

Hey everybody, here is the next chapter of Journey Gone Astray.

With this chapter, I am trying to cram a lot of 'getting to know you' stuff in a single chapter. There's a lot of talking here, and I hope that it all comes off as interesting, even without my normal heaping of combat to go along with it. I know in a lot of stories this kind of thing would be glossed over or happen in the background, but given how central the Kara/Ranma relationship is to the story, I didn't think it was a good idea.

This has been edited by Hiryō and a bit via Grammarly by yours truly. Not all, however. Every time I Grammarly a chapter, my soul dies a little bit...

And since Hiryō pointed this out, this sign // means someone is speaking a language that not everyone in the scene can understand.

Chapter 3: Getting to Know You, Super/Martial(~~Teen~~) Style

While her first best friend was meeting his eventual successor, Cassie was having issues. While she had been prepared for Man's World in a lot of ways, one area she had not been ready for was the appliances. The various appliances that were central to cooking in particular confused her a lot. This was why Diana was staring at Cassie, her gaze deadpan as they stood in the kitchen, their wet clothing hugging their forms in a most indecent manner. "What... did you... do?" the older amazon growled.

"It said microwave ready! How was I supposed to know you had to remove the aluminum tray first!" Cassie protested.

"And the dishwasher?"

"I er... okay, there I will admit I just didn't close it properly. Or make certain the plates were latched in place. And I might not have followed the order for how much detergent to add," Cassie answered, shrinking in on herself with each word.

As she looked at her now melted microwave, the sudsy water all over the floor, and the rest of the mess that had been her kitchen before fire and sprinkler worked together to decimate it, Diana sighed. "Pizza it is then for tonight. And tomorrow, I will explain what the microwave really is for. For now, I suggest you start cleaning up." With that she left, making no move whatsoever to help her young charge to do so.

With a growl, Cassie glared around her, before sighing and turning back to cleaning once more. *I hope Kara doesn't get as embarrassed by all these Man's World things as I do.*

OOOOOO

Kara still looked embarrassed as the duo arrived back at the road where the tractor had smashed down on the road with such tremendous force. She was also looking at Ranma every few steps, her expression going from confused to thankful, as if wondering why he wasn't shocked by her abilities and also thankful for it. Perhaps with a dash of 'who the heck is this guy' thrown in for good measure.

This was in fact the case. *Why the heck isn't he panicking about my flying? About my, my sneezing him into the air? Heck, he's dealing with it as if it's an everyday thing. Wait, does that mean he's a hero of some kind? The Amazons didn't know anything about other heroes and Cousin Kal hasn't mentioned any foreign heroes.*

Beyond that there was also something else bothering Kara, a niggling at the back of her mind. *And why do I think I've heard the name Ranma before? Drat it, I'm horrible with names!*

As they arrived back at the road Ranma called her out on the odd looks Kara was sending his way, snickering lightly. "You don't gotta worry about me, if you have some kind of secret identity or something, that's your own business. I'm not going to share it with anyone or anything like that."

"It's not that! Well, okay, a bit of it is that, and um, thank you. I, I suppose I can take your word with it, but I doubt my cou-er, other people I know will be so happy about it. I'm more embarrassed by how you saw it and my er, nearly killing you with the tractor."

"Eh, I doubt it would have killed me, unless it crushed my head and heart, and I'm too tough for that" Ranma shrugged. "It'd be hella painful, and it'd take me a while to heal from the damage it could do to me. And I'd be freaking starving afterward but meh."

Kara's eyes narrowed at the lackadaisical, almost lazy way Ranma talked thrown by it so much that the words didn't register. When they did, her eyes widened and she stumbled to a halt. "Then are you another hero or an alieEEE!!" She clamped both hands over her mouth, cursing internally. *Damn it, Kara, most humans don't know about aliens! And just blurting out about him being a hero, what are you thinking!*

"Hah!" Ranma shook his head. "Nope, I ain't a hero, and I ain't an alien. Heh, nor am I a magical guy, girl, or creature. I'm just a martial artist who discovered ki and how to use it consciously early. Those two things a very separate, and both insanely equally important."

"Uh, I see... I don't understand, but okay..." Kara said, hoping that Ranma would just skip over the whole alien thing.

No such luck, however. "And is there a reason that alien sprang to yer mind? Is that how you have your powers?"

“AKKK! Er, I mean,” she paused, trying to think of how to explain Kara’s powers and everything else without giving away the fact that she was related to Superman and exactly what kind of alien she was.

“Just tell me this, are you here to conquer the world? Turn us all into blondes?” Ranma tried to keep a straight face but failed.

Kara laughed at that, shaking her head, and seeing that Ranma didn’t care about her alienness, she stuck out her arms like a zombie she had seen in a strange movie with Uncle Jon. “BLONDE, you will be BLONDE!”

Rolling his eyes, Ranma gave Kara a thumbs up. “In that case, I don’t have a problem with you keeping your secrets. Now come on, let’s see if we can move this thing without you needing to sneeze on it.”

