Guiche (More from the original, lemony goodness, RanmaXHenrietta big-time romance moment) won easily, with 1,502.

Before we get to the episode itself, Erm, I said there would be lemons, but um... I didn't realize how much stuff was before the lemons in the original. So there won't be lemons in this one. On the other hand, that means I won't have to do a lot for the next few episodes if the votes go that way.

This has been edited via Grammarly and *Hiryo*.

Episode 11: Sped to the Finish Line

That was the final straw Montmorency reflected, as she moved into the kitchen like she owned the place, which admittedly was just the way most noble people walked all the time. Watching Guiche attempt to butter up the tall girl who had been summoned by Louise along with the two men was just beyond the pale. Despite her physical abilities, the woman was still just a peasant! If he couldn't even be expected to control himself around peasant women, where would it end! No, something had to be done to curtail his wandering eye and she had just the thing.

So for Montmorency this formal dinner was a tailor-made opportunity.

"I'm just checking on the preparations," explained the potions expert to the kitchen staff as she saw the chief chef looking at her. "With the Princess here, not to mention the Valliere family, that there are protocols that must be observed."

"Oh really my lady?" the chef asked.

"Most definitely," said Montmorency. "The Valliere family would be gravely insulted if certain vintages were brought to their table. Old standing feuds and the like, especially with Baroness Cotre and Duke Largo here. After all, Duke Largo was once courting Lady Karin. And the Baroness is... well, frankly she has feuds with nearly every other noble house. For example, where is this tray going?"

For several moments, Montmorency actually did as she was saying, helping the maids and the butler decide where to send what. Her earlier comment on Largo and Karin had won over them all, calming the head chef's wariness. During this time, she dealt with about a dozen minor issues, and two major ones, on top of the aforesaid issue for Lady Karin. Then, as the group was about ready to ferry the trays up – almost all at once so she spotted the final one, which she had been avoiding up to this point. Pointing at it, she asked her normal question again, "And finally this one, where is it going?"

The maid holding the tray looked down at what she was holding, a bottle surrounded by eight glasses. "That is for table nine. I believe that is the table with Guiche Gramont and his friends."

"Ah, another a minor issue," Montmorency opined, switching the wine bottle with another from another tray. "Gramont dislikes this color and the vintage is from a vineyard owned by a rival of his father. Who happens to be here tonight, unlike General Guiche."

With that she waited until the maid had moved off to consult with the butler before adding a few drops from the vial hidden up one sleeve to one specific glass on that tray. Knowing Guiche that well, she knew which one of the glasses he'd automatically select. *Now I'll just have to watch the table to make sure he gets it. Pity I can't sit at the same table with him.* The tables were separated between grades and element types.

Mission accomplished, she thanked the chef and the maids for listening to her, and after they thanked her in turn for her help, she left, hurrying off to pamper her nose before heading to the cafeteria.

This was why she didn't see what occurred a moment after she left. "Ah, Cloe, take that to the Princess's table right away. The students will have to wait to get soused. The princess wants to make a toast before the meal arrives and we've not gotten her table wine yet."

The serving maid looked at the tray and then back up. "But the wine is already poured."

"You want to keep the Princess waiting?" one eyebrow rising in surprise Marie questioned. That did it, and Cloe shook her head quickly, and joined Marie heading to the cafeteria and then to the table near the far end, which had taken over the area set aside for teachers.

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"So, while the initial effect seemed to be some kind of automatic magical defense of your world, this second active power source means we cannot discount someone on your side of the portal being involved in what occurred. My guess would be the runaway...truck was it?" Colbert asked, looking at the three-dimensional travelers, his eyes lighting up in delight. "Would you mind if I ask you questions about that? How does it work? What was it made of? You said it was wheeled, but what kind of magic was propelling it?"

"Ahem, professor, I think those questions can wait until another time," the Princess intoned, while looking at Ranma, waiting for him to finish his translation. To her surprise Colbert almost ignored her, continuing to spout out questions for a moment until a cough and a glare caused him to back down, looking almost like a child deprived of a toy. *Good grief, I cannot believe he has bounced back so well from my earlier remonstrations. Am I losing my touch, or is he just that single-minded? That is not what I would expect of someone with Colbert's background... or perhaps it should be.*

Soon all three of the newcomers understood what had happened and why. That didn't mean Kazuma didn't occasionally glare at the shortest of those present but they understood.

"Wait, you said there were two nearby sources of dormant magic. Does, does that explain how I was able to fight off Louise's spell?" Makoto didn't seem to take Kazuma's words about the magic worked on her at face value. She was too interested in magic being real and the implications of her ability to fight Louise's spell off.

"Quite possibly," Henrietta said, smiling at the other young woman. Of the three newcomers, Makoto was both the most talkative and the nicest.

His mind coming back on task, Colbert also nodded. "Certainly, that makes sense given what you have told us about your fighting off the Familiar Bond. Although, I would suppose that it is something dormant within you. Waking it up, so to speak, might be difficult without more information."

"And you already said that your parents are dead. Might I ask how?" Henrietta asked, solicitously.

Makoto flinched a little but it had been more than four years since her parents passed away, and more than two since she had started to live on her own. "Yeah, they've been dead for four years now. They died in plane accident."

To Ranma surprise when he translated this everyone understood it and he wondered why for a moment.

But then Makoto went on drawing his attention back to her. "I sure don't remember anything about them being magical or anything like that..." Makoto frowned, tapping a finger on the pen she had picked up. It was a funny, thick kind of pen, the kind she liked, although it wasn't one of hers. She had wondered where it came from, before deciding that it must have belonged to the young girl who had lost her computer. *I wonder what she's thinking about right now?* "Regardless, do you think I can try to learn your magic system?"

"It will certainly be an interesting experiment," Colbert declared enthusiastically. "Both you and Kazuma might have magical abilities."

Ranma translated this and Makoto squealed, grabbing his arm in a hug. "YES!"

While Henrietta kept a scowl from her face, Kazuma shrugged his shoulders. "I doubt it. My sword's ki." From that start, Kazuma explained how he had learned to project his ki into a sword shape during the tournament to learn from Genkai.

