

YAY. This has now been Grammarly checked and Hiryo checked. I also took into account some of your comments and made changes to a few segments.

Although I still don't own the originals.

Chapter 5: A Star Came Falling

Ranma and Kara jogged into Tonopah along the main road, with Kara already looking around for a place to eat.

"Heh, people might think you were the one with the Saotome Stomach with how eager you are to find a place to eat," Ranma teased, as they finally reached the city proper and turned off from the main thoroughfare. Here, that highway went right through the city, becoming the main street for a while before becoming a highway again.

"It's not so much that I'm hungry as that I want something that's actually come from a kitchen," Kara confessed, shrugging her shoulders. "Roughing it was fun, and I'll admit that you're a great cook when it comes to meat over the fire, and even that strange garden salad you made with berries and other stuff was good. But I got used to fresh bread, pancakes and so forth while on the Kent farm, things we can't get out in the forest... or at least you didn't cook."

The look she gave Ranma warned of pain if he was holding out on her, but Ranma simply shook his head. "Nope, sorry. I only recently started to cook anything but Japanese food, and I haven't really branched out into stuff like that."

As Kara nodded, the pair came upon a group of kids and their parents moving down the street. The two young adults weaved through them until one kid, laughing, dodged into Ranma's way to get away from a slap from another boy, his water bottle top open and the water splashing up towards Ranma.

Ranma, however, had seen it coming this time. With a faint twitch of his thighs, he leaped up and over the kid, landing on his other side. Twirling, Ranma gave the kid the stink eye even as he and Kara passed through the group, the Kryptonian eyeing where the water had splashed with narrowed eyes. "Watch where you're going, punk!"

"You watch where you're going!" the kid shouted back, unrepentant and giving Ranma the stink eye right back.

"I wasn't the one flailing and throwing water all over the place," Ranma retorted.

Rolling her eyes, Kara set aside her confusion on where the water had finally landed, looping one arm around Ranma's and pulling him along. It almost looked as if it had tried to head towards Ranma's landing point, but that was impossible, right? "Come on, Ranma, let it go. Honestly, I have to wonder which one of you is the actual child here."

The parents had watched this with looks of both amusement and interest, having seen Ranma's acrobatics and, unlike the kids, knowing how impressive that was. "I wouldn't worry about that, dearie. A sense of humor is one of the most important things you should be looking for in a boyfriend. Just so long as there's more to him than that sense of humor, you know?"

Staring at the woman for a second, Kara nodded slowly, but as they moved on, she shifted away from Ranma, wondering if the pair did indeed look like they were in a relationship, which was... Kind of odd to think about. *We haven't known each other for very long after all, and beyond that, our parents haven't met to make sure there were no issues between our families, nor have either of us submitted a blood sample, so we know we're genetically compatible.* And of course, Kara didn't have any kind of parental unit to give her permission to seek a courtship, or vice versa. Without all of those things, there was no way that an upstanding young lady would be seeking a relationship.

But that's on Krypton, Kara thought, shaking her head as they passed by a store selling Hallmark cards and other things of that nature, many of which had hearts or pictures of couples on them. *Humans very obviously do things different. Very different.*

That was another strange thing that Kara had to get used to here on Earth. Romance was so much...**more** here. It was important on Krypton, yes. No one wanted to be in a loveless relationship or anything of that nature. Back on Krypton, courtship, romance and such like had not been used to sell stuff as it was here on Earth, and it wasn't as talked about or culturally prevalent. There was an entire genre of shows and movies here on Earth based on romance and romantic comedy, whereas back on Krypton, that would very much not be the case. Romance would be in the background in any show that had it at all, most of which would be mainly about science, history, sports or warfare. Comedy, too, but that was mostly for kids' shows, and really wasn't a genre in and of itself otherwise.

Outside of standup comedy, anyway. Oddly enough, that was pretty similar to standup comedy here on Earth.

So I suppose, I suppose that Ranma and I could look like a couple on Earth, couldn't we? Kara wasn't certain what to think of that. *I mean, this whole trip's been amazing and fun, but we really haven't known each other for very long, wouldn't that be rushing into things?*

Kara was broken out of her thoughts by Ranma grabbing her hand lightly, pulling her to a stop. "You just passed a café that had a very large sign for pancakes, girl, which you told me ya were missing a few minutes ago. Are you okay? You didn't even look at it."

Blinking, looked over at the sign, then down at his hand, shrugging as she gave it a squeeze before pulling away, moving towards the door. "Sorry, I was lost in thought. I just had a difference in Kryptonian culture and here on Earth sort of pop up in my face."

Ranma snorted as he moved to open the door for her, something that made Kara smile. "Eh, I'd say Kryptonian culture to here in the States, whatever it was. Don't make the

mistake of thinking the rest of the world is like here in America. Heck, don't make the mistake of thinking America's all one culture. Even I know that's wrong, and I'm not exactly a native."

The two of them fell silent for a second as they got in line and ordered their food. Heading over to a table to wait, they grabbed free cups of iced tea as they went.

As they sat down, Kara nodded. "I understand that, and trust me, the Kents and my cousin have all been very upfront about the fact that America isn't exactly homogeneous, even if I am still having trouble wrapping my head around that and the whole idea of a single planet having so many different nations."

Ranma wondered what the word "homogeneous" meant, but he figured it had something to do with cultures based on context, so he simply nodded. "So what sudden revelation caused that bit of wool gathering?"

Floundering for a moment, Kara realized she really didn't want to bring up the possibility that people might be seeing the two of them as a couple for some reason. It made Kara feel embarrassed and off-balance, and she hastily scrambled for something else. "Just, well, some of the shows, and those kids, a few of them were watching shows on their phones from that online V-tube place." She waved it off as if it were of no consequence, shifting the conversation. "I guess you could say I'm still mentally wondering about how much of the local culture I want to really start emulating. Self-aggrandizement certainly isn't about to be a part of it, though, I know that much."

This was a conversation they'd had several times before, so Ranma simply nodded, though he wondered why Kara had looked a little panicky for a second there. "Well, you know I'm the last one to ask about that kind of thing. I'm not exactly about going along to get along, and my normal is very much different from everyone else's."

That caused Kara to laugh, and Ranma grinned at her as he took a sip. Then his grin turned into a grimace, and he pushed away the iced tea. "Ugh, speaking about culture, that is definitely **not** what I or any upstanding Japanese person would call tea. It's too dang sweet!"

Kara laughed again at that, then took his tea, adding it to her own. She was all for sugary sweetness, thank you very much. Deciding to shift the conversation even further along, she was about to ask it, only to pause as their number came up. Ranma got up, got their food, and brought it back, setting it to one side of the table before pulling out a map, humming thoughtfully as he began to eat while looking it over. Her own thoughts derailed, Kara asked between bites of her own pancakes and sausages, "So, how much longer?"

"Hmm... I think, depending on the weather, we should be able to get to the border with California in a day. After that, another three days to get to Star City, maybe? Depends on the terrain. This map's only for Nevada, so we'll need to get a topographic map when we get into California."

Nodding at that, Kara looks down at the map, a sense of anticipation filling her. "I'm really looking forward to that."

She voiced that allowed, and Ranma nodded. "Hah! You think you're looking forward to it? But yeah, four, five days at the most if the weather turns against us or we want to spend some time in a few national parks along the way or something. I don't think that portion of California has anything in the way of amusement parks or anything else I'd find interesting."

While she would probably find things like a science museum or a computer chip laboratory interesting, Kara simply nodded at that. The two of them turned their attention to the food for a few moments before the question that Kara had been going to ask before the food was finished came back to her. She hesitated, glancing across it, Ranma almost shyly, before forcing the question out. "By the way, what are you going to do after we find Cassie?"

That the pair would eventually find Cassie once they reached Star City was not a question. Even if the Kents didn't have an exact address for Wonder Woman and her young charge, Ranma and Kara had significant advantages when it came to searching for someone, even in a place like a city. Moreover, Kara knew she could pick out Cassie in a roomful of blonde girls, let alone a normal crowd.

The question was what would happen then? I mean, I know about your whole curse thing and wanting to use it to get back to the Isle of Women. But do you want to go back there if Cassie's staying here in Man's World? Are you assuming that Miss Diana will let you stay with the two of them?"

Kara tried hard not to let any jealousy through her voice when she said that. If Diana really had been as friendly to young Ranma as Ranma and Cassie's stories alike had painted, that was a distinct possibility. While Kara loved being with the Kents, there was no doubt in her mind that she would've preferred joining her two friends.

The idea that two young girls shouldn't live under the same roof as a young boy they weren't related to didn't really occur to her. Nor did Kara look closely at the idea that she was equally jealous of both her friends, not just Ranma.

Blinking, Ranma scratched at his pigtail thoughtfully as he finished chewing. "You know, I haven't really thought of it. I mean, sure, if Cassie is staying here in Man's World, that kind of removes a large chunk of why I wanted to get back to the Isle of Women. I mean, I'd like to see the Queen again, and one or two of her servants were nice too, but with Cassie and Diana both here, yeah..."

He snorted then, shaking his head, and gesturing over to a carafe of water he'd kept an eye on ever since they sat down. "If I'd known that was a possibility, I don't know if I'd've gone through the whole curse thing. It's been useful a lot since, but I could have done without everyone's reactions to it."

Kara nodded in agreement, but stayed silent, indicating she was waiting for Ranma to continue. Eventually, he simply shrugged. "I don't know yet. I know I'm not interested in becoming heroes like Diana, or your cousin."

While Kara had come clean about her connection to Superman, she hadn't actually mentioned his alter ego's name, so simply referred to Superman like that. He honestly couldn't take the guy's hero name seriously, it was just too bland. "I mean, I understand that when there are superpowered criminals, you need superpowered heroes to fight'em. But going around solving crimes and finding so-called villains to fight has never been my thing. If I see trouble, sure. But going looking for it, or making that my whole mission in life? No."

"Even if you could have a secret identity? Go back to just being a wandering martial artist the rest of the time?" Kara half-teased, half questioned.

Ranma barked a laugh, shaking his head. "No. I don't really see the point of having a secret identity or anything, unless you're travelin' incognito and don't want trouble. Yet if I wanted to be a hero, it would be a twenty-four-seven job; what would be the point of having a secret identity all the time? That would be kind of weird."

He tugged at his pigtail. "I suppose I want to keep in contact with Cassie and now you, but beyond that, I don't know. Maybe see more of America, maybe travel even up into Canada and down into South America, although I understand that traveling through a lot of the South American countries, well, I might see things that would make me want to step into the hero role, you know?"

Finishing her pancake off, Kara nodded, running through what she knew about South America. This was a lot of generalities about both good and bad things. Mexico was apparently the place to go for college kids during their Spring Break, but also a pipeline for drugs into America. Why those two went together, Kara had no idea, and put it down to the fact that she didn't really understand what college kids meant in reality. *I know where they are supposed to be academically and in terms of age, but that's a different thing entirely from maturity.*

"I guess," Kara shrugged. "And I suppose traveling the way you do, footloose and fancy free as that one song we heard put it, sounds like a lot of fun."