Kara blinked, then realized with a smirk that Ranma didn’t actually realize the full implications of her powers, her earlier apprehension about a stranger knowing about her disappearing under a wicked sense of grin. *He’s only seen me fly and sneeze. Heh, this should be good.*

Having knelt down at the side of the crater containing the tractor, Ranma didn’t notice her change in expression as he examined the wheels on the large machine and the crater itself. “Eessh, this is gonna take a bit of concrete to fix, and some dirt too. It’s a lucky thing this road isn’t used all that often. Where does it go anyway?”

“Well, that way goes into Smallville, the local town. The other way...um, I think it is a really, really long way to the bypass or something? The highway takes you to Nevada eventually,” Kara seemed to hesitate, the shrug. “I think, anyway.”

Ranma tried to bring up what he knew of American geography and murmured, “That doesn’t sound right, but whatever.” He then moved to the back of the tractor, looking over his shoulder at her as he crouched down, saying, “Well, if you can’t help getting this out of the way, I suggest you move a bit. I’m going to try and see if I can lift it out of the crater at least. Wonder of wonders, it looks like the wheels and axle are okay, but...”

“Oh, I can help,” Kara said her feeling of looking forward to this growing as she felt as if Ranma was making fun of her. She moved to the other side and crouched down as Ranma did, but when he began to count, she simply lifted the tractor up out of the crater. To her, it barely weighed anything.

Ranma’s jaw dropped, and as Kara shifted the tractor to one side, he simply stood gawking. *H, how much does that thing weigh!? I can maybe lift a car, maybe a bit more than a ton if I use my ki to reinforce my strength. But a freaking tractor like that has to weigh at least five tons. And she just deadlifted it without any buildup! Hell, it barely looks like she is trying.*

Kara set it down, actually performing a little fist bump. "So, hurricane sneezes you can handle but draw the line at super strength?"

"Superstrength at that level I draw a line at, especially coming from a twig of a girl," Ranma muttered.

Kara squawked in outrage at what she could tell was an insult. "What did you just call me!?"

"Well, can you blame me?! I could maybe move it but certainly wouldn't be able to do so easily!" Ranma waved wildly at the tractor. "Come on, girl, there's a limit to what ki can do for me, and that is well beyond it." *Not beyond my new magical form, which I am still having trouble remembering. Still, it's damn impressive.* "Don't suppose you have any exercise tips for me?" he added jokingly.

"Heh, um, nope, it's all-natural," Kara shot back. She had gotten something from the strength training the Amazons had put them through, but not nearly as much as Cassie or the Amazons. But what it really built up was understanding her growing strength under Sol's yellow sun and endurance in terms of using that strength.

"Tsk, now I am jealous." Ranma pouted, only half joking.

Kara snorted and set the tractor down in front of the crater. This caused Ranma to look at it, and forgetting his annoyance for a moment, he hopped up onto the tractor. "So, what were you doing with this thing anyway?"

"Uncle Jon was about to show me how to drive it," Kara grumbled. "He said that if I learned how to drive a tractor, anything else would be child's play." She looked up at where Ranma sat in the chair, clasping her hands together hopefully. "I don't suppose you're going to say that it's going to be okay without repairs. Are you?"

"Eh, let's see about that," Ranma answered, surprising her. He pulled the keys out of the ignition, which had cut off at some point during its midair tumble. He then moved forward onto the front of the tractor, pulling the engine housing up, frowning as he looked inside. "Darn it, I've never worked on one of these. I worked on a boat engine, and a motorcycle several times." *Thank you Lara, your adventure certainly taught me a lot of weird info.* "But I don't think that's going to exactly carry over entirely here."

With a small push from her legs, Kara landed next to him, staring inside the engine coiling as well, her eyes glowing red for a second as she did. "There's some kind of wire out of place, I think, a little circular thing larger at one end than the other is out of place, a pipe seems broken, there is a leak of some kind into the interior and several small parts are out of place."

“... you just stared through the engine, didn’t you?” Ranma said flatly, a shiver going through him at the possible implications. “Can you do that to me too?”

“Um, that depends on what you mean. I can see your skeleton, and I could see if you were wearing a gun or something like that, but if you mean just seeing under your clothing, which is a no,” Kara replied candidly, understanding what Ranma was worried about and flushing a tiny bit at the implications, having heard the same question from Cassie.

Ranma breathe the faint sigh of relief. “Huh, that sounds useful. Again, I don’t suppose that’s something you can teach someone else?”

“Sorry, no. As far as I know, you have to be born with it.” *By which I mean be a Kryptonian, and then spend a lot of time underneath a yellow sun,* Kara thought with a wan little chuckle.

With a shrug, Ranma stuck his hand inside his ki pocket, causing Kara to frown, not having seen anything inside of it. Her eyes widened a second later as he pulled out a set of tools, setting them to one side. “There’s a martial arts construction technique to remove or put in screws, but I never saw the point of it. The rest though is really good stuff, hugely applicable. I swear that school should be famous, but whatever.”