He didn't mention Botan, Yusuke or his dying or anything on the supernatural side of things. He'd promised to keep that secret and being in a different dimension was not enough to break that promise.

Unbeknownst to Kazuma, Chad hadn't said anything on that score either. He also had the thought that maybe the Shinigami were also connected to this world. If so, that might be a way home, if the locals weren't able to or didn't want to send them home.

All this was new info to Ranma, whose translation slowed down for a bit, but still continued until Kazuma sneered, gesturing over to where the students were beginning to sit down, some of them with their parents, others with their age or element groups. "So, I don't use magic and I'm not certain I want to learn the system here anyway. Not if I have to dress up like these idiots."

When Ranma translated that, he drew a giggle from Henrietta and Louise, and a blank look from Colbert and the headmaster and the other nobles. The princess had long thought that the male form of the Academy was not the most rugged appearance in her opinion. *Dandy yes, manly, no.*

But Colbert was already concentrating on something else, pointing down to the pen. "That actually also has a magical signature now that I'm looking at it." He removed his glasses,

and seemed to cast a spell over them for a moment which Henrietta recognized as a mix of fire, wind and water, before putting them back on. He looked down at the pen, nodding his head slightly. "It's enchanted for certain. No internal power source, but it should I think perhaps link into something else?"

Makoto blinked, frowning at it, then shrugged saying she hadn't known that at all. Henrietta looked at the pen as did Louise, before the princess decided, "I would leave it for now. Add it to what you all will need to experiment with going forward. On that topic though, was there anything else that came with you all that struck you as odd?"

Chad nodded, speaking up for the first time since they had finished explaining the accident from their perspective. "A computer came through. A laptop."

"I hadn't seen one, are you sure?" Ranma frowned in confusion.

Chad nodded firmly, and Ranma cocked his head thoughtfully. "Huh, I wonder how much battery life it will have. Heck, I wonder how it survived the drop you all described."

"It hit its corner on the ground but didn't seem to take any damage. Beyond that I can't tell you," Chad replied with a shrug.

"What's wrong, Ranma?" Henrietta interjected.

"They say a computer came through," Ranma replied.

Judging from the faces of the Tristainians, that didn't seem to scan it all, and Henrietta frowned at him. "You just flipped back to your own language there for a moment."

Ranma's eyes crossed at that, then he said slowly. "I think that the translation spell or whatever that Louise hit me with is doing a lot more than I thought."

"What do you mean?" Karin questioned sharply from her own end of the table. She had been silent for much of the discussion with the Earth people other than making sure that her youngest daughter was on her best behavior, which she actually hadn't had to do. Instead, Henrietta had her hands full with Eleonore, who seemed to be almost vibrating with the desire to tear into her Louise.

Not only was now not the time for that, however, it certainly didn't seem to be needed either. At the moment, Louise was on her best behavior, and seemed to just want to spend time with Cattleya, Karin's most quite, fragile daughter. Further, from what Karin had seen, Louise had perfectly performed the ceremony, and had a choice of three Familiar Warriors to create a Familiar Bond with. Louise would just have to work at it a bit and it would be a far more even relationship than most.

Ranma frowned thinking how to explain it. "I think it allows me to understand words in your language I don't know the meaning of. But it doesn't seem to be able to do the same going the other way, at least not to this extent. Er, it's like a, a computer is like a book that has a lot of other books and information and stuff in it, which you can also use as a journal. It's technology, er, did that translate?"

"Alchemy chemistry and physics all combined in one word? I heard you say one word, but it translated into three or four," Henrietta confessed, becoming more certain than ever as to what kind of mage Louise was. Judging by her suddenly tight expression, Karin had too, and Henrietta caught the older woman's gaze, making a slight headshake and a movement with her fingers towards herself, meaning they would talk about this later.

Unaware of this, Ranma questioned Chad once more. "Where did the computer go?"

"One of the students took it. Short, large classes, blue hair."

Ranma relayed this to the others, then looked over to Louise. "Her name's Tabby or something, right?"

Louise nodded. She still didn't like Ranma, but he was certainly doing a bang up job of translating or at least seemed to. He also seemed more than willing to follow the princess. A bit of jealousy spurted through her at that thought, but Louise pushed it down with the ease of long practice. Feeling jealousy towards the princess was perhaps the stupidest use of that emotion she could ever have.

She looked around, frowning a little. "I don't see Tabitha yet. Though, that's not entirely unusual if Tabitha's lost herself in a book. Huh, but I don't see Kirche either. That's a bit odder."

"I think we need to speak with her at some point then." *On that and on her mysterious past. Student pasts being private is all well and good, but her skill the other night speaks of a possible threat I need to address,* Henrietta mused, before saying aloud, "But let us get back to the topic on hand. Are you certain that none of you have any idea of this woman that Ranma described? No memory of seeing her or even hearing of someone similar?"

Once more Ranma translated the question, then added his own description of the woman, not for the first time. "Tall woman. Really long green hair, very tanned. Sailor suit. Some kinda staff or big damn key."

All of them shook their heads, although Makoto frowned tapping her chin thoughtfully. "That, that actually sounds like some urban myth I heard come to think of it. Something about some kind of magical vigilante that goes around fighting possessed objects?" she looked around at the other Earthers, and after a moment, all but Ranma nodded. "You've never heard of it?" she asked.

Ranma shrugged. "With my memory the way it is, I probably couldn't tell you if I had. Besides, from what my memories are telling me, I wasn't exactly connected to the rumor mill, you know?"

"I can believe that, especially since rumors of you hadn't reached the regular martial arts scene," Makoto teased, smacking Ranma on the shoulder and giving him a particularly bright grin. "I would've heard of someone like you if you had been for sure, Sempai."

Henrietta frowned at their interaction, sensing that Makoto was somewhat interested in Ranma. Not that Henrietta could blame herb the Princess are reflected. *That body, that face, and that easy-going smile of his? It is remarkably easy to see why someone would be interested. Particularly myself.*

Still, Even Chad, who had been the closest of the trio to the truck couldn't say that they had seen anyone matching Ranma's description. And from what Makoto shared now of the rumors, it sounded as if this woman was not the same person as whoever was going around apparently destroying magical items or whatever.