Ranma nodded, then smirked at her. "What about you? Have you decided what your future's going to be like? I can't picture you going back to the Kents and telling them that you're fine with going to high school or anything any longer."

"Definitely not. I definitely want to test out of high school, and then maybe take some courses in robotics and such. More to get used to what you humans call cutting-edge technology than that I'll actually learn something. Beyond that--"

Kara was interrupted by an explosion in the distance. This was followed by what was very obviously the sound of gunshots, a lot of them. People all around the café ducked, staring at the doors in consternation and fear, but Kara and Ranma could tell the noise wasn't coming from the street outside; it was coming from a few blocks away.

With a sigh, Ranma stood up, took their stuff and moved over to the countertop, setting the plates down on a pile already there from the rest of the café goers. Kara moved with him, smirking just a little bit as she gave him an elbow nudge. "Whatever happened to not being a hero, huh?"

"I ain't looking for trouble, trouble's finding us. Even if we're just in the vicinity, it counts. Besides, if it's just two gangs exchanging fire or something like that, I'll let the idiots keep on killing one another," Ranma drawled, shaking his head. "So long as they're not involving innocents, anyway."

"That's a very thin line, and I still say this counts as a heroic act. Also, you're doing that hick accent again. Stop it," Kara snorted, as the two of them, ignoring the wide-eyed stares from several other café goers, exited the café. Orienting on the sound of gunfire in the distance, they jumped up onto the rooftop, a sight that most of the people around them didn't have the attention to notice at the moment, as they were all crouching behind cover staring towards where the noise had come from.

The two of them hopped from one rooftop to another, then across several more before they came within sight of whatever was going on. It looked like a convoy of some kind had been moving through town on the main road, which Kara and Ranma had followed into Tonopah, only to be ambushed by two individuals. What the convoy was containing, neither of them had any idea, although it didn't look military, rather high-tech maybe, if the big sign on some of the trucks of a technology company was any indication anyway.

The convoy hadn't been without its defenders, as it seemed as if each of the three trucks had at least four guards, all of them armed with rifles or machine guns. By the time Kara and Ranma arrived, several had been disarmed or taken out of the fight, although there were still at least half of the guards firing from the front or back of the trucks. Regardless of where they were, they were all trying to fire at just two individuals, the pair who had attacked the convoy.

Worse to Ranma's eyes was how the convoy had been pulled to a stop in the first place. Several cars had seemingly been lifted or taken control of in some fashion, Ranma didn't know. However it was done, the cars were forced to crash together, causing a series of pileups in the convoy's path. One of the attackers was hiding behind some of those crashed cars, ducking down and hurling boomerang-looking things at the defenders of the convoy.

Those cars hadn't been empty when they had been forced to smash together. From where Ranma stood, he could see people inside them were either hurt and screaming, or trying to hide. Not just ones and twos, but at least ten, including a family of six with three kids in the background.

"Do you see any seriously wounded among the people in those cars?" he asked stonily, knowing that Kara could actually look through iron and so forth. "I can see one guy bleeding from his face, a lot of people groaning, and at least one guy, I think, has had his legs crushed."

"I'm not a doctor, I don't know as much about Earth's medical technology as I would like, but I think there are at least four injured there that need to get to a hospital right away," Kara reported after a moment concentrating, her eyes glowing just a little bit.

A second later, they widened, her concentration broken as one of the attackers shouted, "Allack Avar U!"

As the pair whirled to look at the convoy again, one of the trucks began to lift into the air. Twisting onto its side like a wheel, the truck dumped the driver and its three other defenders to the ground, falling out like skittles from a bag. "What in the heck..." Kara muttered, her eyes narrowed.

The attacker in question was far older than his companion looked. He was, in fact, extremely old; Ranma would go so far as to call him geriatric. He had wispy white hair, which seemed to flutter in a wind of its own, an equally wispy white goatee, and a heavily tanned face and hands, both pockmarked with age lines and spots.

Thus, this man looked even older than even Master O had appeared when Ranma had been training with him, yet for some bizarre reason, he wore a skintight silver suit of some kind that showed precisely how little muscle or even mass he had left. It had a V-neck going down to the top of his pecs, which on a woman would have been the next best thing to scandalous. On this old man, it just showed off his lack of upper body, well, anything. It was flat, sure, but it was the flat of emaciation rather than muscle. That V-neck shifted into a white collar that stood in contrast to the rest of his silver suit.

The old man was also hovering several inches off the ground and gesturing wildly. A shield of energy was in front of him, taking several bullets from two of the last defenders, who fell to well-placed boomerangs of all things seconds later, before the man could deal with them.

As Ranma watched, he gestured, and the shaking truck in the air was slowly set back onto its wheels. The two men who had fallen out from the back found themselves pressed up against the wall nearby, along with several of their fellows, while the two who had fallen out from the front of the truck were struck with small boomerangs. One exploded almost removing a man's arm, while the other was hit in the temple by a boomerang with a cutting edge, going down with a splash of blood and a howl of pain, drowned out by his fellow's screams.

The two boomerangs had come from the other combatant, the one who had been using the cars, whose pileup had caused the convoy to stop as cover. He was maybe a little younger than middle-aged, or just past college age? Ranma wasn't certain. This guy was clean-shaven, with wide shoulders, red hair, and narrow eyes. He was also dressed in something like a soldier's combat uniform, but in black and red rather than any type of camouflage. Complete with body armor and armored areas on his thighs, although he didn't have a helmet for some reason. Everywhere on his person were boomerangs of various sizes and colors. Ranma counted at least a dozen in various places and thought that some of the built-up, armored areas in his suit might be hollow, carrying still more.

Ranma acknowledged the guy's skill with a highly unusual weapon, but his eyes narrowed, seeing him kill a third man with another boomerang. At first, it seemed to almost miss, just barely touching the third guard, but that simple touch caused the guard to light as if lightning had been sent through him from a lightning bolt. The man screamed, convulsed and fell, smoking to the road beside the lamppost he had been using as cover.

Beside him, Kara shook her head at that, but her eyes flicked back to the old man, frowning. She concentrated on one of his hands for a brief second, and then, as she noticed something about his wrist blinked as she watched him fire a beam of power at two of the last guards, freezing them in place. "What the heck again!"

"He's some kind of magic user, I guess," Ranma said, frowning as he reached into his ki pocket and pulled out two half masks. He couldn't remember off the top of his head where they'd come from, probably some strange martial arts challenge, but they would do to hide their identities a little bit, and since he didn't want to be bothered by cops or anything else, that was a good thing right now.

He explained this to Kara, who nodded, took one of them, then decided to go a little further and asked for a bandanna. She knew Ranma had one; he'd used it occasionally to show her the Cloth Armor Technique, and taking it, she was able to, after a few seconds of work, pile her hair underneath it, which, coupled with her upper face being covered, would hopefully keep her identity a secret. Ranma had to suck it on that idea because he simply didn't want trouble down the line if he was recognized, but Kara had a more pointed reason to want to stay hidden. She didn't want her cousin or any of his fellow heroes to know what she was up to. Kara just knew that Clark wouldn't like how she had been travelling with Ranma, let alone left the Kents without his say-so; he was a worrywart like that.

"Do you think if I distract the pair of them, you can get some of those wounded out of there?"

"Don't be insulting. I can get in and out really quickly, although I'll have to make multiple trips. A few of those wounded will need to be handled a lot more carefully than the others, and I can't carry more than one like that. But that's not magic," Kara scoffed, shaking her head, pointing towards the old man hovering in the air.

"I saw the device set into that guy's sleeve when he moved his hand. That's a simple kinetic controller, a toy made to make things fly or lift at command. I'd wager anything that there's a small anti-grav unit, a tiny-buglike thing, floating around here. The same goes for that Freeze Ray. Those are nifty little toys, and I'm kind of impressed at the miniaturization of the devices in question, but that's high-tech, not magic."

She snickered a little at Ranma's audible sigh of relief, then gestured to the nearest side of the crash in front of the convoy. "I'll start there; do you think you can keep their attention on you long enough for me to make seven or eight trips?"

Below, the last of the defenders had gone down, and one of them was screaming at what looked like a badly perforated side and shoulder, while the other one was bleeding

profusely from his legs, with one of them looking like it was hanging on only by a thread after some other kind of attack from the technology user.

"Don't be insulting," Ranma shot Kara's own words back at her, before leaping off the rooftop, one of his ki blasts flashing out from his hands towards the magic user. "Hey oldy! The old folks' home is missing one of its crazies, ya know anything about that?"

The magic user must also have had some kind of personal shield that activated when it detected anything coming towards him, as before Ranma's ball of ki could smash into the man, a shield appeared barely a few inches away from his skin, absorbing the attack. Ranma then was forced to dodge under something he could barely see, as both of the attackers turned their attention towards him.

"What's this? Some young do-gooder, some hero in training? You're too young to be allowed on this stage, young man. Run away, and retain your skin," the old man announced, trying to be both ominous and pompous simultaneously. "For if you stay, you will simply become another stagehand in my performance."

"How about you make me, old guy? Although I wouldn't want you to throw out a hip. Maybe make your younger fellow over there do it for ya?" Ranma taunted, launching an attack in that man's direction. He had been about to pull the doorway at the back of one of the trucks open, but now dodged aside, watching as the truck's back, where he'd been a second ago, the energy attack hitting and almost burst straight through, rather than melting as the man had thought.

"You're going to regret getting in front of Abra Kadabra and Captain Boomerang kid." So saying, the red-haired man tossed dozens of boomerangs Ranma's direction. Yet to Captain Boomerang's surprise, the younger man charged towards him, ducking aside from something unseen as it came through the air.

Ranma hadn't actually seen anything there; it was simply his instincts screaming that danger was coming his way. The next second, there was another, a beam of energy flashing out from Abra Kadabra as he intoned a magic spell, causing Ranma to stop in place and leap to the side through the air, dodging that, then several boomerangs in midair. Tapping down on one lightly with a finger to redirect himself in midair, Ranma thus dodged a third beam of some kind of power that came from Abra Kadabra's outstretched hand.

"H, how the hell did he do that? Momentum doesn't work that way. Is he like you, Abra Kadabra?"

"Abra Kadabra is one-of-a-kind, fool! And he most certainly is not using any kind of magic that I can tell," the old man hmphed. His voice was actually quite deep despite his aged appearance, although it cracked near the end as he gaped at Ranma again, dodging one of his attacks.

This time had not been one of the tiny, barely perceivable hover discs, each the size of a fly. Rather, that had been an unseen wave of energy that should have simply picked the youth up and hurled him into a wall. Somehow, Ranma had seen it coming, or sensed it, and

had slid underneath one of the trucks to the other side. Now he bounced up and over it, releasing two energy blasts, one each towards the pair of super criminals.

While this was all going on, Kara reached the side of one of the cars and cut into it with her heat ray. With the way open, she swiftly removed one of the people inside, whispering to the others that she would be taking the man to the hospital and that they should run for cover.

Before the woman who had been sitting at the man's side could respond, Kara zoomed away, searching for a hospital. Finding one, she placed the injured person down in front of it, shouting at the top of her lungs, "We've got wounded here!" before racing back the way she came.