“How did you do that? Where did those tools come from? I should have seen them!” Kara exclaimed.

“Eh, short answer, this goes back to my ki comment. I can consciously control my own ki, I think one of my friends called it bio electricity or something. Whatever. Important thing is I can control mine. For a longer answer, we’d be here a while and I’d have to explain a few things to lead up to it.”

Again, Ranma’s accent threw her for a second, but Kara got the gist of what he was saying and shook her head. “I really don’t want that. I’m already going to be in big trouble with Uncle Jon for what happened with the tractor. The fact that you saw me using my powers is going to make that even worse.” Ranma looked over at her as he finished pulling out a segment of the engine, she had no words for and Kara watched as his eyes slid down and to the side.

When Kara realized that meant he was looking down at the road, she sighed, muttering under her breath, “Drat it,” before saying louder, “He’s standing behind me isn’t he?”

“Somewhat old guy, just past middle-age, looks pretty fit, dressed like a farmer? Glasses and white hair? Stands with a certain... what’s that word that means like respectability or something, but begins with a G?” Ranma snapped his fingers, trying to think of the word.

“Gravitas, although I wouldn’t say I’ve got that kind of thing,” Jon Kent said, cocking his head to one side as he looked up at the teens standing on either side of his tractor’s front.

Which itself was next to a large crater. It didn't take him more than a moment to realize what was happening here, although the stranger was a definite complication. "I don't know any Asians living around here. What's your name, youngster?"

"Just passing through, sir. The name's Ranma," Ranma replied, removing the engine block and handing it over to Kara. "Okay, so I can see the tank is battered, but not cracked, that's good, but the side of the engine block is staved in, a piston is broken, and a whole mess of wires have been torn loose. The engine, er housing I think it's called, is also battered, and so are the cooling pipes and a bit more. Most of that can be fixed, I think..."

"And I think I'll be the judge of that, young man," Jon said, moving to climb up, doing so quickly. To peer at the engine block and into the housing before looking at his niece with a wry smile. "And I think we'll leave off any tractor lessons for you until you do something about that allergy of yours, Kara. Now, would one of you mind telling me what happened here?"

"That's all you, o tornado creator," Ranma said, tapping Kara on the shoulder, before pushing his upper body down into the engine housing. His hands began to glow for a second, concentrating on his fingers as he shifted around, heating one bit of a pipe leading into the cooling system softening the metal before gently pulling it back into shape.

Since this was blocked by the side of the engine housing to Kara and Jon, they didn't see it, and Kara sighed, explaining what had happened. Hearing that Ranma had seen Kara's powers, he sighed, but had already figured that would be the case. "I don't like it Kara, and you're going to get into trouble with this one. Still, what's done is done, and there isn't anything the likes of us can do about it." *Not until Clark arrives and asks Batman or one of the others for some kind of memory erasure device anyway.*

"I know, Uncle Jon, but I think I lucked out here, Ranma might've seen me, sure, but he has his own powers too!" Kara exclaimed. "He has something called ki, and he says he has super healing, and he seems pretty strong too and has this weird expanding pocket thing."

"Among other stuff," Ranma said pulling himself out of the engine housing. "Okay, so I think I did all I could with just my hands and ki in there. One part, the radiator is just smashed through, I could maybe bend it back into shape, but that will take a bit. I also really don't trust that engine tank. Kara?"

Kara obliged quickly, while Jon peered into the engine housing, nodding his head as he spotted where Ranma had apparently welded things back into place. Other bits of metal also looked to be cooling and Jon wondered if Ranma had some kind of heat-vision like Clark and Kara did.

"It looks like it does have a few cracks in the interior, not all the way through though, at the points which are dented. Damn, there's no way this is going to be fixable here, is it?"

“Eh, not really. I would want to test each bit before we put the engine back in,” Ranma gestured toward where Kara was holding the engine block under one arm as if the four-hundred plus piece of metal weighed next to nothing. “I also think a replacement cylinder would work way better than one bent back into shape. At least by me. You could probably do it if ya have, like, super-sight too.”

“Yep, I could do it,” Kara was eager to help anyway she could, forgetting about keeping the breadth of her powers secret. “Just tell me what to do.”

“Here now,” Jon cautioned. “As grateful as I am for your help with this young man, I have to say I’d rather make my own survey of it back at my farm.”

Ranma nodded agreeably but added, “In that case, let’s make sure the tires are all right. And the axles, so we know it’s alright to move it more.”

Jon nodded firmly, but when Kara opened her mouth, he waved her to silence. The two men hopped down and got under the machine, where Jon grilled Ranma a bit about what he thought of the tractor and what they were seeing. His answers, combined with the work Ranma had already done, convinced Jon that the younger man knew what he was talking about. They popped back out, and Jon said, “Well, it’s good to be moved without doing more damage, at least. Let’s get this back to the farm. There’s no point in trying to repair it out here, especially since we might have a spare radiator somewhere in the barn. At least we could scavenge the old tractor for parts.”