"Before the food arrives, does anyone have anything else they want to ask now?" Henrietta questioned, moving the conversation along. Now was not the time for specifics, only generalities and giving everyone a chance to get to know one another.

Mention of the food calmed Kazuma down, as Henrietta had wanted. He had been the most combative of the trio from Earth. But he still had to say something. "I want to make certain that you all will be able to send us home if we want to go? I understand Ranma here doesn't want to go back, at least not yet. Not until all of his memories return. But I've got a sister I got to get back to."

Chad frowned thoughtfully, then slowly nodded. "I have friends I'd like to see again. No family though."

Makoto shrugged her shoulders. "I don't have family, and I'd be more than willing to stay here in return for learning magic. I mean how cool is that!" She then poked Ranma in the shoulder again, smiling at him. "And maybe learning some martial arts from this one."

Again as Ranma translated this, Henrietta had to fight back a frown, uncertain if she liked how outgoing Makoto was around Ranma. The idea of the two of them practicing Ranma's martial arts was not something she wanted to contemplate. She shook her head, and nodded at that, then formally announced that the crown would be looking into a way home for them as best they could. "Until then, you will be looked after by the servants here at the academy until a safe way of sending you home is found."

One of the maids came up and started passing glasses out, Henrietta decided that enough time had been spent merely talking. Now she would let the good food and drink do their part to get rid of the last bits of resentment and annoyance she could see.

"For now, I propose a toast," Henrietta said, taking one of the glasses and holding it up when everyone had gotten one. Well, except for Ranma and Chad as both had refused the wine, holding glasses of water Ranma had asked for earlier. "To new friends and peaceful interactions."

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Oh, no, Montmorency whimpered internally. Thanks to the unique red vineyards mark on the outer side of the bottle she knew that the bottle on the table where the princess sat in conference with the newcomers, Colbert and the headmaster was the bottle which had been on the tray where she had put the love potion into one of the glasses. Terror gripped her, holding her in her seat as if she had been glued there, as she began a mantra in her mind. *Oh please let it be one of the newcomers, oh please let it be one of the newcomers, oh please...*

The moment Montmorency saw the delicate soft hand of the princess holding the glass, she knew her prayer had not been answered. Rather it had been dropkicked. *I'm doomed.*

The potion in question was the most powerful love potion Montmorency could put together, and she was the highest ranked in her potions class, a prodigy in fact. Montmorency had wanted to assure Guiche's fidelity. She had wanted to overcome any problems he might have with commitment, and also, well, the rumors he might also be attracted to men as well as women, which had somehow become one of the most talked-of rumors since that time in the kitchens.

Thus, Montmorency knew this was not just a goof up. This fell into the category of unmitigated disaster. The use of love potions and similar mind-control magics was strictly forbidden to be used on the nobility. Heck, it was even an issue when used on commoners, if only a social rather than legal one.

If it was discovered that Montmorency had given the princess such a thing, death would likely be the result of a swift and speedy trial. Thankfully for her, the table for water element students was at the far end of the cafeteria, near the doors. Even as more servants and students came in, she was able to escape without anyone noticing. *Hmm, now, should I hide and wait until I know the damages, or just run?* Thinking about it, Montmorency decided quickly. *Run. Horse, then a trade caravan to the nearest horizon. Perhaps if I run fast enough, the fallout from this won't fall on my family too much.*

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"For now, my guests I would like to... to..." Henrietta's words stumbled to a halt, blinking twice as everyone who knew Princess Henrietta looked curiously at her. Even Ranma, who had only spent a few days near her, knew something was up.

Henrietta, Heir Apparent to the throne of Tristain, closed her eyes and took a deep breath. *Oh, oh dear... that is...* Even with her eyes closed, Henrietta could still see an image in front of her and feelings erupting within her from nowhere. *Oh dear... love potion, a powerful one too!* She pinched herself with the hand she had been holding in her lap, thinking things through. *Well... this, this isn't how I wanted this to happen, but...* Henrietta opened her eyes, her gaze flicking to Ranma. *But while we might be rushing to the finish line, at least that is all we will be doing, instead of, to keep the metaphor going, being forced to take part in a race I didn't wish to be in.*

But, but it can't be her, that wouldn't make any sense, and she's been under the watch of some of my Musketeers all this time. That mystery can be solved in due time, for now, damage control. Apparently in complete control, when she opened her eyes, she put her glass down and addressed her guests again.

"My apologies. I have some pressing business I just remember I must see to tonight, even if I am away from the palace, alas. Louise, if you could give details of the translation spell that you used to give Ranma his translation effect to the headmaster before tomorrow?"

"Uhm, okay, are you feeling all right, my Princess?" asked Louise as she stood up from her chair to curtsy. But she has also eyed the Princess uncertainly. While she hadn't seen her childhood friend in years, there was something off about the princess right now.

"I'm fine," said the Princess, her voice sounding a little rough. "Sir Ranma, if you could assist me? Please relay my apologies to the others of your country and let them know we will meet again at breakfast. Then accompany me to the royal suite."

With only a reflexive flick of his eyes toward the remains of dinner, Ranma nodded briskly, still on his best behavior. "Yes, your Majesty."

As Ranma was translating once more, Henrietta looked at her most trusted bodyguard with an intent gaze that brooked no questions, and instructed, "Agnes, I will need you to join us." She then took up the wine glass and swept as regally as she could toward the quarters the Academy had prepared for her with her defenders old and new in her wake.

Behind them, Makoto frowned thoughtfully, staring after the Princess. Most of her attention had been on Ranma, not only because he was doing the translating but also because he was so freaking dreamy. He, Kazuma and Makoto had at one point completely derailed the conversation prior to Colbert sitting down to talk about martial arts and it had been eye-opening to say the least. By the time that conversation had shifted, Makoto had at least three reasons to stay in this world, Ranma, martial arts and magic.

But right now, she was kind of worried for Henrietta. "I wonder what that was about?"

Kazuma shrugged unconcern. "Well, she's some kind of semi-head of state or something right? It ain't exactly a big deal that she suddenly remembered something she had to do."