Luckily, several EMT teams were already waiting, ready to head out. They hadn't left the hospital yet for some reason, possibly to wait until the shooting had finished? Kara didn't know, but by the time nurses and others began to see to the first person she had dropped off, Kara had come back with her next precious cargo, placing the second severely wounded person down quickly, this time a young boy with nasty head trauma, then zooming away.

Ranma caught two of the boomerangs this time, crushing one and smacking the other. The explosion this caused should have removed his hand, but Ranma moved it so quickly that not only did the boomerang go off, but the explosion was sent back away from him.

"Alarej, Acti Uma!" Abra Kadabra shouted, and from his condensed hands, a wash of smoke enveloped the area around Ranma, yards wide in every direction.

This was supposed to blind him to further attacks from the pair of super villains, but all it did was allow Ranma to sneak into his Umi-Sen-Ken. For a few seconds, this worked, then the elderly gentleman, warned by a beeping in one of his ears, twisted around, raising a hand and creating a stronger defensive shield in front of himself as Ranma reappeared, using his ki claws. Ki blades and plasma energy met, causing a loud screeching noise as if someone had just run a nail over glass. "Ahahaha, I do so enjoy seeing the tricks of others, young man, but your skills will not avail you against my magic!"

"We'll see about that." Ranma then leaped up into the air again, rolling in midair, then flipping himself further upwards into the air to dodge a series of hurled boomerangs. He caught one as it passed him, hurling it down into the side of Abra Kadabra's shield, causing it to come on and for the man to stagger for a second, where he hovered in midair.

Ranma landed on one of the convoy trucks, then rolled over the side of it to dodge still more 'magic' from Abra Kadabra. The other guy really wasn't much of a threat to Ranma, which was proven a second later as one of his hurled boomerangs came back in on Ranma's blindside, hitting him in the back of the head and sending a large shock toward him, enough to fry a normal person, but doing no damage except cause Ranma to wince a bit and twitch from head to toe.

"What the hell is he made of? Are we dealing with someone like Superman here?" Captain Boomerang nearly shouted nervously, even as he readied another boomerang to throw.

"Bah, my magic would affect even Superman! We just need to make him sit still long enough for me to cast a spell on him!" Gesticulating wildly, Abra Kadabra lashed out towards Ranma with beams of different colored power.

Soon, the last of the badly wounded, one of the convoy guards, the one whose arm had nearly been blown off, had been taken out of the area, quickly, lashing out with a kick that crashed into his shields. That shield failed a second later, but the white-haired man had already shifted away, shouting and tapping his chest for a second, teleporting himself several feet behind his previous position.

He raised his hand, but Kara exhaled, and suddenly icy air shot towards him, causing the old man to gasp and back away rapidly. Before he could recover, Ranma jumped from where he had been a moment ago, lashing out at the back of the older man's head. Again, his shield appeared, blocking the blow, but once more it also shattered, and Abra Kadabra stumbled forward, his eyes wide and looking at something only he could see. "Wh, what is this, what are these two?! Even the Flash could not do this!"

This close, Kara could detect more than she had been able to up on the rooftop, and saw a series of odd energy runs underneath the man's skin for a second, up to and including his eyes. *He's part cyborg, then? What a strange old man. I wonder where he got all this high-tech stuff from. I understand there are a lot of super villains out there with access to innovative technology, but some of this is far too advanced even for them, and I'm not talking about theoretical; I'm talking about actually constructing it, let alone miniaturizing it.*

Setting that mild mystery aside, Kara blasted forward behind a heat vision beam of power, which caused Abra Kadabra to dodge to the side. At the same time, Ranma, having used the momentum of the kick that his shield had blocked, shifted his attention towards Captain Boomerang.

The red-haired man only had a brief second to toss out one more boomerang, which Ranma dodged, before Ranma was on him. His outstretched hand was caught in a vice, and Captain Boomerang screamed as Ranma crushed that hand under that grip, before a foot to the stomach doubled him over, hard enough to cause him to start throwing up, as it felt as if his diaphragm had suddenly been completely collapsed.

"Huh, not nearly as durable as I thought," Ranma muttered, shaking his head. "Kevlar full body armor doesn't seem to be worth it to me."

Similar thoughts were going through the redhead's head as he vowed to find the gang that had sold him this body armor and liquidate the lot of them. *Impact resistant, my ass!* He tried to stand up, to throw a punch, only for his opponent to catch his other hand in a similar vice to the first.

His eyes like ice, Ranma crushed the man's second hand. Then, as he screamed and fell back to his knees, a chop to the side of his head dumped him to the ground unconscious.

Elsewhere, Abra Kadabra had taken to the sky, zooming around as if he were in complete command of his own levitation, but Kara knew better. Again, her x-ray vision allowed her to see that his boots were creating a series of spheres underneath them, which could propel him or keep him in the air in one place. Kara knew that technology better than the rest, as it had been part of several children's toys and exercise equipment back on Krypton.

Kara also knew that those things were extremely susceptible to extreme cold conditions unless they were specially made. With that in mind, she kept up a running stream of cold air aimed towards the man's feet as she dodged his own energy blasts and chased him through the sky over the city for a few seconds.

At one point, he did use a piece of tech that Kara hadn't seen before, a matter converter of some kind that did look more magical than anything else he'd used. In this case, he used that technique to conjure up a series of daggers in midair, which he directed telekinetically towards Kara. Kara batted them aside or caught them, eventually ending up with holding five of the daggers tip-first between her fingers.

A deadpan smirk crossed her lower face for a second, visible to her enemy. "Are you done now?"

"A true magician is never without tricks, my dear! However, perhaps this stage is not one where I will truly shine. I bid you adieu, my--"

That was as far as he got before Ranma leapt up from below, grabbing onto his feet, his hands glowing with ki as they clung on despite Abra Kadabra's energy shield. Those devices had already begun to react to the extreme cold Kara was shooting their way, and now, given the added weight, they failed completely.

Instantly, both Ranma and the old man plummeted toward the ground. The old man squawked, trying desperately to kick Ranma away, all thought of using his magic leaving him for a moment, Kara's fist slammed into his chest.

Abra Kadabra's energy shield shattered a second later, allowing her to grab onto his belt, and then chop for his neck a second later. The old man fell unconscious, his eyes rolling back up in their head's head, and Ranma landed, rolling away as Kara followed, carrying the prisoner for a second. "Well, that was a little fun," he quipped. "Pity boomerang guy was so one-dimensional though."

Kara nodded, and after touching the older man's neck to make sure he was, well, still alive, he was quite old, after all, and Kara knew she still had some trouble controlling her strength. With that done, she looked around as many of the locals were starting to come out of houses and shops, her face shifting into a confused look. "What now?"

“... Honestly, if this were a martial arts thing, I’d probably just steal them both blind, leave a message that read something like ‘you just got beat by Ranma Saotome’ and move on,” Ranma admitted. “As it is, I suppose we should probably still steal every weapon they’ve got on them, at least. Make it easier for when the cops eventually show up.”

“That’s going to take some doing. This old guy’s part cyborg, some of his stuff is built into them.” Kara frowned pensively.

“We’ll remove what we can then, and leave a message about that as well,” Ranma answered, before turning to a crowd of onlookers and shouting, “Any of you lot got a pen and pencil?”

With a slight sigh of relief, Kara went over to Captain Boomerang and began pulling anything that looked boomerang-shaped off the man, piling it up nearby, then reached into his Kevlar vest and destroyed it, removing several more boomerang-shaped knives hidden within, setting them on the growing pile quickly as well. *Not that he could use them, given the wreck Ranma made of his hands. OUCH.*

By the time she was done with that, Ranma had already taken up the pen and pencil, marking things down, as he pulled and pinched at the guy's uniform, shattering anything that felt a little more solid than it should be. Of which there was a lot.

Kara came back and observed, pointing out areas he’d missed, and then ‘helpfully’ said, “That’s the lot of it, except for one area right underneath his privates. Well, that and the matrix embedded in his head, anyway. I’m assuming that some kind of control grid, but given the old man’s age, it might have just as much to do with his life support as anything else, just like something embedded in his chest. What could be below his privates, though...?”

“Yeah, let’s stop thinking about it. We’ll have to leave it there for the police and whoever to figure out then. I’m not going to touch whatever that is with a wooden pole,” Ranma shook his head. Still, he dutifully filled that out and then dropped the large piece of paper onto the man, tacking it in place, before looking towards the distant sound of sirens. “Good grief, the police here are freaking slow.”

“That, or maybe they already had reports of supervillains and knew they couldn’t handle these two.” Kara shrugged. “Should we go?”

“Yep. I don’t want to be a hero, and you’re not an accredited one yet. Let’s get going.” Ranma advised, suiting word to action as he leapt up onto a nearby building and away, with Kara jumping up after him.

A moment later, a streak of red came over the horizon, covering the distance between that and the site of the fight within a bare few seconds. The streak was well in time to track Ranma and Kara heading up onto the rooftop, and after taking in the scene, chased after them.

Several blocks away, Ranma and Kara jumped down into an alleyway, where they pulled off their masks and, with a trash compactor between them, quickly changed clothes. "Do you think we got away with it? I mean, I know I want to be a hero in the future, but being recognized so quick, that would be a problem, especially when I haven't really figured out what kind of hero persona I want to create, and we're on this trip," Kara worried with a frown as she finished pulling on one of her T-shirts.

"I think that none of the civvies saw anything that they could use to figure out who we are. Maybe if anyone here in the US had ever heard of me, my hair and attitude might've been enough, but that's doubtful. As for you, your idea of covering your hair was a good one. I think we got away clean," Ranma said right before some instinct had him twisting around.

Before he could do so fully to face the entrance into the alleyway, a hand clapped him on the shoulder, then Kara, despite the fact that she saw it coming and tried to dodge. "BZZT wrong! Nice try, though," the man who had smacked them said as he leaned against the fence at the other end of the alleyway.

Ranma twisted around to where the voice was coming from, and a man stood there, leaning against the alley wall, looking at the pair thoughtfully from under a full facemask. A facemask that was red and looked like spandex, along with the rest of his outfit, something that Ranma could not stop himself from commenting on. "Okay, seriously, what the hell is wrong with you Americans and the whole spandex thing? I mean, I'll give you points for not wearing your underwear on the outside or cosplay ears, and I suppose the lightning bolt thing is your theme, so okay, but still, it's spandex. Just... why?"

"Er, I'm starting to wonder the same thing about the spandex issue," Kara murmured, shaking her head as she stared at the man. "Although I think I kind of approve more of this outfit than Co, um, that is, Superman's, after you pointed out the whole underwear on the outside thing. Hello, Flash. Er, do you remember me?"

"Yeah, Blondy, I do," the Flash replied, answering in the same manner. There might not be anyone around, but that meant nothing; he was in costume, and thus super-names were the thing right now. "But as amusing as that repartee was, and trust me, if either of you says that underwear on the outside thing to Superman's face, I will probably die laughing, I'm going to have to turn you in, kid."