“That only leaves the giant crater,” Ranma muttered, staring at it. “I don’t suppose you’ve got some power to melt the edges together, do ya, Kara? There are bits missing, but if we can do that and lay down more dirt underneath, we can probably repair it.”

Kara blinked at that, then she and Uncle Jon watched as Ranma seemed to pull various large bags out of nowhere, one labeled dry concrete and the other asphalt.

“Where did you pull that stuff come from?” Jon scowled, thinking this boy might be some magic user or something. He had heard Kara speaking about the magic that the Amazons routinely used but knew that magic was a threat to Clark and Kara thanks to a few of Clark’s adventures over the years since putting on the cape. Jon was also a Christian, and while he had reconciled himself with the idea of aliens easily enough, magic didn’t sit well with him even if he approved of the people who used it.

“Ranma said it was something about ki like I mentioned before,” Kara interjected helpfully, moving forward to hold a tub that Ranma had just pulled out of his pocket somehow steady as he poured in the cement. “He said it was something like biological energy.”

Ranma nodded. “That’s right, I can manipulate my ki to a certain degree. And I’ve built it up to the point where I can do quite a lot with it.”

“That sounds mystic, I suppose, rather than magic,” Jon snorted, still frowning at Ranma, his shoulders a little tense. “You sound Japanese, by the way.”

“Eh, I guess I am.” Ranma eyed the other man thoughtfully. “Ya don’t look old enough to have served in WW2, so, Vietnam?” Jon blinked, and Ranma shrugged. “Ya got some burn marks on your fingers. I’ve seen them on vets before. Beyond that, it was a wild guess.”

“Aye, Vietnam. I grew up on stories about the Pacific war,” Jon admitted. “I don’t know if I’ve ever actually talked to a Japanese person before, but I gotta admit the stories about who they fought the war stuck with me even through Vietnam and seeing what the Viet Cong were capable of. Heck, that just made those stories more believable.”

“World War 2,” Kara interjected, humming thoughtfully. “I remember reading about that vaguely in a book Clark gave me, but we didn’t go into it much. Apparently, we’re supposed to in high school, so maybe something at that school will actually grab my attention.”

The fact she had not yet read ahead in that class was left unsaid, although Jon understood. He hoped that class at least would be able to give Kara something to concentrate on. Or else she might be quite miserable in high school regardless of how she was accepted by her schoolmates. *Which is a whole other bag of worms, according to Martha.*

Not understanding the full context of Kara’s comment, Ranma shrugged. “Long and short of it, Japan and America were on opposite sides. Japan was being a massive dickhead, wanting to conquer China, as if that wasn’t a horrible freaking mistake given the difference in our population sizes. Why the two went to war is something you could argue about, but me, I’ve been to China, I’ve been to Korea, Vietnam and other places. I know how horribly my nation acted at the time, and while a lot of my countrymen still get a little annoyed about the war and don’t like to acknowledge the things we did, I know Japan was in the wrong at the time, and it ain’t that big a deal ta me. World War 2 is history, and frankly, if I was an American or Chinese at the time, I’d have fought us too.”

That seemed to take the old older man aback, while Kara’s eyes narrowed at Ranma’s accent shifting again, and Ranma snorted, shaking his head. “Heh, I’ve spent a lot of time outside of Japan Old Man, including in China. While I would say that their own history isn’t all suns and roses...”

That won a bark of laughter from Jon, and Ranma went on with his habitual crooked smile. “It at least mentions a lot of the stuff Japan did in the war. And I honestly don’t think you’d recognize Japan these days. America tearing our spine out and beating us over the head with our failings changed a lot of our culture. Most of it for the better, I suppose.” He paused, adding, “Maybe. Most of us don’t worship the Emperor anymore so much as the idea of money and advancement, although ancestor worship and family ties are still super important, and the whole code of bushido is still around, though it isn’t as blindly about obeying the government and your higher ups any longer.”

“Why do I think I’m only understanding half the terms used in this conversation, and none of the context?” Kara demanded.

“History stuff. America and Japan were on different sides in the war, the Japanese atrocities made it really easy to understand who was the good guys and who was the bad guy. To say nothing about contrived reasons, sneak attacks and our attempt to conquer China.” Ranma shrugged, dumping the concrete in. “Stir that while I remove bits of the rubble.”

Jon, amused by the resources this Ranma fellow brought to bear and at the young man’s attitude, took over stirring the concrete as it began to churn. With that, Ranma and Kara both turned their attention to removing the shattered chunks of asphalt that had been made by the falling tractor.

Kara then showed off her eye-beam, melting the edges to merge together in places. “Wow, I can feel the heat off that, pretty damn impressive. I haven’t felt heat like that since I had the Phoenix Pill,” Ranma murmured, moving his hands near the beam, nearly making Kara jerk her eyes away.