"Maybe, maybe not. I don't know, there was just something abrupt about that. And did you see Ranma and the others faces when she started?" *Or the look she sent my way? That was kind of weird.*

Both boys looked blank and she scowled annoyance. "Men! You two wouldn't know that your own nose was missing until someone pointed it out." With a sigh, Makoto stretched, then looked at the food in front of them shrugging her shoulders. "Well, it's been a long day, I suppose that mystery can wait."

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As she walked, the princess had found her thoughts had cleared to a degree outside the presence of the target of her induced lust, but the fact her general arousal was not fading as quickly was somewhat unnerving. *Still, I can control it. For long enough, I hope to do what I must.*

Upon arrival in the suite reserved for the Tristainian royal family in the Void Tower, Henrietta took a seat quickly rather than pacing around as she was tempted, since her strides were seeming to keep her worked up, her legs rubbing against one another. One sitting down at a seat facing into the suite with a balcony behind her, Henrietta took another slow, cleansing breath, before setting the tainted glass on a table before her and locking eyes with Agnes and Ranma in turn. "I have been dosed with a love potion. A rather strong one, I think,"

Agnes, who had not even had a chance to take her customary obeisant stance, hissed like a snake at Henrietta's calm pronouncement. Her fellow Musketeers, four of whom had entered to secure the suite, also gasped, hands falling to weapons automatically despite there being no threat here they could fight.

On the other hand, Ranma's eyes widened as he crouched slightly on the balls of his feet shock plain on his features. "Wait, those are real things!?"

Henrietta chuckled somewhat woodenly at that. "Yes, they are real and quite illegal. But rather than forcing me into a romantic relationship, given who I have fixated on, the intent was possibly random impairment prior to a larger strike. Or else the perpetrator made a mistake, perhaps even targeting someone else only to be foiled by chance."

Agnes gauged her princess's condition watchfully as she asked, "You are certain of that? Who was the potion keyed to?"

"Makoto Kino, actually," Henrietta sighed. "Who not only has only been here for less than five hours but has no motive."

Ranma was still looking a little jumpy, but he moved over, taking Henrietta's hand and squeezing in wordless support. "Yeesh, I, I'm sorry. No one should have the power to mess with someone else emotions like that, that's like, like mental rape or something."

"Indeed, I have long thought the same," Henrietta answered with a smile gripping his hand with both of hers.

"Ahem and Agnes interrupted, crossing her arms as she tried not to glare at Ranma. "The Kino girl would not have the ability to make a potion like that, nor being able to get anyone local to make one for her. She was also obviously unprepared to capitalize on the potion when it took effect."

Finding that thinking politically helped bank the fires of her libido, much better than squeezing Ranma's hand, Henrietta explained: "If the plan was to distract me and my bodyguards with following up on the how of this enchantment, then there might be some manner of attack soon. Having you here, Sir Ranma, would surprise any such assailants." As Ranma grinned at her, Henrietta giggled back, before becoming serious again, looking over at Agnes. "Especially since this allows me to have you investigate instead of providing for my protection, Agnes."

"Your Highness," Agnes protested, "I cannot leave you alone with this man." A sour expression crossed her face. "I mean, more than you have already been alone with him."

"You may leave Alice and Natalie." Henrietta named two of the present Musketeers, smiling at both women, whose spines straightened under her regard. "But I need to have you follow up on the criminal or criminals behind this. A potion strong enough to cause a pentagram water mage like myself to change from being somewhat annoyed at Makoto's cuteness to wanting to see whether or not she was using pads and if her lips were as soft as..."

As everyone else stared at her, Henrietta stumbled to a halt once more, shivering and shaking her head. "Yes, *ahem*, high-powered love potions have a drawback in that they must be administered to the victim in a **very** short amount of time after being brewed. The more powerful the potion, the briefer its lifespan. In this case, I would estimate the potion was finished no more than two hours ago. That means it was likely done within this school and the potioneer is either still here or nearby. If you find them, they might have the means of neutralizing the potion. If they do, then I will not need to... ask Ranma to help me the only other way I know of to break the spell."

Having an inkling of what the backup plan would entail, Agnes started moving with dispatch. Grabbing Victoire and Aimee, she led them outside, where she gathered two more of her Musketeers. This left two more, who she gave orders to let no one but her and whoever she

brought with her into the room before hurrying off, filling her lieutenant in on the relevant details all the way.

Ranma pulled his hand away for a moment, moving over to the window. Staring out of it, he didn't see anyone and then moved back to sit next to Henrietta again. "What's this help you need me for if Agnes can't find the poisoner?"

"Poisoner?" Henrietta asked.

"Potions help, poisons hurt," Ranma explained his label. "It's awful hard to see how a love potion can help the person being potioned up."

'Heh, true, I suppose. And as for your question...' Taking another steadying breath, Henrietta looked around at her remaining musketeers. "Ladies, what we are about to discuss cannot be mentioned without my **express permission** outside of this group and Agnes."

Hearing their replies, Henrietta turned her attention to Ranma, who, up until this had happened was only a prospective, if rather hoped for, swain. What might happen tonight was going to change that dynamic, one way or another. But whatever their future might be, she would meet it with her head held high. "You asked me once why I was taking on so much onto my shoulders and I never explicitly answered you. You see, my mother, the queen, should be the head of our government. But due to her personal inclinations, she has not been ruling, merely reigning. Can you understand the distinction?"

Ranma nodded instantly squeezing her hand again. "Yeah, it's the same as being a dojo master and a Master. You rule, she just poses. So, wait, did she er, what's the word, choose Mazarin?"

"She did, but only in conjunction, or perhaps being strong-armed by Duchess Valliere. Thanks to his teachings, I have been taking as much of the duties as I could in the last couple of years as her formally designated heir," Henrietta answered with a smile for her friend's support. "Because of this, and my plans going forward which you already know, I dare not be under the influence of a potion like this for very long."

She sighed. "Not only will I no longer be in position to push for my early assumption of the throne, important and unscrupulous people like the Judge Magistrate or the Chief Speaker will notice that I am distracted and afflicted. My internal enemies are too many to count, and most are not allied with our foreign enemies and can thus be more easily attacked in turn. Once it is known that I am affected by this potion, my authority will be **severely** damaged internally, to the point where some nobles will start plotting to divide the power of the royal house among themselves. Civil war could result, a war in which the real losers will be my common folk."