The Flash pointed at Ranma as he spoke, before his finger twitched to Kara for a second and then back again. "You little miss, I don't have any idea why you're here, although this at least doesn't look like a kidnapping or magic mental domination thing, which was my first thought. However, you, you're the one who kills the Joker, right? We superheroes don't do that kind of thing."

"I didn't kill him, his own acid-spitting flower did," Ranma snorted, shaking his head. "I just turned it back on him before I knew what it was. Am I supposed to feel sorry for that?"

"Yes. You are. Like I said, I'm afraid you're going to have to turn yourself in," the Flash stated. "Bats is particular about that kind of thing, and the Joker's still dead because of something you did. Self-defense, sure, but you're still going to need to be put on trial, and the laws gotta be harder on us super-types."

Kara frowned a bit but stayed silent for now. *I honestly don't know Wally well enough to tell if he's really serious right now, doesn't have all the information, or is poking Ranma to see what he'll do.* Kara had heard about how the Joker had died from Ranma before this, so that was no surprise to her. *Although I could tell you how he'll react...*

"Hell no!" Ranma held up his arms in an X, following Kara's mental prediction.

He might've gone on to mention that he had been acting under diplomatic immunity at the time, but the Flash wasn't just the fastest man alive; Wally was also somewhat hasty. Even as Ranma's mouth opened, he had launched himself forward, and Ranma's eyes widened as he barely could track the guy moving.

Even so, he could feel the moment the man's fists hit him, and twisted as it did, using the momentum of the blow to send himself flying backwards. Landing on one of the walls, he crouched there like a frog for a second before launching himself back towards the Flash. The Flash dodged around his charge easily, coming in with a kick to the back of Ranma's head, but Ranma again moved with it, deadening most of the force behind the blow, and the Flash frowned a little as he easily dodged under a return kick from the youth.

Okay, so maybe I have to try a little harder here, Wally thought. The next time he attacked, his fist hammered in several hundred times, each of them too fast for Ranma to dodge.

Yet again, Ranma could feel them when they hit his skin and almost automatically shifted with each blow. Further, the Flash made the mistake of spreading out his punches. *Yeah, that'll hurt eventually, but it ain't gonna hurt quickly. Now...*

Even as he shifted away with another blow, this one to his shoulder, Ranma lashed out with a low kick, catching Flash in the ankle. The Flash hadn't bothered moving his leg so much, once he began pressing Ranma back, still taking Ranma seriously and now found himself sprawling forward.

He turned that into a leap, shooting past Ranma, but when he came back in, Ranma hopped up over the ground, forcing the Flash to twist to the side, racing up a wall to catch him. When he did, the Flash's eyes widened as he found his hands caught by Ranma's own.

Grimacing, Ranma pushed more ki into his arms and hands, a lot of ki, more than he'd used in the battle against the two supervillains. Moving his body this fast, Ranma was basically controlling himself with his ki, rather than moving with his muscles alone. He'd done this a time or two when sparring with Kara, although normally she was more careful about keeping her speed down than the Flash. *Frankly, she uses her hand-eye speed better than Mr. Red Rifle here, but she doesn't move quite as fast either.*

Still, it worked, and now the two of them fell back to the ground, locked in a stalemate until the Flash lashed out with a kick, pushing away from Ranma. "Right, I think that's about it, kid. Nice try, but lights out time."

Coming back in, the Flash aims to finish this fight, while Ranma pushed himself to his feet, all his limbs glowing with ki.

Watching this, Kara decided she'd had enough. "Okay, that's enough male machismo or whatever this is."

With that, she took several steps forward faster than most could have tracked, appearing between them almost as fast as the Flash himself could move. He was unable to stop his blow in time, but the punch to the cheek barely registered to Kara. It didn't even stagger her really, and her other hand came up, grabbing Ranma's before it could connect with her as well, frowning a little. "Why the heck didn't that hurt more?"

"Because Mr. Red over there is going for speed over everything else," Ranma stated, allowing his ki to seep back into his body and stepping back. "Speed and strength are different; he's just letting his momentum do the work for him, which is okay against normal opponents, but not so much people like you and me, although more me than you, cheater."

Kara stuck out her tongue at Ranma with a laugh at that, but Ranma just continued, gesturing to her and the Flash. "Also remember, we already figured out that my ki allows me to hurt you a little. Mr. Spandex over there also tends to spread out his punches too much, rather than concentrate them as I do with my Amaguriken. He should put more power into every blow, rather than simply go for a significant amount."

"Both hurt and tickle, which has proven kind of annoying more than once," Kara muttered, before looking back at the Flash, who also looked confused.

Experimentally, he tried to pull out of Kara's grip, but unlike Ranma, the friction he could generate along his arm in a few seconds didn't matter at all, and Wally also didn't want to kick Kara. That could escalate things here beyond a level he wanted to deal with.

For her part, Kara's grip remained where it was, clamped around his arm like an inescapable vice, and she looked between the two men. "I think this has gone far enough. Ranma, you have something to say in your defense when it comes to the Joker, right?"

"Yeah, I guess." Ranma scowled a little at having the fight interrupted, but after the earlier battle, he was okay with that being the only real action of the day. *Then too, I'm not certain I could beat this guy without some prep time... and okay, a lot of ki tricks.* "When the Joker died, from his own weapon I'll remind ya, I was acting under diplomatic immunity as a bodyguard for someone for my country..." Ranma frowned, then cocked his head. "Is it bad that I can't remember the guy's name?"

"Yes," Kara stated bluntly, laughing a little. "Yet it's also so in keeping with your 'martial arts ninety percent, everything else ten percent' personality that it isn't even funny."

Seriously, you'd probably only remember his name if you had learned some technique or other when you were working for him."

While Ranma pouted but nodded wry agreement, the Flash scowled a little. "All right, I didn't know about you being under diplomatic immunity at the time. Still, you're not exactly showing much remorse, and with your powers and abilities, and, you know, still being in America and thus the League's concern, that's worrisome."

"Wait, would you be sorry if you were in my shoes?" Ranma stared at the Flash, then shook his head. "Look, I have no idea why that Bat-guy got on my case so much afterward, or why you think I should be feeling sorry for some psychopath that died from his own weapon, but I don't. I don't have any history with him, and I for sure as hell don't think insanity is any defense against a person's actions."

If I did, my actions when I defended myself against Kodachi and Kuno would've been very different; to make no mention of that crazy ghost lady I met bodyguarding Lara.

Aloud, Ranma said, "I also ain't looking to become a superhero or even an American in general. I'm just a martial artist. I might have a lot more tricks in my bag than most, but that's all I am, a martial artist traveling who's traveling right now to meet a friend with a friend."

The Flash turned his attention to Kara, who waved her now free arm at him while releasing his own from her other. "That's me. We're on our way to Star City. We, um, you know where I was staying. I, er, kind of showed who I was to Ranma when he was traveling through, and we got to be friends."

"That sounds really random, or really suspicious, but I'll leave the suspicion to Batman, he's got more suspicion than any two of the rest of us combined," Wally mused, before shrugging. "What about the battle against Abra Kadabra and Captain Boomerang?"

"We were eating in a café nearby," Kara explained before Ranma could. "Ranma might be a martial artist, but neither of us is the type to just hear stuff like that going on and not do anything."

"We didn't go looking for trouble or anything like that. If it had been normal gangsters or if normal civvies hadn't gotten involved, I'd have been willing to just watch, but as it was," Ranma shrugged, gesturing with a grin towards Kara. "We had little Miss Flyer here, and me. My Code wouldn't allow me to just step aside. I'd wager she at least saved seven lives today."

Kara flushed a little bit under the look of approval and happiness Ranma gave her. That felt really nice, being acknowledged like that by him. *Almost like when Cassie laughed at herself when I beat her in a spar after learning a new trick, or when Donna told us she was proud of our progress, only a bit more personal.*

At the mention of the wounded guards and civilians, Wally's remaining tension eased. "I suppose that if you just stepped in because you saw what was going on, I'm not

going to jump down your throat about saving people, that'd be really retarded. And you didn't kill those two, which is also a mark in your favor since you could have. And I'll admit Batman might've overreacted. He's super protective about Gotham in general. None of the rest of us operates there because he's got his own way of doing things that just doesn't mesh with any of the rest of us."

Well, except when whatever's going on is supernatural. But that's an area of heroing even I don't touch with a ten-foot pole, Wally added mentally.

"Not my problem, dude," Ranma quipped, shaking his head. "I don't know Batguy beyond what I learned when he tried to attack and later track me, and I ain't gonna go back to Gotham if I can help it. Which means I hopefully won't need to deal with any of the other crazies there."

"Again, you're not exactly showing remorse here, and you also didn't try to stop it even after the first bit of acid struck his face, which should've been enough to tell you what was going on. You just fought me, kid, I **know** you could've been fast enough to redirect the stream of acid away," the Flash observed, frowning and crossing his arms.

"Fast enough physically, yeah, but even I'm not able to go from seeing something to reacting to it instantly," Ranma protested, before shrugging. "Look, from what I've learned since, the guy was a murderer many times over, a manipulator, a terrorist and a thief. I wasn't about to kill him myself, but if his own actions did? It's not my place to stop him or save him. He lost the right to call himself an innocent the moment he took someone else's life. And again, I was acting as a bodyguard. I'm not a hero, I don't hold myself to the same moral code you guys do, but my own," Ranma repeated.

"I kind of agree on that," Kara murmured, drawing Wally's attention her way. "I don't know if I would be as sanguine about it as you, Ranma, but I certainly wouldn't go out of my way to save someone like that. I wouldn't kill him either; I'm not sure I have it in me to do that. Certainly not a human. A monster who attacks me and can actually harm me, sure, I've done that before, but another human? No."

"What about an alien?" Ranma grinned and smirked as Kara gave him the most deadpan stare she could. "Heh, I didn't mean just aliens like you, I meant like those chest burster things from the movie we watched at that motel before we hit the mountains."

"Oh, those? Yeah, I'd squish some bugs. And in a full-on invasion, I don't think I'd be in a position to pull my punches." Kara shrugged. "Besides, soldiers or pirates or whatever, well, they know what they've signed up for, don't they?"

Wally frowned, staring between the two youngsters for a moment. Finally, he shook his head. The whole diplomatic immunity thing at the time was a telling argument, and it wasn't as if Wally had heard the whole story. If the Joker had basically killed himself with his own weapon once, it was turned on him by someone who had no idea of what his normal weapons in such did, well... From the Flash's point of view, some people needed the noose, and the Joker just seemingly had saved the taxpayer the bill for the rope.

That still left some questions here, but about the earlier fight, not what happened in Gotham. "So, suppose I'll chalk up what happened to the Joker to inexperience, you still used excessive force when dealing with Captain Boomerang, and don't tell me different. Again, someone who can move as fast as you did just now in our little back-and-forth, and traveling with someone like her," the Flash hooked a thumb towards Kara, who felt mildly offended at the act. "You could definitely have done something beyond breaking every bone in his hands, and maybe a rib, from what the EMTs were saying when I arrived."

"Huh... That was quick," Ranma said instead of answering the allegation, frowning a little. "What, were they holding back out of range or something?"

"No, but the nearest hospital where I dropped off the wounded had at least five or more ambulances and EMT teams ready to go," Kara answered.