“Watch it! and what’s a Phoenix pill.”

“Eh, old bit of I suppose ya could call it alchemy, which made me develop an immunity to hot temperatures. I once was hit by a fire attack, and it only singed away my clothing. Doubt it would stop that beam of yours, though,” Ranma mused. *Although maybe my other form would be able to take it? No way to tell, really. While I’ve trained with it, I haven’t exactly been able to push my magical body to its limits.*

“Where did you come up with something like that?” Kara asked, blinking in surprise. *And why do I think every time he talks about something like that or his ki ability, there are a lot of adventures behind it?*

“Eh, it comes from this group of Chinese Amazons I met and befriended,” Ranma said, missing the shocked look that crossed Kara and Jon’s faces, having set the next bit of asphalt down in place. “And ya might say I was forced to eat it because this old biddy named Cologne was a freaking troll of the first order... and still pissed at the fact me and her granddaughter hadn’t gotten together...”

The last was mumbled under his breath, but Kara still heard it, and although she wasn’t really all that good at human idioms, she understood this one, which caused her to snicker a bit. The other term, though, demanded an explanation. “Troll? Don’t tell me those are real too?”

“If they are, I haven’t met one. Although maybe, considering I just met a living cheat code, I will eventually find those kinds of monsters are out there too,” Ranma snorted.

“Hah, it takes one to know one, mister ‘I am walking around with a pocket dimension’,” Kara retorted.

The two continued to talk as they worked, with Kara asking Ranma about the Amazons. Ranma was very open about the Joketsuzoku, but not his affiliation with the other group of Amazons he had met, thinking that maybe he should keep that a secret given Wonder Woman was a hero, and they seemed to always want to keep their civilian identities a secret. *I don't get why, but I know she ain't going around calling herself princess Diana, so I suppose I should keep quiet about it.* In turn, Ranma didn't get much information out of Kara, although Jon mentioned his wife, and that they had a son, and that they were related, which was kind of confusing, since Jon seemed purely human.

As they talked, the concrete went down first underneath, with the asphalt set on top, the bits of rubble melted together at the edges. The rest were filled in by the asphalt as it melted under Kara's eye beams, then the whole thing was flattened by Ranma. When they were done, it didn't look as if a crater had ever existed there, despite its huge size.

“All done,” Ranma smiled and thrust his hand up towards Kara, who after a moment's hesitation realized what he wanted. “Oh right, high fives.” She reached up and clapped hands with him, hitting his hand just a bit too hard for a normal person, although Ranma didn't notice at all.

“How long have you spent on earth again?” Ranma snorted. “I think every nation high fives.”

Jon twitched at that, shooting Kara a warning look. He had stayed mostly silent, only interjecting when he sensed Kara was going to say something she shouldn't, offering what help he could. Instead, he mostly watched the two youngsters talk, grateful Kara was able to interact somewhat normally with someone her own age. But she just shrugged. “About a year and a half? But most of that I spent on a retreat away from most civilization to get a handle on my powers.”

“Ah, that makes sense, although I just call that training myself. And I certainly wouldn't stop after so short a time. My Pops might have been a waste of space, but he was right about one thing, training is for life.”

“But you don't have the power to lift tractors one-handed or sneeze and send them flying,” Kara teased. For some reason, she greatly enjoyed the pout that Ranma sent her way at that.

Jon had listened to all muttering, and as Kara began to giggle wildly, he asked, “By the way, Ranma, you didn't tell us what brings you to these parts. We're quite a way off the beaten path, you know.” Jon desperately wanted to know more about this young man. He seemed nice and very affable, if something of a rascal, but he needed to know more before deciding they

could trust him with the secret of Kara's powers, especially since if he ever met Clark in either persona, it wouldn't take long to put two and two together.

"Eh, I've just been traveling through America for a bit. I've been seeing the sights since I left my last job as a bodyguard," Ranma announced.

"Bodyguard? Is that because of that ki stuff? Can you do attacks or something like that?" Kara interrupted eagerly, her curiosity just as powerful as Jon's, if for a different reason.

Still, Jon was pleased when Ranma just nodded. "Eh, kind of? My ki gives me a leg up, but I've trained myself in the martial arts for a long, long time. My reflexes are insane, my speed way beyond what normal people can do, and my strength, well before I met Kara, I was actually kind of proud about my strength."

"Speaking of super strength," Jon said interrupting the two of them becoming aware they were out in the open right now. *I just have to praise the lord that no one's come by to this point.* "Considering that this area isn't part of my property, I don't suppose you'd be willing to carry the tractor back to our actual property, would you, Kara?"

Ranma watched Kara nod eagerly, and the two men watched as she lifted the tractor up, watching for anything that fell off. The tractor creaked a bit, but while one of the axles was indeed broken, and the brakes warped, nothing came off.