Henrietta saw that Ranma had gone a little pale at the implications and tried to give him a heartening smile. "However, there are two ways that we can be saved from this. One is if

Agnes succeeds in catching the potioneer and getting means to a cure. The other..." Henrietta paused a moment to gather herself, then went on, "The other is for me to perform a ritual as I make love to someone other than the person the enchantment is trying to bind me to. If it comes to that, I would like for that person to be you."

For a moment Ranma just looked at her in shock. Then as he gulped once, looked away for a moment, then began to stammer. "I, um, okay. That, that's one heck of a, ah leap from, um, just getting to know one another better, you know? I, um... this is..." he paused, holding up one hand to indicate he was trying to think his way through what he wanted to say. "Erm... will this... I told you I don't have any memories of girls. But I, I don't have many memories of friends either. If, I mean, I know we both basically said we were interested in getting to know one another, but, rushing like this, is that going to ruin what we already have, Henrietta?"

Hearing Ranma use her name, Henrietta smiled and realized he was asking this on a personal level, uncaring of her rank. "Dear Ranma, I fully understand your concerns. I don't have many friends either, beyond Louise I can count the number of friends I have on the fingers of one hand with fingers left over. But while I would have liked for the circumstances to be more romantic, becoming lovers was something I had already considered, even if only in vague terms." She looked at him closely. "Unless you never saw us going that far?"

"I don't know much, if anything, about love or romance, I just... you could do way better than me," Ranma admitted a little sadly. "I'm not smart like you are, or cultured, or civilized even not in this world, not back in my own I don't think. Not from my memories anyway. I just know the Art, how to fight and survive, so I can protect you. Just not be a good guy for you, you understand? I, I just don't think I'm marriageable material for Henrietta the princess."

Henrietta put a soft hand on his cheek trying to projecting resolution and some of her still rather high ardor in her gaze. "I believe I can make my own decisions as to that, I also think you underrate yourself. You have shown much more perceptiveness than someone who was just an 'uncivilized warrior.' You might surprise yourself if you took the chance to learn more, Ranma. You are also kind and honorable, not to mention handsome, and even your rough edges seem endearing to me, so if you can accept me, I think we can be good together as, as a permanent couple."

It worked. Ranma was utterly entranced by her passionate gaze. Though obviously still nervous, he was also clearly moved as shown by the look in his glowing eyes. "Then, then I will too. I'll, I, I ain't good at words, but I'll try my best make you happy." Then his brow furrowed, "If this happens, that is. Sorry if I got ahead of myself."

Suddenly realizing her persistent sexual excitement had caused her to push things a little farther than was necessary just yet, Henrietta looked away from Ranma. But the moment she did, her mind went to the earlier aborted dinner and Makoto. Suddenly it was all Henrietta could think of, the other girl's tall, lithe form, her curves, her...

Frowning as he felt something off in the princess, Ranma gently tapped the back of her hand, slowly making a circle there. "Hey, you OK?"

Henrietta came back to herself with a thump, but Ranma's gentle, dare she say, tender, touch was not helping matters. "Ah, um, YES, sorry. The potion took advantage of my distraction to disturb me. I am worse off than I thought if I failed to control my expression," she admitted with a wan smile.

"Nah, your face didn't change. I think I felt your Ki go wacky for a bit there. It was kind of weird."

"Ki?" Henrietta blinked in momentary perplexity before she recalled their previous conversations on this score. "Ah, that is what you call your type of magic."

Yeah, but remember what is said, I don't think it's really magic. You all said only a few people, mostly nobles, have magic, but everybody has Ki," Ranma answered shaking his head.

"You mean everyone back in your world," Henrietta guessed.

"Nah, I mean here too." Hesitantly, Ranma looked at the two Musketeers, who were looking back at him with the interest of two people who knew they were in over their heads but who were determined to try their best regardless. Neither of them seemed to have Agnes's dislike of him, but also didn't like knowing that Ranma could deal with them so easily. His eyes glowed for a moment as he looked at them, then he closed his eyes and tried to reach out with his mind. It was tough, since Ranma hadn't trained to have this much ki, but he'd been meaning to try some more subtle stuff "You, your crew, the serving staff, the students, everybody has it."

With a grin, Ranma turned back to Henrietta, his tone more enthusiastic than she had previously seen. "The trees, the animals, anything that lives, or anything that supports life, even the ground, the waters, the air, and the light of the sun have some kind of ki. The only thing different about me..." Ranma clenched his free hand into a fist and a glowing, blue gold nimbus formed around it, "...Is I trained my Ki up, built it up like a river behind a dam, controlled it and put it to work."

Henrietta leaned forward, fascinated, barely noting her bodyguards shifting their weapons as their attention was also riveted to their guest's display, wary concern in their eyes. "Amazing, is it dangerous to summon it up like that?"

"Heh, only if I want it to be." Ranma's lips twitched into a lopsided smile at the princess. "This isn't anything, just a lightshow, me bringing my ki out to show you what it can look like. But I've been using it to boost my strength, speed, or whatever for years. I can feel stuff out with it, like if someone is about to hit me. You saw the bit with the air-burst thing I did, so stuff like that attacks like that are doable too. Not as easy though, since they take a lot of power,

which I didn't have until this last training exercise or whatever. Before that, I could even heal myself pretty fast."

His face flushed a bit as he put his glowing hand on the table, wiggling his digits a bit. "Um, you can feel my ki if you want. It, it won't hurt, just maybe tingle a bit."

"Oh!" Realizing Ranma had just essentially offered her a chance to touch his very life force, Henrietta blushed, realizing that was perhaps as much a sign of his desire to make their growing connection work as anything he could have said. "I, I think I would like that very much, thank you." After another exchange of blushes, Henrietta reached for the ki aura around Ranma's hand. At first, her fingers only grazed the edge, feeling the promised tingle, and her eyes widened. "AH, that, that felt rather nice."