"Yeah, that's actually pretty normal when it comes to incidents with supervillains or when the police learn before lives are lost that they're in over their head in terms of weapons and so forth. The emergency responders wait until the coast is clear, then come out and help deal with the wreckage, while we supers deal with the villains and do what we can for any wounded at the scene. Now answer the question," the Flash demanded, scowling. "You just crippled Captain Boomerang for years, if not his whole life. That's not going to fly here in America."

"I could argue that I'm still getting used to things here in America, like how many guns there are, how many gangs are able to operate so openly, but I won't." Ranma's eyes hardened. "Instead, I'll simply remind you that he killed at least two of those guards after me and my friend here arrived and started to plan what we wanted to do." Ranma had gathered that the Flash knew about Kara, but wasn't using her name, so he had decided to do the same. "I figure the price of a hand per dead guard is pretty decent, even if it probably won't seem to be for their families."

The Flash narrowed his eyes, but Ranma went on, crossing his arms belligerently. "Like I told ya, I'm not an American citizen. Heck, when you get down to it, I don't really consider myself much of a Japanese citizen either in a lot of ways. My sense of right and wrong is one I built myself. It's my Code, no one else's. I'm no hero, so I'm not going to hold myself to the standards that you people can. I respect that, but I follow my own Code. I also normally go for non-lethal solutions until there's no other way. But that doesn't mean I'm going to treat anyone with kid gloves. Boomerang Boy knew the consequences, and if he has to spend a few years without the use of his hands after killing someone, that's fine by me."

Wally twitched a bit, but he honestly couldn't argue with Ranma's point. He had seen the two covered bodies for himself earlier as the police started their work, and the Flash had to admit that he hadn't always turned supervillains in without broken bones. It was just that the whole hands thing had seemed a little too pointed.

He looked over at Kara, wondering if he should ask her what she thought of that, but he'd already gotten a decent idea of what she thought a moment before about the application of violence. "Just keep the injuries to a minimum, kid. And while you might not

want to label yourself a hero, if you keep on jumping into things like you did back there, you'll be labeled one by the public pretty darn quick. Once you are, the rest of us **will** hold you to our standard."

"You'll never get me in spandex as long as I live!" Ranma shuddered, shaking his head, and forcefully rejecting an image of himself in his Shazam persona the first time he'd transformed in the old wizard's hidden laboratory. Thankfully, Ranma had figured out how to change his suit up a bit when he became Shazam form. It was all in the image in his head and having a fixed one when he changed. *Although I couldn't do anything about the colors or the cape, damn it. Nor the giant lightning bolt symbol. Huh, I wonder if this guy'll be after me for copying him if I ever have to use that power? Heh.*

Kara laughed, although the image of Ranma in spandex came to her just then, and was certainly interesting. A moment later, the image of Cassie also appeared on her head, clad like Wonder Woman was in a few news broadcasts that Kara had seen occasionally, and Kara felt herself flushing just a little bit. *Dang, but they both look good. Although I think I like the armor look more than the spandex.* Thankfully, her moment of hormonally induced thoughts shifted quickly into one based on fashion fast enough that even the Flash didn't notice.

Instead, he laughed at Ranma's words, shaking his head and looking between the two teens. "Fine, kid. I'll set aside any questions about your heroic activities and the rules and such you need to follow about that kind of thing for now. So what are you two up to now?"

Looking over at Kara, Wally had to ask, "Does your cousin know that you're traveling across country with this young man?" The Flash's tone turned teasing just a bit, although he was also wary.

"Er, my family does," Kara answered, feeling a thrill go through her as she said those words. The Kents had both been amazing, and if anything, talking with Martha and John on the phone had only helped them to become even more like a family than being on the farm for some reason. "My cousin, not so much, since he was heading out of the system at around the same time Ranma and I met."

That caused Wally to frown, but that frown disappeared a second later, along with the suspicion behind it, as Ranma snorted. "She calls home every night. Or at least every night that we've got an Internet connection. We didn't have that the past two nights, so you still need to call tonight. Kara, I mean, we warned them ahead of time but..."

"Right, fine, but what are you two traveling for?" Wally shifted the conversation along.

"We're heading to a friend." Ranma shrugged before giving a little more information than Kara probably would have if the question had been directed to her. "I know Wonder Woman from a time when I was younger and wound up on the Isle of Women, and I'd always

hoped to go back there, but hearing that she and Cassie were here in Man's World, well, it's just easier to get to them that way."

Images of all the reasons why he, a red-blooded male, would want to go to the Isle of Women went through Wally's head before crashing into the wall of reality that was the fact that, well, it was the Isle of **Women**, as in magically sealed against men by the power of gods, whose existence the Flash still had trouble occasionally accepting really. Wally was a scientist and an atheist, and the idea of a higher power, let alone several ancient deities being real, was one he still had issues with. "Okay, you're going to have to unpack that. How exactly were you planning to get back there? I mean, I can't imagine that you got there on purpose, and I certainly can't imagine that the women there would want you back afterward. They don't want any man there, that's sort of the point of that island in the first place."

"I was a kid when I was there the first time, washed up there after a storm. And I only stayed there a few months, but it was... Well, you'd have to understand my upbringing to realize how nice a time that was compared to the rest of it. Suffice to say that my father, the only family member I knew for most of my life, wouldn't exactly win any parenting awards. He's a fantastic martial arts trainer, but that's about the only positive anyone can say about him, and even that's stretching it."

"Trust me, you have no idea how right that is," Kara snickered under her breath, surreptitiously breathing down into her hands, creating a bit of frost in her palm, which she then began to melt a bit. This allowed her to quickly create a handful of cold water in the palm of her hand. Unseen by either of the men, Kara grinned, knowing where this was going to go eventually, and knowing Wally's reaction would be hilarious.

"So being around Cassie, someone my own age who could really push me in the art, and around Diana and the other girls, well, it was really nice, so I wanted to go back there," Ranma continued, not noticing what Kara was up to.

"Yeah, but again, Isle of Women, kid. How exactly did you intend to go back there? I mean, you're Japanese, right, so you couldn't, like, find some ancient relic or something linked to the gods that protect that island or something. And I doubt that just trying to get drowned in a random storm and trusting to luck would work either."

"Nope, Ranma's plan wasn't anything so random or specific," Kara interjected, before splashing Ranma upside the head with the water she'd gathered in her hands. "He luckily found a simpler method to bypass the magic around the island."

As the Flash staggered backwards and stared, releasing little squeaks as his eyes flicked down, then back again, Ranma rolled her eyes, reaching up to wipe at her wet face.

Dragging his eyes away from the redhead's chest (the muscle-t Ranma was wearing was not built for his female form, and it was quite obvious she wasn't wearing a bra), the Flash turned to Kara. "What the hell did you do?! I didn't think that Kryptonians could do magic, so i, is that some kind of super high-tech sex change water or something?"

Kara blinked, her eyes going wide. "Wait, what the heck? You think that was me doing it?!"

"HA! No, it wasn't Kara. This is a curse, a curse I got at a training ground in China. Me and my old man were there, and he didn't realize that the name of the place was so literal. When I heard that the Cursed Springs could change you into different people, I asked the guide which spring would change me into a woman, and I manipulated my old man into knocking me into it."

Ranma's snicker at that faded as she felt a spike of irritation for a moment, but as if it was coming from something beyond himself. It was a weird feeling and faded quickly, and Ranma didn't dwell on it, moving on quickly. "I figured it was a small price to pay to head back to the Isle of Women, and even with all the stuff since, I have to say, despite needing to deal with the monthly monster, I think it's worked out pretty well. This form's kind of useful a lot of times. Especially when you're living off the land and need to get a job as a waitress or something."

Ranma posed coquettishly, although she was directing the look towards Kara. "Sexy redheads get more tips. Although if we ever need some real money quickly, I'll have to drag you into it, Kara. Sexy little redhead on one side, bookish yet sexy blonde on the other? We'd make a killing."

As Kara waved her hands frantically and denied any such idea, the Flash raised a hand to his mask-clad face, really wanting to run a hand through his hair for a moment but only able to run a hand over his covered head. This was just a little too weird for him to deal with. He wasn't at home with magic at all, and to hear that curses were real, especially a curse of a sex change, and that someone had willingly done it to head back to the Isle of Women? *Yeah, I'm just done with this.*

"All right, I'm out of here. Just go, you two. Don't spend too much time in my neck of the woods, or dealing with my Rogue Gallery, we'll be cool." He sobered a little, shaking his head and looking over his shoulder. "I tried to get here as fast as I could when the Justice League's computers warned me about a report that matched two villains I've dealt with in the past, but it caught me in a meeting, and I had a devil of a time getting out of it."

He looked back at Ranma and Kara, then nodded his head. "Regardless of my thoughts about how you both went about it, you two saved lives today that I couldn't. Just remember, the job of a hero is to stop the crime in progress, capture the perpetrators, and keep civilians safe from the threat. Keeping that threat under wraps afterward is the government's responsibility however they want to do it. Heroes don't get to decide who lives and who dies."

Ranma nodded as she reached inside her ki space and dumped a bottle of quickly heated hot water over her head, transforming back into his male body, although internally, he really didn't agree with that entirely. He still understood why the Flash or someone like Superman, say, or Wonder Woman, even, considering his memories of how powerful Diana was, would want to put shackles on what they could and would not do. It was a way of both

keeping to a higher standard of morality, being an example for other people, and not make people afraid of what you could do.

Or at least that's how he thought of it. Ranma wasn't on that level and didn't think like that. *Okay, so maybe in my Shazam form I am on that level in terms of power, but that's a card I'm not going to play unless I really have to. Crap, when was the last time I actually practiced in that form anyway? I don't think I've done it since... Crud. More than a month, at least. Pops would smack me upside the head for that. Still, I'll make it up later when we meet up with Cassie and Diana.*

Aloud, he said, "So we're cool?"

The Flash's eyes had widened as that water bottle came out from a pocket that looked as if it couldn't have even been holding a wallet to the moment before, and now Wally's scientific brain just went 'fuck this shit, I'm out' and clocked out for the day. "Yeah, we're done. Get out of here, you two."

Kara and Ranma looked at one another, shrugged, and then moved off, with Ranma looking up at the sky. "If we can push it, we might be able to get to a smaller town heading towards California before nightfall."

"I was kind of looking forward to a nice bed. Don't get me wrong, the mountains were amazing, and I loved rock climbing and being in the rivers, but a nice mattress is better than a sleeping bag, and remember I still have to call home tonight," Kara said, as the two of them went out of sight. "I don't want to chance us entering a area without Wi-Fi."