Jon breathed a sigh of relief at that, then snorted as he looked over at Ranma, who had slumped down, poking the ground with one finger. "Don't mind me I'll just you know mope here... I can destroy mountains, I can get in and out of heavily guarded criminal bases, I've slaughtered undead oni by the dozen, and a little slip of an alien girl is stronger than me."

"Don't mind it kid." Jon patted Ranma on the shoulder, deciding he was indeed some kind of oriental hero and deciding that made him at least a bit trustworthy. With that, and somewhat pleased to see Kara being so comfortable around him, Jon made a decision. "You seem a little handy with those hands of yours, Boyo. Don't suppose you'd be looking for work, would you?"

Ranma broke out of his momentary funk to look up at the older man, shrugging his shoulders. "It depends on if it's interesting. Like I said, all I'm doing at the moment is traveling. I mean, I want to see if I can find an old friend, but other than where she might be living, that's about all I can tell you about her."

Ranma didn't want to outright state that he knew Wonder Woman, figuring that was a kind of secret that he should keep, although he knew by this point that Kara was probably in the same hero business. *Or at least just starting out? I wonder if they've got some kind of apprenticeship organization or something going? Master and student maybe?*

Jon nodded understanding, but said seriously, "You know about Kara's powers, but they are a major secret. And frankly, I'd be more sanguine about letting you go your way if I knew you better." *And maybe Clark will stop by and he can erase your memory somehow if push comes to shove.*

Ranma blinked, then nodded. "Ah I get ya. You want me to work around your farm for a bit, get to know me doing it, so that you can figure out if you want to trust me or not. I'm sort of uncertain what would you do if I don't measure up, but whatever Like I said, I don't have anywhere specific to go right now. And maybe Kara and I can spar too, that could be fun."

Kara beamed, and moved off through the tall cornstalks, shouting over her shoulder, "Come on then! The farms this way."

A moment later, she was flying, with the tractor still held above her head and Ranma and Jon moved after her, Ranma pouting all the way to the amusement of the older man. This didn't stop Jon from plying him with questions, although he hadn't really learned much more about Ranma than he had already said by the time they got back to the farm. He knew now that Ranma had a mother who he got along with very well, didn't get along with his father, who had trained him, liked modern American Rock, and didn't know a lot about modern America, although he was something of a history buff.

Then he watched in shock as the first thing that Ranma did when they arrived back at the farm to find Kara tapping her foot on the ground as if impatient for them to arrive was to ease her away from the tractor. "Before we get to work repairing that thing more, let's see if I can lift it at all."

Kara snickered. "Don't burst a vessel or anything," she teased, causing Jon to frown.

She's getting too used to having other super-strong people around, he worried. All the acclimatization she's been doing since returning from Amazon Island is eroding. Still, if she can keep her control then I suppose letting slip with jokes like that in a controlled environment is okay...

His thoughts shuddered to a halt as Ranma placed his hands underneath the tractor from the side. He breathed in a bit, and, although neither of the others there could see it, he began to reinforce his muscles with ki before lifting.

Ranma was able to lift the tractor up to chest height before needing to set the thresher down again, gasping. "Woo, okay, so that was tough as heck. Might be possible to get to the point I can lift it, but that would take a lot of dedication on just muscle training. Blargh. I've never seen just weight lifting as nearly as important as sparring or learning new styles."

Seeing that, solidified in Jon's mind Ranma was indeed some kind of oriental hero, and he decided to be blunt about it, asking, "So which one are you?" Ranma looked at him quizzically, and Jon shrugged. "Which hero are you?"

"Heh, Kara said something like that earlier. But to quote her response to me questioning her about her tornado sneeze, I am not the hero you're looking for." That won him a chuckle from both his listeners as Jon recognized the original quote Kara had mangled. "Japan and the rest of Asia really don't have heroes like you are thinking of. We have wandering martial artists like me, although I will admit that kind of thing is really rare these days. Most martial artists of any skill have settled down in one place, teaching to crowds, letting their skills fade or just waste away. Sad. But not what is gonna happen to me."

Ranma shrugged his shoulders, then gestured over to a nearby barn. "So, let's go see your old tractor."

Jon nodded, leading the way, more confident than he was before about trusting Ranma as he watched him and Kara joke around with one another. The boy had a certain charisma, an easygoing air of friendliness and openness that was fun to see.

Moments later he became more impressed with Ranma's skills, as he easily took apart the old tractor, not asking questions about how it had been broken, even with the human sized warped area set into the side of it. That was why they had never gotten rid of it, the damage being too difficult to explain away. And then admittedly, he had forgotten about it, much like a lot of the other junk in this particular barn or up in their attic.

With Kara's willing help, it took the trio about an hour to pull the parts needed out, and then Ranma walked her through fixing the cylinders in the engine block, after which Ranma got to work repairing or replacing parts in the tractor. That took a bit more, as he wanted to test each part that had been jostled or dented, and the actual housing had to be straightened out, cracks melted back into one piece and the axle repaired, the brakes replaced and several other smaller bits straightened out or otherwise repaired.