That tingle drew her in, and soon Henrietta found her hand gently clasped in Ranma's. She felt the distinct warmth of both calloused-yet-still-smooth flesh as well as something else, some kind of emotions almost held within the radiance around their conjoined hands. Feeling the heat of leashed power and... eager friendliness on her skin was intense. The boyish grin on Ranma's face matched the feelings quite well, and Henrietta realized that perhaps her thoughts on this being Ranma's life force was just a bit off. "I, I, is this your spirit, Ranma? Your soul?" *Which you just let me touch!? Oh my...*

"Eh." Ranma waved his free hand this way and that. "I've got a few dozen memories, all of them with different opinions on that, but... well, I'm pretty sure yanking out a bit of my soul to make a shiny glove shouldn't be possible, and would be really stupid if I did it." Henrietta giggled and his lopsided smile appeared again. "Heh, so I don't think it's my actual soul. I think that ki is more a, a reflection or maybe a shadow of the soul, or, ooh the shadow of a cloud!"

Henrietta laughed again, watching as Ranma worked it out on his own, going on excitedly. "It is the same shape as the cloud, it's visible, you can even feel it a bit when it passes over you, or see it go a bit darker when the cloud becomes more solid or whatever, but it ain't the cloud." Ranma barked a short laugh. "Only, with ki, you get color changes too, showing the impact of, of what emotions makes up the soul I'd guess."

"Well, whatever it is, it is truly extraordinary. A singular experience indeed, and certainly not like any magic I have ever felt," Henrietta answered enthusiastically.

"I figured as much, but I haven't exactly been in an observational frame of mind or whatever when I've seen magic used so far. The Closest was, when you were doing that anti-rain trick of yours last night." Ranma shrugged a little, his fingers moving around Henrietta's hand, looking up at Henrietta's face before looking away quickly. "And I had, um, other things on my mind at the time."

Blushing and feeling her arousal spike dramatically at that admission and what his words implied, Henrietta grabbed onto the topic of magic desperately. "I, in that case, please allow

me." Henrietta lifted their other set of joined hands and started concentrating. "As, as I said last night, it is somewhat difficult without a focus, but quite good practice according to my chief librarian. He says that only using a focus is quite lazy, although given my duties... well, never mind. Here."

A small globe of water appeared over their hands as she raised them from the table and Ranma closed his eyes and cocked his head a little, his newly created ki senses tingling as if he were trying to listen to a faint tune. After a few seconds, he felt aware enough to assay a guess. "So, you reach out with your, uh, whatever and pull in magic to do stuff? That's... huh, not certain what that is other than kind of cool."

"Exactly right," Henrietta smiled brightly before teasing him gently. "And you still think you're not educated?" When Ranma snorted at her, she went on. "We call the power we use to create magic our Will and we use it to gather in the elements to perform spells. Everyone starts with one element, the element they are more closely aligned with. At higher levels, mages add another layer of our main element, or sometimes even another element to cause additional effects or strengthen the spell."

She went on for a time, telling Ranma about the number of ways elements could be stacked, ending with, "And I suppose that Louise was trying to use a line-type wind spell, controlling the air you could push into your vocal cords. It's actually a far more difficult spell than most think. I had thought at first the difficulty was why she failed, but I am no longer certain. She and I will be talking about that tomorrow. I had hoped to bring it up tonight, but that is not going to happen."

Nodding, Ranma tried not to think about Louise or the reason why talking to her wasn't going to happen tonight. Instead, he frowned. "You know, from what little I remember, I don't think we see elements the same way. You might want to talk to the others when you can. I think there was two more elements in our philosophy than in yours, though I can't remember what they might be. But you mentioned five elements, and only named four."

"Ah, that would be why I need to talk to Louise. The fifth element you see, is Void. And if Louise is a Void mage, that is, a mage who uses Void magic as their primary element, then that has tremendous consequences," Henrietta said, her face shifting so that it was clear she didn't know whether that was a good thing or not.

Ranma looked at her, but now it was Henrietta's turn to wave her free hand. Neither of them had made any move to release their joined hands, the Musketeers noted. Natalie was also rather in awe of the sight of the glowing hand in the globe of clear water. It was a fascinating sight. "Never mind. If we tried to talk about that I would need to give you so much political and religious background we would be at it all night."

"Huh. Okay, we'll leave that then, besides, I think I've figured out something else too." Ranma gently moved their conjoined hands, his fingers twitching and moving around Henrietta's. "What you call Willpower, I call Ki. The start of it anyway."

That startled Henrietta, and her lips twisted into a moue as she thought it over, her voice now coming out in a near whisper. "But wouldn't that mean anyone could do magic? Yet you have said a few times ki was very rare in your world."

"Learning how to use ki is tricky, like really hard. A lifetime's worth of practice for most, mostly building up the life energy within you to the point where you've got enough to actually manipulate. But it isn't impossible." Ranma wasn't sure why, but he went along with Henrietta's lead and spoke softly as he worked it out. "If you know it's doable, which most people don't, it becomes a lot easier. That's the way my old man trained me. He told me to do it, and I didn't know it should be impossible, so I figured out how to do things that most people thought crazy. Although that's only half the battle. The other half is natural aptitude. If you don't have that, you will never reach the level of a natural."

Ranma clicked the fingers of his free hand. "Actually, I guess you could compare it to music. Most people can sing a bit, but it takes both natural skill and training to get really good at it. Here, well I'd wager that there's more to it going on, not being strong enough to reach out to the elements say, or just that most people can, um, barely hold a tune. But yeah, I'd wager that most people could learn how to use ki. And with a system in place, jumping from that to magic could be possible, at least for some people."

"That... would be interesting," the semi-effective ruler of Tristain admitted, while thinking of how she could use this to undermine the privilege of certain troublesome nobles. "However, we would have to be careful about spreading that information. There are those in the aristocracy who might react badly if they thought their hereditary privileges were at risk," she said carefully and quietly.

Frowning at that, Ranma put it together with the way he'd seen some nobles act, the issues she had mentioned during their time together, and finally, the fact that Henrietta had so many problems among the nobility. Leaning over the table, he brought his lips close to her ear, and whispered. "And let me guess, you plan to do something about those hereditary privileges?"