OOOOOOO

Behind them, the Flash stared after them for a few moments, scratching his chin thoughtfully as he wondered if he should contact Batman. Superman was still out of the star system along with Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and the Martian Manhunter, but Batman had, as always, remained. He would surely want to hear about what Ranma was up to, as well as how he had somehow met up with Kara. *Then again, if her relatives know, whoever they are, maybe it's none of Batman's business? I'm not exactly getting romantic vibes from them, although they're certainly friends for sure. If Superman were here, it'd be an easy decision. Clark would want to know his cousin was with someone Bats at least wouldn't approve of. Still, he isn't, and what would Batman do anyway? Leave Gotham to come after him? How would that go?*

The Flash decided that contacting Batman really wasn't worth it at the moment. The fact that he was also still weirded out about the curse was another thing entirely. *I'm also wondering what Diana will say. She sure as heck never mentioned meeting a boy on the Isle of Man to any of us, although I can completely understand her making an impression on a young impressionable kid. Still, it'll be interesting to see both her and Clark's reaction to this cross-country trek of Kara and Ranma's? It could be funny at least.*

OOOOOOO

At Kara's insistence, the pair decided to indeed spend the rest of that day in town as well as that night. They found a small motel with decent rooms on the outskirts of town and decided to watch a historical TV marathon about Rome. That area of human history was kind of fascinating to Kara, who likened the Republican structure of Rome before it became an empire to how Krypton had been ruled for most of its history after it unified, although her own people had never adopted a Legion-based military, at least as far as she knew.

Similarly, Ranma was interested in it because, well, Rome equaled a lot of wars.

The two of them had a nice time of it, just lounging around, or rather their own equivalent of lounging around. That this amounted to Kara floating in space in the middle of her room and that Ranma spent at least half of the day doing push-ups, sit-ups, and other things of that nature was quite typical of the pair of them, even as they kept their attention mostly on the TV.

At one point, Ranma stepped out to get them some food, while Kara phoned home, spending more than an hour and a half talking to Aunt Martha and Uncle John. Ranma left her to it, even after returning with the food, heading over to his own room until Kara came and got him, whereupon TV-watching resumed. As they watched an episode about how the Roman Republic's military had evolved, Kara kicked her feet back, looking over at Ranma speculatively, still floating in midair, but now looking as if she was lying on top of the bed before she flipped, reached down for a bite of pasta, chewing thoughtfully. "So, you're a master of adaptation and such like that. You ever think on a strategic level like this?"

"What, like I was a leader of an army or something? I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a guy who hasn't thought about what it would be like to be a general at some point." Ranma laughed. "What was that meme you found on your phone when we stumbled on this marathon? Guys think about the Roman Empire at least seven times a day?"

"Something like that," Kara snickered. "But that means you haven't thought about it seriously, right?"

"No, not really. And given my life, well, thinking about stuff like that isn't nearly as interesting as going over how I would better be able to defeat older enemies."

"Like the Flash? He kind of had you dead to rights, didn't he?" Kara teased, smirking just a little. "Whereas he and I would tie at best."

"And if you could get him into the air, you'd probably beat him, yeah, unless his superspeed allows Red Guy to fly." Ranma shook his head, sticking out his tongue at her for a moment. "But yeah, he'd've had me beat eventually. It would take a while longer than he probably thought, and if I had time to set things up? That would be a little different."

Kara raised an intrigued eyebrow. "Oh? How so?"

"A few ways. One, targeting Flash's feet like I was doing, only more subtly. Glue, oil, ball bearings, stuff like that, used right before he hit me or during his punches might work, dropping them out of a ki space in my pants legging."

"There's no way that the Flash hasn't dealt with that kind of thing before," Kara laughed.

"Sure, but after a little while, he'd be so used to looking at that that he wouldn't see the real attack: chicken wire at neck height. Duck under a seeming blow, back away, and as he's pressing forward at superspeed, wire to the neck."

"Maybe if the wire could hold and wasn't visible enough. But I still think you're not taking the Flash as seriously as you should," Kara warned, shaking her head.

"My ki was able to empower me enough to keep up with his movements. After that, it's just a matter of coming up with a strategy that'd allow me to pin him in place for a bit. I noticed, despite how fast he can move, his reaction time isn't quite up to keeping up, and when I proved I could match his arm speed, he forgot about his footwork," Ranma argued. "He also wasn't nearly as mobile as he should have been for being that fast. He was looking down on me even after I started to keep up with him."

"I'll give you that, but—" the two of them continued to argue about how Ranma would deal with the Flash, and as he began to lose the argument, Ranma wondered if he should come clean about his Shazam powers. Eventually, he decided that he only really wanted to explain that once and conceded the point for now.

Later, after the history marathon started to get boring, the pair headed to bed, with Ranma moving back to his own room. As they had promised the Kents, whenever they could, the pair always got separate rooms or used different tents.

The next day, Kara was scowling as she came out of her room to meet with Ranma at a diner across from the motel. "Okay, if last night is the kind of noise and stuff we have to deal with while staying in a bigger town or city, you can keep it! I prefer a bed over sleeping bags, but the silence of the forest was really nice."

Ranma snickered more at Kara's bed head than her words, trying hard to not let his eyes drift downwards. The fact that her clothing was a little askew, and she was very much giving off her normal sexy girl next-door vibe, was something he once more did not want to concentrate on. Although sadly, it was getting harder and harder to ignore as their time together went on.

"City folk wouldn't think that was silence, but whatever. As for the noises, I think there were only a few sirens, one distant shooting, and what, six or seven cars with their music blaring? Not much. More importantly, did you misplace your comb or something?"

The last words didn't register for Kara for a moment as she glared angrily at Ranma, then around at the inside of the, thankfully nearly empty, diner. "It wasn't even that! It was the noise of the air conditioner and the humming of the lights outside in the parking area, and everything else. Human technology is so noisy."

It was only after she finished her complaint that Ranma's words registered, and Kara's hands shifted up into her hair, finding it bunched or sticking out all over the place. Her

eyes narrowed as Ranma's snickers turned to laughter, and she shook her head. "I'd melt the rubber in your shoes for making fun of me, but you've got no rubber in your shoes anyway, you ki-using weirdo."

Ranma just laughed louder at that, then twitched when he raised his cup to his mouth only to find that the nice cup of tea - well, the American equivalent, but it was the best he was going to get - had gone cold suddenly. He looked over at Kara, who smirked at him even as she took out a brush and began to work on her hair. "Nice one," he admitted. "Just remember, if you want to start a prank war with someone who has ki space, that's a losing proposition."

Kara laughed at that, then bowed her head, beseeching Ranma to not retaliate too hard on her in a mock-frightened tone, to which he magnanimously agreed. The pair was soon on the road again, sprinting out of the city, then hiking cross-country at one point, crossing between two highways, then running again alongside the highway. They only stopped once to eat some sandwiches, and again near evening time for Kara to go to the bathroom at a gas station, while Ranma waited outside on guard, considering how she had gotten some looks from some of the locals.

Late that night, they pushed on as Kara, who'd taken a moment to fly up into the air, saw ahead of them the lights of the town on the horizon. Carrying Ranma again had them there quickly, and they found a motel once more.

The noises that night were again annoying to Kara, who complained about the local music in particular. "What the heck is that sound anyway? She complained. "I like country, and I like swing, but that wasn't either."

"I think it's the kind called honky-tonk, but don't quote me on that." So saying Ranma pulled out his wallet and checked their available cash, then pulling out his map, he laid it down on the ground. Kara crouched next to them, examining it quickly. "I think we're gonna hit the border with California this morning, then maybe two more days to Star City with the use of shortcuts."

Shortcuts was the term they used when they were talking about Kara's ability to fly, which she'd done on occasion just to speed things up at night, although not as often as Kara had thought she might need to in order to make this trip in any kind of appreciable timeframe. Ranma's ability to keep going at basically the same speed as a car, with few rests throughout the day, coupled with the ability to just go in a straight line most of the time, had allowed them to make great time.

"However, we might want to spend a little more time in the next town we hit. We're getting a little low on funds."

"You're the one in charge of our planning for this trip, such as it is. I'll go along with whatever you say, excluding any efforts to make me a waitress or anything similar," Kara stated firmly, before looking a little guilty. "I'd be willing to do other things, but waitressing and, er, flaunting myself is not among them."

Ranma snorted but agreed. If he had been born a woman, Ranma figured he wouldn't have been so willing to use his female form the way he did, anyway. "So let's stock up a bit, and then push on. I think by midday we'll reach the town I'm thinking of on the other side of the state line." He jerked his hand towards the front of the motel. "There were a few posters about some kind of fair going on there."

Unfortunately for Kara's sensibilities, that fair turned out to be based on an Elvis impersonator convention. Who Elvis was, why he was so famous, and why there were so, so many people who wanted to dress up like Elvis, neither teen knew, but Ranma found a restaurant/bar that was more than happy to hire her for the day and night. Kara quickly retreated to her room, something that Ranma dearly wished she could do. Instead, she had to deal with people who looked and acted like Elvis attempting to flirt with her.

This was not a pleasant thing, especially when one of them, drunk on his ass, attempted to explain how the length of his sideburns was a sexual thing of some kind. How, Ranma couldn't quite make out through his delirium and really didn't care to contemplate.

Regardless, the night and day's work allowed her to gather enough money that they wouldn't need to stop to do so again until they reached Star City. Leaving what Kara and Ranma had both unanimously decided they would forever know as the Elvis Town behind, the two raced on their way. The terrain had already begun to change when they entered California, and now it did much the same, shifting away from sand, desert and long flat areas and slowly into more grassy, lightly wooded areas as they pushed deeper into California. This simply meant that they could once more go cross-country without running into any issues and make even better time.

Two days later at around evening time, the pair was running along a somewhat busy highway when they spotted the first signs for Star City. By around evening, they started to hit the outskirts of the city, and soon, the whole horizon was filled with it.

"So, do you have any idea where to start our search for Cassie?" Ranma asked, not particularly concerned about it, just wondering. The two of them did have a lot more going for them to find a single individual in the city than most people did, and even if Kara hadn't done that good a job of describing how Cassie had changed, since Ranma had seen her when they were younger, he still felt as if he could recognize her right off the bat.

"I think there's a local hero, Green something?" Kara remarked, frowning pensively as she ran along beside Ranma. While Ranma was lightly sweating by this point, more from the heat than the day's exertions, admittedly, she still looked as fresh as a daisy and kept up easily even as a feeling of anticipation and joy began to fill her at the thought of meeting Cassie soon. She had loved living with the Kents for the most part, but being away from Cassie after so long spent on the Isle of Women with her had been a severe wrench, alleviated only when Ranma arrived.

"Maybe if we run into him, he can give us directions? Other than that, find a few high spaces, stake them out? I think I know Diana well enough that she'll be living in one of the high-rent areas, but beyond that, you're the expert here."

“Ehh, I’m not so much an expert on tracking someone but more as an expert on living off the land,” Ranma snorted, shaking his head. “Still, that’s not a bad starting point. Given how much Cassie likes to run and jog for exercise, she’s almost certainly going to be out and about every day, so our odds of actually seeing her are pretty high.”

Kara nodded, but just then something in the sky caught her attention. She began to slow to a halt as she stared upwards, seeing what looked like a shooting star going across the sky for a second.

“Huh.” Ranma also paused beside her, staring upwards. “That’s kind of ironic. Is that normal?”

“I don’t think so, at least not from the information I found online about Star City. We’re nowhere near the Northern Lights, and there’s no local equivalent,” Kara mused. There was a moment of silence from the two of them as they stood on the sidewalk, while other people passing by and even in cars became aware of the thing in the sky, pausing to look up at it.