When it came time to start the engine up, however, the tractor purred, and Jon cheered. "Well done, Ranma! That was an excellent job, the both of you. Now, I need to head out to get at least some of the harvest in. Kara, why don't you show Ranma into the barn, maybe he can fix up some of the older bits and bobs we have in there."

"Right Uncle Jon," Kara answered, ignoring Ranma's mutter of wanting to spar.

Both of them however were silenced as Ranma's stomach growled like a full pride of angry lions. That, combined with Ranma's suddenly sheepish expression caused Kara to collapse into peals of laughter.

“Oy!” Ranma mock-snarled. “Stop making fun of me or else I will tickle ya into unconsciousness!”

“I, hahaha, I would like to see you try, Ranma,” Kara guffawed, before yelping as she felt fingers finding her back and side. Not hard enough to bother her or tickle, but enough to shock her out of her laughter and she flushed a bit, realizing with a start that a boy had just touched her for the first time since she was a young girl back on Krypton and had played with some of the other children in a park. “Wh, how?”

“Hah! Not so fast, are you?” Ranma snickered, having crossed the intervening distance within a few heartbeats and gotten close enough to touch Kara and away before she could react. *Her reaction time and situational awareness need work.*

Kara growled and flexed her fingers. “You know what that spar idea of yours sounds like a nice idea now.”

“Here now, none of that. There’s work to be done,” Jon shouted from his perch in the tractor. “Kara, show Ranma the barn, and then get the wheelbarrow, you still need to help repair those furrows you made the other day. Ranma, if you can keep control of your hunger for another hour or so, you can join us for dinner. My Martha always makes too much, so you can eat something then.”

Sighing, Ranma kept his thoughts about Jon being a spoilsport to himself. A spar sounded a lot more fun than working on whatever old farming tool Jon wanted repaired. Still, he understood that Jon wanted to get to know him better, and nodded, pushing back his martial arts madness for the moment. “Sure. Should I prioritize farming equipment or something else?”

“Farming equipment first, if you know your way around leather, there are several bridles and so forth in there, start with them. There’s also a radio that broke just the other day.” Kara’s guilty expression told Ranma what had happened there, but instead of teasing her a bit more, he just nodded and headed on his way.

OOOOOO

When Martha Kent came out several hours later to fetch Jon and Kara for dinner, she had anticipated many things. She had anticipated Kara accidentally tearing the steering wheel out of the tractor, and the two being late to come in due to trying to fix it. Clark had done that twice, and he’d had the advantage of having learned to drive before that. Martha had anticipated Kara maybe accidentally putting her foot through one of the petals. Clark had done that once. She had maybe thought that the darling girl’s hay fever might’ve acted out all at the worst possible moment and the two were doing cleanup. Clark never had that issue, thankfully, but it wouldn’t be the first time Kara’s sneezing caused trouble.

What she had not expected was to see her husband leaning against the side of one of their horses, watching an Asian-looking boy working on bending what looked like a series of nails into a long spike, which he then used to poke at the interior of the radio Kara had accidentally broken the other day. Kara too was there, tying a feed bag around the horse's neck.

As Martha walked up, the Asian youth pulled his makeshift tool out, closed the radio and pressed power, the previously rubber button having seemingly been replaced by a wooden peg. Instantly the radio started belting out a song from the local country music channel, causing the boy to grimace, and turn it back off. "Okay, it's fixed, but this thing stays off unless you all tell me a channel where they plan actually play good music."

"And what would be good for you then youngster, some of that disgusting Korean stuff I've heard is all the rage in the cities?" Jon scoffed.

Ranma snorted. "I don't like that stuff either old man, don't like stereotype. Most of that stuff is either girl bands or the boy equivalent."

Nearby, Kara had already turned away from the two men, and was waving her hand at Martha. "Aunt Martha, meet Ranma. Ranma, meet Aunt Martha. He is an Asian superhero who's up on a bit of a vacation, even if he won't admit it."

Ranma rolled his eyes but bowed from the waist towards the older woman. Since Jon had just agreed to tell him some war stories his father had passed down, Ranma was going to be on his best behavior. "Good afternoon, Mrs."

"You call her Mrs. but me old man, what's up with that?" Jon muttered, rolling his eyes as he stepped forward to give his wife a kiss on the cheek. "I take it dinner is ready?"

A loud growl caused Martha to yelp, but Jon and Kara just began to laugh as Ranma sheepishly rubbed his stomach. "Er, sorry. My master decided it's time for feeding a while ago and has been denied for a few hours now."

Martha chuckled at that, amused by the young man who seemed to have a good sense of humor and was good with his hands if nothing else. His presence, however... She looked at Kara, one eyebrow rising, as Ranma said, "And I told you, I'm not a hero. I'm a martial artist. There is a difference."

"Like what?" Kara snorted. "I mean, all the stuff you said you can do, all that stuff sounds like you are a superhero to me. You even said a wandering martial artist is like a hero in Asia."