Despite being practically alone save for her Musketeers, Henrietta wasn't willing to speak her thoughts on that score and her plans to curtail the nobility. Not when even a whisper of it would almost certainly start a civil war if it got out. Thus Henrietta only nodded her head the barest amount.

Moving back a bit to focus on her eyes again, Ranma saw Henrietta's eyes locking on his own filled with determination purpose. Seeing that look in his friend's eyes, Ranma could do

nothing more than nod his head in reply, his voice a barest whisper. "I'll help you, whatever comes."

Henrietta softly released the breath she had been holding and gave him a thin, but thankful, smile. Then she deliberately moved on from the solemn turn the conversation had taken. "Do you think you could teach your Ki techniques to a magic user, Ranma?"

If there were truly a link with Willpower and ki, any noble could benefit from this, possibly more quickly than a commoner, alas. Regardless, it would be an excellent power-up for herself and those mages who she could trust.

That question was one Ranma didn't even need to think about. "Yes. Not to my level for sure, or anywhere close really. Not even if I knew what kind of training I went through recently to get to the level of ki I have now. But yeah, anyone who is already in good shape and has access to your Willpower should be able to use some of it in the same way I used to use my ki: that is, to heighten my physical abilities. You wanna learn?" Ranma asked in delighted anticipation.

"I certainly would not mind learning myself. But I was actually thinking about Louise, Makoto and Agnes. Those three to start with. Louise I can trust implicitly to keep my secrets and back me up. Agnes and my Musketeers I trust with my life and secrets both." Henrietta did not notice how her words once more caused both Musketeers to straighten and hide smiles of pleasure, though Ranma saw them and had to hide a smile of his own. This was made easier a moment later as Henrietta went on, her tone and attention shifting. "As for Makoto, she seems to be a very earnest sort, who has no previous connection to this world. She is also quite pretty and rather..."

Ranma watched the princess trail off, her face flushing badly, and then slowly tried to push out his Ki into their joined hands, trying to convey some measure of his concern. It seemed to work, as Henrietta's flush faded and her eyes started to track again, and Ranma's lips quirked sympathetically. "Potion again, Henrietta?"

Henrietta grimaced slightly in frustration, although she was strangely thrilled by Ranma once more using her name. For some reason when he did it made her want to smile. "Alas, yes. Was that your Ki that brought me back to myself?"

Shrugging self-consciously, Ranma looked down at their joined hands, tapping it lightly into the puddle on the table left behind when Henrietta's technique dropped in her distraction. "Um, yeah. I, told ya that I wasn't used to having this much ki, so I am learning as I go, but pushing the ki out of myself is a good base to start with. I just, um, pushed it into your hand, and added a bit of my concern to it, so to speak, er, like adding a color to the cloud from my earlier comparison. After you didn't seem to notice your wet hand, I figured it would be a nicer way to do it."

"Oh dear. I do apologize." With her free hand, the princess quickly took up her scepter and evaporated the spill with a single wave, the top of the scepter glowing only slightly.

Well, um, if the potion is bothering you, we could start your first lesson in Ki right now?" Ranma began hesitantly. "Though I'll warn ya, this part is the aspect I had the least grasp of when I started out."

"I would not mind at all. Though I don't know how much time we will have left until Agnes returns." Henrietta's lips twisted into a smirk as she looked over at their audience of two, sharing a smile with the other two Musketeers. "She is most thorough when given an order like this one."

"That's not an issue, but this might be able to with resisting the potion. Have you ever done meditation?" Ranma asked as he gently disengaged their hands, then stood up and circled behind Henrietta's chair, motioning for her to stay seated.

Looking up at him, Henrietta confessed, "I have heard that some monks and nuns practice it to try to attain a greater understanding of Brimir and of magic but I have never attempted it myself. It always seemed to me to be something that would take far too much time to get to the point where I would get anything out of it."

"Monks do something like that on Earth, never ran into a nun, not that I know of anyway, damn memories," Ranma grumbled, shaking his head as he laid his hands on Henrietta's shoulders for the second time that day, feeling the curve of her neck under his thumb, causing him to flush a bit. "Like I said, this is something I had a lot of trouble with, I'm, my old man basically taught me through doing not thinking, so meditation was really hard for me to get. Still, I know the basics. What we want to do is get your life force flowing in a nice, calm pattern so you can start feeling it out. I'm gonna help you cheat a little by trying to use my ki again in, er conjunction I think is the proper word, with yours."

Henrietta nodded understanding, trying hard not to let Ranma's touch get to her. Her potion induced arousal was making his touch on her shoulders and neck impact her control far more than it had earlier that day. Then, it had been the touch of a good friend who she had growing romantic feelings for. Now it was like a livewire to her nerves.

Feeling a bit of Henrietta's tension, Ranma kept his voice soothing as possible. "What I'll do is push a little of my Ki into you like I did a moment ago. Only this time I'll be trying to help your Ki settle down and start moving it in a more controlled way. As I do this, I'll be massaging some points of your head to sort of help your ki focus. Later on, once this potion crud has been flushed out of your system or whatever the term is, we'll want to make this a more whole package thing. Body, mind and spirit are supposed to come together when you are mediating on your ki. That takes a lot of practice though. I, looking back on it I don't think I had the spirit or mind part really up to snuff. I'll have to work on that myself sometime soon."

Giving the princess a moment to process that, Ranma wrapped up his explanation. "I gotta warn you, some people take weeks to start making any headway, even with help and this is the first time I'll be doing the helping. So if all that happens this time is you get to relax a bit, that's great. That's just what we want. Anything more can wait." Ranma patted her shoulders encouragingly with both hands, then began to move his hands up her neck and into her hair, flushing a bit at the feeling of her hair under his hands. "Ready to try this out?"

"I believe I am." Henrietta tilted her head back to send him a small, trusting smile, while her Musketeers frowned but did not object, knowing that, if the potioneer didn't have an antidote, this bit of touching would be the least that occurred that night. "I leave myself in your hands, Ranma."

"Er, right. Keep leaning back, but make sure you're comfy, and close your eyes." Ranma flushed a bit as Henrietta complied, but Ranma shook his head, and placed his fingertips at certain points on her forehead and temples. Once Ranma's fingers were in place he began moving each finger in small circles, slowly letting a trickle of Ki flow through them, gritting his teeth at the amount of control this took.