It took Kara a minute to remember that there was another name for a shooting star, an asteroid and even longer to realize what that could mean. “Oh crap!”

Her exclamation caused Ranma to blink, and, quickly coming to the same conclusion, he triangulated where that thing was heading: deeper into the city from their current position. “How much power is that going to hit with?”

“A lot!” Kara said, looking around and then the pair ducked into an alleyway, before shooting up into the sky, Kara carrying Ranma on her back. However, they were too late.

Even as they got up above most of the rooftops around them, the asteroid came apart. A second later, both bits slammed to Earth somewhere in the city ahead of them, creating a sonic boom that washed over the pair. It didn’t do anything to them, but smashed windows and caused people below on the streets to scream aloud in fear and pain, as many of them were blown off their feet.

“Did it look as if that thing split apart?” Ranma questioned, frowning as he stared ahead of them from his position in Kara’s arms. He’d gotten kind of use to the whole being flown around by a girl thing by this point.

“It did, and I think it was metal. I thought I saw an explosion up there at some point, although I couldn’t make out any more details before the bits disappeared below the horizon of all these buildings,” Kara cursed.

“We split up then,” Ranma decided, hopping out of her arms. “You head to where the main bit came down; I’ll hunt down the smaller portion that fell off. As much as I don’t like it, you’re a lot stronger than me, and that means you’ll be able to deal with whatever’s been damaged by that thing better than me.”

Kara nodded grimly, then her lips twitched. "Well, look at it this way, Cassie is almost certainly going to respond to this, which means finding her will be a lot easier than it might otherwise have been."

Ranma laughed at that. "That's a very thin silver lining, but I'll take it."

With that, he raced away, heading towards where he had seen the smaller portion of whatever that had been come apart from the rest of it. Kara too raced ahead, flying deeper into the city, uncaring about her identity or anything else right now, beyond helping whoever needed help after this disaster.

OOOOOOO

Hopping over the rooftops as fast as his ki-enhanced legs could take him, Ranma eventually saw smoke and heard shouting and alarms in the distance along with gunfire. "What the hell? Gunfire?"

Shaking his head at that, Ranma continued on his way until he came within sight of the disturbance, which was happening in one of the lower-end areas of the city. Here, where a series of streets met up, something had slammed into the concrete with enough force and heat to explode and melt the concrete at the same time. Several nearby buildings have been peppered by debris, and at least two cars had been damaged in some fashion, but none of that grabbed Ranma's attention nearly as much as the fact that the thing that had hit had seemingly been some kind of escape pod.

Like in some of the sci-fi anime he had seen, it resembled a tube that tapered to a point with a glass canopy. That was currently buried in the concrete, while the small thruster at the back, thankfully, was no longer sputtering, was stuck straight up.

The individual who had been inside that tube was what the locals were shooting at, although whether or not they had begun to shoot at it because the alien had come out of the pod, or because the alien in question attacked them, Ranma couldn't say. And this was no alien like the ones in those chest-burster movies that he and Kara had watched. Rather, this alien was humanoid, specifically a humanoid girl.

She looked around their age, perhaps a little older? Maybe a little younger? Who knew. Her hair was vibrantly orange, far more orange than the color most people used when talking about orange-haired people, making Ranma think of anime characters rather than normal redheads or ginger-haired folk. Her eyes were jade, glowing with power, which sputtered and gave out occasionally as Ranma paused there, taking in her impressive height and build. She was dressed in what looked like a form-fitting sports bra and pants combo that looked as if someone had taken the idea of boy pants and then molded them to her body as if she had been dipped in tar, outlining nearly everything in a way that made Ranma feel secondhand embarrassment for the first time in a long while.

The skin that was thus shown off was an orange color, very much not a human color, especially not with that hair. It was equally clear that the alien girl wasn't dressed that way

willingly, because the girl's arms were chained together. Another chain had been around her feet, but that had been snapped cleanly near the manacles on her ankles.

This didn't seem to have stopped her from attacking the local humans, or from responding to their attack; again, Ranma wasn't sure. This was America, and there were a lot of guns here, and Ranma figured people might've become trigger-happy pretty quickly. She was swinging her chain around angrily every which way, but hadn't killed anyone yet, which Ranma knew, if she was as strong as he was, she could have.

Deciding that he'd examined the scene enough, Ranma jumped down, landing in front of one guy who was about to take a bead on the side of the girl's head. Crushing his gun with one hand, Ranma delivered a slap to the back of the head of another man, sending him sprawling, and that man's gun skittering away along the concrete. "Enough of that, you idiots! Can't you see she's got chains on her?!"

At that point, Ranma was forced to duck under a blow from the chains, only to be clobbered in the side of his thigh by the next, which upended into the ground with a grunt of pain. "Damn! That hurt!" *And I can already tell she's almost as strong as Kara is when she doesn't hold back. Ugh, this had better not be the start of a trend, or I'm going to get annoyed.*

He rolled forward, taking another blow from the chain, but smacking it to the side in turn, skidding before flipping up and over another blow. Grabbing at the chain, Ranma tugged hard, pulling the girl off-balance as he landed, then ducking under another blow and racing forward, his legs glowing with ki for a second. Then he was in her guard, smashing out with punches and kicks. "I don't suppose you have some kind of communication device or something embedded in you, like in some of the sci-fi anime's I've seen? Can you understand me? Can I take you to my leader? Well, I don't know exactly who **my** leader is, really, but the thought's there."

Ranma spoke between blows, which the girl shielded or dodged as best she could, although she was hampered by the long chains, which Ranma noticed were actually quite a good deal longer than the escape pod and must've been incredibly difficult to get into that thing with. However, Ranma's blows weren't doing much yet. She simply moved with every blow, snarling and growling; a knee coming up almost faster than Ranma could follow.

Luckily, his continued training with Kara had allowed him to follow it easily enough, and he pushed off of it up into his own knee to the head, sending the girl staggering backwards, and following up with a kick to the head again before he was forced to twist away from a blow from the chain.

Ducking under the chain, he flashed out one of his fingers up into it, shouting out, "Bakusai Tenketsu revised, Steel Shatter!"

Ranma's technique shattered the chain, sending most of it collapsing to the ground behind him, while the woman's eyes widened in shock, even as Ranma lashed out with a kick. She blocked it, but Ranma was fine with that, using the impetus of the kick to flip away,

grabbing up the chain. *That took more ki than it should have for something so thin, definitely some high-tech metal in this thing.*

With that, he lashed out with the chain towards the woman, who blocked it with her own, before wrapping the remaining chain around her arm and charging forward with a shout. Ranma, however, simply leapt over the woman, whereupon she tried to jump up after him, only succeeding to a certain degree, as something in her manacles pulled her back to the ground.

She was forced to block another blow from the chain, then Ranma was in her face again. With the secondary chain wrapped around her forearm and upper arm, she didn't have any guard to get under, so to speak, but Ranma's overall speed and swiftness still seemed to take the woman aback, and Ranma pressed her hard back to the ground. He continued to remain in the air, using her return blow's momentum to do so as he had for most of his life.

For her part, Koriand'r, princess of Tamaran, was not having a good day. That was true for every day since her older sibling had decided to sell her into slavery as part of her plan to take over the planet after Komand'r had been displaced as heir.

Despite being beaten down, experimented on, and abused in various ways, the lord of Warworld, whom her older sister had made a deal with for his aid in taking over Tamaran, hadn't fully broken Koriand'r just yet, waiting for her to turn eighteen. He was many things, but he wasn't a pedophile. Warworld also surprisingly had extremely stringent laws against taking advantage of someone before they came of age among their people. If he had taken advantage of her prior to her age of majority, the man, whose name was Mogul, would've lost a lot of face, and on a planet like Warworld, that was tantamount to being removed from power.

Koriand'r had known what was coming for years. Thus, she had made plans to break out, and she acted on them at the right moment, commandeering a shuttle and heading towards Earth, a planet known to have a surprising number of heroes well known across the local star systems, up to and including her own people.

However, in her planning, Koriand'r had forgotten a simple fact: she didn't actually speak the local language. When she had crashed here in this strange town, the locals had begun to fire at her with small arms even as she tried to communicate, their emotions blaring hatred or fear at her.

Koriand'r and indeed her entire people were almost uniformly empaths, able to sense the emotions and those around them to a certain extent, and Koriand'r hadn't taken being attacked that well. Now, however, she was faced with one of the local heroes, who seemingly took offense that she had attacked the locals.

However, while the crowd of people around them were angry, furious or, strangely, intrigued, all she was getting from the pigtailed warrior was an impressively large amount of enjoyment in the fight. There was no hate there, no fear. That and the sheer delight he was

taking in the fight was throwing the Tamaran princess off something fierce, as it wasn't something she'd ever seen or felt before.

She had seen the people enjoy fighting and hurting, or fighting and winning in the constant tournaments of Warworld, yet that was it. They'd only seemed to be enjoying the fight, most of the time; their emotions hadn't matched that visible reaction. Just like with most of her own people, what they felt and what they showed were very different. With this fellow, it was all in one. She could sense some underlying concern, not for himself, but for something else, but for the most part, all she was getting was simple enjoyment of the fight.

Koriand'r sidestepped the kick, only for his other foot to come around faster than she would've expected, forcing her to lean backwards quickly. At that point, Koriand'r decided to stop trying to analyze her opponent's emotions. It wasn't helping.

Continuing his twist, Ranma flicked around, sending the chain into the orange-skinned woman's chest with enough force to send her staggering. She didn't look like she was in pain, though, and came back with a roaring punch with her own chain-laden fist, which Ranma hopped up and over, lashing out with a kick, only for the woman to quickly rotate her arm, sending a bit of the chain up into Ranma's back inside, sending him skittering sideways through the air. He hit and rolled. Flipping up and over a car, he kicked up and off a side of a building, coming back in quickly.

When his opponent raised that same arm to block his blow, Ranma decided to remove that. He again used the Steel Shatter technique, shattering her chain, although again it took a great deal more of his ki than it should have, enough that he was open for a blow that caught him in the jaw and sent him flying.

However, the orange-skinned woman took quite a bit of damage from that explosion of steel in her face, and her face was cut up in several places. Her top had also been shredded, causing several men nearby to whistle in sudden interest, desire and approval.

Ranma rolled, then blinked and stared. The girl's top was more like bits and pieces of clothing now, showing that it had indeed been the alien equivalent of a sports bra, leaving the majority of her breasts exposed. They were quite big, those breasts. Now, some of that was due to the girl's size. Despite something in her face and body language telling Ranma they were of an age, she was taller than his male body by at least an inch and her breasts were certainly... proportional, being bigger than Kara or Ranma's and maybe even with what Ranma could remember of Diana. What was equally obvious, excluding one surprisingly dark, purple nipple, was that the destruction of her shirt had removed a great deal of the woman's support, as her breasts bounced wildly as the orange-skinned woman got her feet under her and came charging back towards Ranma.

His face flushing crimson, Ranma waved his hands wildly, shouting, "Wait, wait, wait!"