Still, he kept his voice calm and soothing as he went on. "Take a deep, slow breath not so much your lungs are straining. Hold it for a long beat, then exhale slowly. Start to imagine a... a deep pool. That should work for you, given your element. Float there, and slowly start to, to sink or otherwise get rid of any thoughts bothering you. That part will be trickier, but the sense of calm will help."

For a moment, Henrietta seemed to struggle, but to Ranma's surprise, she seemed to be grasping the mediation aspect of this far faster than he ever had. *Maybe her mind's already that organized? Or maybe it's because she's so much calmer than I am.* Regardless, Ranma was pleased to almost feel Henrietta slip into what he had heard call deep meditation.

For her part, Princess Henrietta was floating, adrift in the image and sensations of a deep, still pool that she had envisaged to represent calmness, entirely unaware of the passage of time. Aided greatly by the years of mental discipline she had practiced to achieve pentagram-class Henrietta had believed her progress to be somewhat advanced. Now following Ranma's suggestions, she had taken the things that had been troubling her the most and either resolved them in her thoughts or allowed them to fall under the surface of the pool as he had directed.

Gliding freely for now above weighty issues such as the schemes of the nobility, the 'generous' offer from Germania Mazarin had begun to press on her, the situation in Albion, her recent plans and the implications of the cabal whose member she and Ranma had overheard, she mused over one subject she wanted to think of: her new bodyguard, love-interest, and now parttime teacher.

As a ruler and as a woman, Henrietta blessed the instinct that caused her to befriend Ranma that day on the road. Gaining the commitment of someone who was not only powerful

and experienced, but also expert in disciplines and supernatural energies the like which had never read or heard of was a masterpiece. The closest thing she had ever heard to anything that Ranma could do was stories from the dreaded elves. But even they still needed incantations like human mages and not even the most fearful story of the elves claimed they could cast spells as powerful as a second sun in the sky, which Ranma had called an experiment for goodness sake. The fact even Ranma had no idea how strong he could become was somewhat worrisome but not when paired with the rest of the mental package that was Ranma.

The physical package on the other hand, oh my. Luminescent eyes an engaging smile that made her heart pound. Not to mention a backside that Romalian sculptors would weep to see, much less fondle and caress like she would when she. Pushing the salacious thoughts into the depths of her mind became easier with the increasing ease of practice, Henrietta resumed her thoughts, shifting back to the mental aspect of the 'Ranma package.'

Ranma was, despite his rough edges and combative personality, kind to any who treated him in the same manner. That this seemed to have been only a few people in his life was not pleasant to contemplate. But Ranma was determined and resolute, firm in his friendship, something that was quickly becoming one of the pillars in her life. Already Henrietta's years of loneliness were easing away thanks to him.

Less pleasant were the considerations as a monarch-to-be, which were linked to her thoughts of her new friend and future lover. With the clarity this mental exercise was giving her, Henrietta knew that potion or no, that jump was just a matter of time.

Yet now, her mind went back to an old issue in her life: Her mother Marianne's disinclination to rule in her own right. Previously, she had turned the throne entirely over to the Albionian prince she had married immediately upon her succession. With him dead, she had done the same once more with Mazarin, and only Karin's stepping in – **very** firmly - had meant someone with Mazarin's disinclination to personal power had gotten that job.

It continually astounded Henrietta that her mother had not asked for Karin's help. But Karin's heavy-handed manner in pushing for Mazarin, coupled with the Queen's own desire to have nothing to do with ruling, had caused the queen to never want the Duchess in her presence any more than she could avoid. Her own misplaced pride had cause Marianne to ignore her former friend, someone famous for rigid incorruptibility, devastating prowess in war, and skill in administration.

The queen's timidity had left the kingdom on a precarious footing. Having little respect for the queen, ambitious nobles schemed and grasped for whatever power and wealth they could with almost no restraint since her father, had died. The moment Henrietta had begun taking up the duties her mother and regent had let languish, she had found her authority sharply constrained by the maneuverings of entrenched officials, no matter what her position or any decree her mother had issued. That was why she had decided to push for her early

coronation after overhearing this latest cabal. Regardless, any person she could genuinely trust was worth his or her weight in gold at a bare minimum.

Among those, Ranma had already shown his ability and willingness to protect her, from both Louise's near-blind rampage and two groups (or perhaps a single group spread out) of assassins, as well as a certain skill in sneaking about. That last was luck, but it was luck made possible by Ranma's unique abilities, and with the knowledge gained, Henrietta had set in motion a plan which would allow her to take a path that could lead her out of the morass her mother's inaction had created.

And yet, Henrietta knew she needed to think of his needs too. Henrietta would use Ranma. She **had** to, as a leader and a protector of her people. But she would not allow Ranma to simply be treated as a living engine of destruction. He would understand, that was clear, and he would go along with it for the sake of honor and friendship, that was even clearer from his near-desperate need for friends, something which Henrietta knew was based on having one, perhaps two in his shattered memories. But Ranma deserved more, especially if he decided to stay once his memories returned.

Earlier in this session of meditation, Henrietta had found closure in regards to her love for Prince Wales with surprising ease. For years Henrietta had been reconciled, to the fact that marrying Wales would wreck their lives and their kingdoms. Now, while treasuring her memories of her time with Wales, she would explore her future with Ranma. Even if that love was not to be, she would see that he found happiness, home, and family as well, one way or the other. Recognition, titles, companionship, respect. All these and more Henrietta would provide. Her body was already on offer, but she intended for her heart to be as well, in the long run.

With that determination established, Henrietta felt herself called to full wakefulness as...

Agnes returns with Montmorency in tow and anger in her heart ([more from the original](#))

Makoto makes friends with Tabitha and discovers her magic courtesy of Siesta (lots of comedy, some violence, Kirche being Kirche)

The Judge Magistrate's estate is being raided (combat, surprises, world-building)

Ami Mizuno and her new friends deal with a mystery while a certain cat/woman does the same (more Earth-style adventures)

End Episode 11

This poll will last until the Small Story poll ends. And until further notice, the Homage thread polls will no longer be weighted.