The woman didn't stop, and Ranma was forced to flip up and over her next blow, which shattered the concrete underneath. However, midair, Ranma reached into his ki space and flung a shirt towards her.

Koriand'r's hand flicked upwards, grabbing the piece of clothing that came towards her, blinking, then looking over at her opponent, who mimed putting it on quickly, to the course of shouts of "Hey, come on man!" and "Really, gonna rob us of the goods ya pussy?!" from several other people nearby.

Ranma turned to them all and shouted, "Get bent, you losers! This isn't a fucking strip show, piss off!" *I thought Asians were bad for stopping and staring at martial arts matches when they should be hightailing it. Or is it because these people think I'm some kind of hero that they want to stay and fight and watch? Oh, and now they're taking pictures, lovely.*

Blinking, the woman looked between the shirt in her hands and across at her opponent, whose emotions had shifted, no longer wanting to fight her, but being embarrassed for her. For a second, that was strange to the Tamaranean princess. Body modesty was very much not a thing among her people, and as a slave, she had no say in what she wore, so she had developed even less taboo about it.

However, as she stood there, Koriand'r felt the lust and desire from the crowd. That wasn't nearly as acceptable to her as the admiration she had felt from a few of the watchers before this, and reminded her too much of the oily, anticipatory feeling she got whenever Mogul or any of his people came by her gilded cage on Warworld. These men were looking at her in the same manner. They didn't see Koriand'r but rather simply a random female, one they wished to see conquered rather than having any softer feelings for her.

While Koriand'r was not shamed of her form, she firmly felt it should still be her decision to show her body, rather than the vagaries of a fight, and the fact that she was wearing substandard clothing.

With that in mind, Koriand'r quickly pulled the shirt up and over her head, blinking a little bit as she realized it had to be for a woman given how well it fit. Wondering idly where her opponent had come up with it, she looked over at him. He grinned, winked, then hopped up and over to a nearby rooftop, giving her a sign that could only mean that he wanted her to follow him. Whether or not to finish the fight or get away from the locals, Koriand'r didn't know, but she was willing to go along with either.

Ignoring the clicking of some strange flash-creating devices all around her, Koriand'r bunched her legs and leapt upwards, grimacing a little bit at the pull from her still intact manacles. The things were sapping her energy even without the chain, but a warrior didn't always get a chance to choose when to fight. If this pigtailed person thought he could face her in battle, even with his handicap, he would need to think again, the princess thought as she flung out a punch, forcing her enemy to block, the fight resuming.

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Elsewhere in the city, Cassie was also charging towards the disturbance. Unlike Kara and Ranma, she had been inside the apartment that she and Diana shared at the time and had actually been about to watch an action movie. At first, she thought the crash might have come from the movie, but the explosive shockwave from whatever had crashed into the city shattered that thought. By the time the glass finished tinkling down to the streets below, Cassie had leapt up and out of the now open window, landing on a building across the way and staring all around, until she spotted what had to be some kind of smoke in the distance.

Forgetting for a moment any idea of laying low until Diana came back and they could create her super-persona, Diana raced across the rooftops in that direction. In the distance, she could see Green Arrow also moving in that direction and waved at the man. He waved back, then pointed at something behind her. Cassie turned quickly, only to hear a Dopplering shout of, “Cassssssieeee!” coming closer.

All thought of the disaster that whatever had hit the city might’ve caused went out of Kara’s head the moment she saw her friend, and she had turned her flight over the city into a dive-bomb, crashing into Cassie just as Cassie turned. Recognizing that voice, instead of throwing out a punch, Cassie’s arms automatically went around Kara in a hug, even as both of them were pushed off the roof by Kara’s charge.

The two super-powered girls landed with enough force to shatter the concrete underneath them, but Cassie didn’t care at all, not about that, nor about the fact that people had turned from staring into the distance towards the smoke. All that Cassie cared about was that this was **Kara** and she was **here!** “KARA!!! By Hera’s righteous wrath, Kara!”

“I missed you too!”

“Did, did those two girls fall from the roof just now?” one of the locals asked another.

“Yep.”

“Thank God it’s not me,” another woman muttered, shaking her head. “I was about to question my medication for a moment there.”

The two girls heard none of it, hugging one another and laughing wildly. As hard as it had been for Kara to move back in with the Kents, to have no friends for months, it’d been equally hard for Cassie. Even after Diana had come back and taken her with her back into Man’s World, her happiness had waned when Diana had to go away. Now, here was her friend, and that just made everything better.

“Where the hell, how, you didn’t call me!” Cassie shouted into Kara’s ear.

“No one gave me your number. Heck, I didn’t know until a few days after they all left for that disaster in space that you were even in Man’s World! My cousin and Wonder Woman are both going to get it for that, but at least I knew where you were,” Kara nearly babbled, still hugging Cassie just as tightly as Cassie was hugging her. “And then I made a new friend, who convinced me to try and travel here, and oh my word, you’ll never guess who it was.”

“Who?” Cassie asked automatically, pushing Kara away slightly so that she could look up into her friend’s face. Their legs were still kind of wrapped around one another, but Kara willingly sat up on her friend’s stomach, laughing wildly as she looked down at her, her blond hair cascading down either side of her pretty face.

“You remember that boy you told me about, the one who wound up on your island when he was young? Well, I met him! I accidentally kind of sort of showed my superpowers in front of him, and he just kind of took it in stride, and then, well, we became friends, and then I name-dropped you, and Ranma knew you, so—”

“Ranma?!” If Cassie had been ecstatic a moment ago, now she was wide-eyed and gleeful. “Seriously? And, and he remembers me too? And he’s, he’s here, where is he?”

Before Kara could reply, a droll voice interrupted them. “Girls, I hate to interrupt, but could we at least figure out what’s happened to my city before the two of you have your reunion. And if you keep on having your reunion, as you are now, don’t expect me to stop anyone from filming it?”

Blinking, Kara and Cassie became aware of their surroundings again, noting that they’d drawn a bit of a crowd and were indeed being recorded. For a moment, that didn’t register, then their current position did. With both of Kara’s legs to either side of Cassie’s, their clothing rumpled, and Kara’s hands on Cassie’s shoulders, it certainly was... suggestive.

Kara leaped away, blushing and pushing herself to her feet, quickly pulling Cassie up. When they were both standing, she couldn’t stop herself from flinging her arms around her friend, who did the same. “We have so much to talk about!”

“I know, but now isn’t the time. Green A---” Cassie began, before Kara twisted, staring upwards into the sky. Cassie followed her eyes, stepping back from her friend, as Green Arrow then the rest of the people around them, did the same. Above, several comets were descending from on high, not at an angle like the first one, but straight down.

“That, are those the missiles Wonder Woman’s told me about?” Cassie began, knowing Kara had better sight than she did.

“No, I think those are drop ships,” Kara guessed, scowling. “They’re coming down under power and slowing as I watch.”

“You mean to tell me this is a full invasion?” Green Arrow demanded, drawing both girls’ attention to him.

“I don’t know, it could be a rescue operation for the first thing that came down into the city, but if so, well, whoever’s aboard certainly isn’t friendly. Once those things hit, they’re not going to be exactly to anything nearby, no matter who’s aboard,” Kara explained, becoming completely serious once more.

Glaring up at the things coming down into Star City, into **his** city, Green Arrow shook his head. "All right, I'm deputizing you both. Blondie number one, do you have a name you want to go by?"

"Don't do anything 'girl' related," Kara interjected quickly. "It won't age well."

Looking over at her friend and needing to fight hard to fight the reflex to reach out and hug her again, Cassie frowned for a second before shrugging. "She's got a point, I suppose. Call me Nyctimene," she decided, naming the owl familiar of the Goddess Athena.

"Good. Blondie number two?"

For a second, Kara panicked, then shrugged. "Call me Shielder for now. I'll think up something more permanent in the future, I guess."

"Fine, whatever. Both of you are obviously more physically inclined than I am. Shielder, see what you can do to intercept those things. Knock them off course without damaging them too much, if you can, but keep them from causing more damage to the city. If this is some kind of rescue operation or something, maybe we can talk everything down. Nyctimene, get to the original crash site and see if there's any need for super strength-type help for anyone there. If not, intercept any of the drop ships that Shielder misses."

The two girls nodded, and Cassie leapt up onto the nearest rooftop, then raced away. Similarly, Kara flew straight upwards and then zoomed out of sight towards the nearest drop pod.

Green Arrow watched them go, then shook his head, looking over his shoulder at his quiver of arrows before sighing. *Fuck if I don't feel inadequate right now.* "Let's just hope whoever's on those drop ships is a lot less impressive than those two." With that, he shot a rope3 arrow up onto a new nearby roof, zooming up and away following after the pair.

OOOOOOO

Ranma and the alien girl had fought their way across several rooftops, then into a park, which quickly became abandoned as the two of them started rearranging the landscape a bit with their missed punches and ki-enhanced kicks. Ranma was starting to feel it a little bit; the girl was faster, stronger, and much more durable than he was normally, which forced him to use his ki to reinforce every move he made. Luckily, this wasn't the first time he'd had to do that, and the weeks spent training with Kara had actually pushed him to an entirely new level of ki mastery when it came to physical enhancement. But even so, he knew that he was starting to be worn down.

For her part, Koriand'r had begun to smile the moment they had left the large buildings behind. She had always preferred nature, trees and living things, and that, coupled with the fact that her opponent still wasn't feeling any animosity or anger towards her, had actually started to cut through her ongoing desire to simply put him down and get away, to hide somewhere.

So much so that when Ranma paused and stared upwards, she paused too. Looking upwards, she growled angrily. Numerous small craft were coming down, racing down into the city, and Koriand'r's knew why. "They're already after me!" she shouted in her own tongue.

Ranma didn't know what she had said but felt it didn't really need any interpretation. "Let me guess, they're not friendly. To you or us."

The two combatants looked at one another, then, as one of the drop pods began to close on their position, shifted away from one another, still staring at it, their own fight suspended for now as they waited for the newcomers. One shuttle had already shifted in their direction.

Koriand'r's pursuers had found her.

OOOOOOO

High above the city, a gigantic sphere the size of the moon began to descend. It was only its own gravitic negators that stopped its slow descent into the gravity well of the third planet out from the sun from shattering the planet, and that only at the word of its leader. Such destruction had its place, obviously, but now was not it. No, this planet, Mogul the warlord had heard some rumors about this planet before this, about the number of so-called heroes it could call on, and about one in particular. One called Superman, who had apparently been strong enough to get the attention of the dread Darkseid.

If that one is around, perhaps I will need to get personally involved. But for now, this is simply a smash and grab, Mogul thought with some amusement. It'd been many, many decades since he'd needed to lead one of those. He stared at the map of the city where the princess's purloined shuttle had crashed, his lips pulling back in a snarl. "Find the Tamaran princess. Kill anyone who gets in your way. Destroy anything in your path. She will be returned to me, or this whole world will feel my wrath!"

End Chapter

So here we've got the last of the quartet-to-be. Check out the new addition to this collection for more info on how I'll be portraying the girls and Ranma. As for the action to come, yeah, the next chapter... maybe more than one... is gonna go hard in terms of combat. Hope you enjoyed this.