“She’s got you there, son,” Jon snickered, causing Martha’s eyebrows to rise. Looking at her husband, it seemed as if he liked the young man, which was admittedly a point in his favor regardless of his finding out about Kara’s secret.

“I don’t go out of my way to pick those fights or look for them. If I see a crime, if it’s hurting someone, sure I’ll step in and protect ‘em, but if it’s just someone selling drugs unless it’s to kids, I won’t bother, figuring the druggies know the risks, and if I stop ‘em once, the druggies might just go somewhere else to get their fix. It isn’t my job to protect everyone from crime, not unless the people can’t do it themselves. I don’t have supervillains or anything like that. Most of my opponents come to me because they had a beef with me personally or my Pops, or thought I had something they wanted, or just to prove that there were stronger than me. I’ll admit the undead ahos I recently helped to deal with were a different story, but there I was doing bodyguard duty.”

Ranma shrugged. “Beyond that, a hero has to be held to a certain code of rules and regulations, which he may or may not have a lot of control of. I follow my Code, but I created my Code personally. I am not bound by any law unless I decide to be. And I really don’t care a toot about fitting in or secret identities.”

While that was quite an oddly deep comment, Martha had her mind on something else right now, specifically his presence there. “With all this talk about heroes and such, why am I getting the impression that some secrets have come out which shouldn’t?” Martha nearly growled, looking at a suddenly wincing Kara. “Kara...”

“I, I couldn’t help it, the tractor, I sneezed and he was right there, and um...”

“And what were you doing when he saw you?”

“I, I was flying...” Kara admitted, hangdog.

“Young lady, honestly! We have told you time and time again, don’t just fly around all the time! Who knows who could see you!?” Martha continued in this vein for several minutes until her husband interrupted.

“Now now, it’s not like we can go back and change the past, honey. And so far, Ranma seems to be somewhat of an odd duck himself,” Jon joked, winking at the young man, whose work ethic at least, and admittedly his fixation on the martial arts, he had come to respect. That wasn’t quite the same thing as trusting him with Kara’s secret, but it was a step in the right direction, and he had at least already seen to all the leatherwork for the horses, a chore Jon had not been looking forward to.

“...I suppose, but you’re still in the doghouse young lady,” Martha grumbled. “I think a loss of TV privileges and taking away some of those fantasy novels you like will serve as punishment.”

“Yes, Aunt Martha,” Kara answered meekly. “But um, can Ranma, that is...”

“True.” Martha turned to almost glare at Ranma just as much as she had Kara. “I suppose we should keep you around for a few days at least Ranma, just to get to know you. I’m sure you’re a nice enough boy, but that’s a different thing than trusting Kara’s secrets to you.”

“Huh, sounds now more like you’re worried about people connected her secrets to you. But whatever, I’ll promise to keep it if that’s what you want,” Ranma shrugged, tossing off the promise like it didn’t matter to him, which it really didn’t, before going on in a wheedling tone of voice. “But I was kind of promised dinner...”

“Hah, you have a one-track mind you know that?” Kara snorted, recovering some of her sass.

“Hah yourself, I have a three-track mind I’ll have you know. Eating, having fun and the martial arts. And what have I said about making fun of me, huh?” Ranma grumbled.

“Oh, please, I’m ready for you this time, I...” That was as far as Kara got before Ranma was in her face, and she barely dodged his finger coming towards her nose. Her eyes narrowed, and she shook her head. “Okay, you’re kind of fast...” *Geez, he’s not as straight ahead speedy as Kal-El or Wally but he is quick!*

“Kind of fast is it,” Ranma snorted, bringing up his hands as he started to channel ki into his arms. “This time I’ll really try then.”

“Bring it!” Kara snorted.

Staring between them as they began to dance around one another, Martha thought that despite the danger Ranma knowing about her powers represented, seeing Kara opening up like this was nice, especially to a young man given the disaster that had been her first initial impression of the local high school. The two of them had gone into school to drop off some of Kara’s built-up schoolwork, several weeks back and Martha had insisted Kara go around and explore the school. In so doing she had met several students, some who were there for sports training, others there for makeup classes.

What had happened there, Martha didn’t know. But Kara had been there when Martha came back from talking to the principal – more making time really - looking as bewildered and alone as Martha had ever seen her. Kara hadn’t told her much, alas, but it was clear that she had both developed a certain disdain towards normal teenagers, and her annoyance at needing to go to high school had only grown.

Shaking her head, Martha looked around, then frowned, looking back at Ranma. “Where’s your bike, young man? Or your car, I suppose, if you can drive, you look old enough to have a license. How did you get out here?”

Ranma shrugged his shoulders. "Eh, I might like to get a motorbike eventually. They're kind of cool, but it isn't like I actually need one. I can run faster over longer distances than most bikes can go, and I can keep going way beyond the point where they'd need to stop for gas... or even replacement parts. Besides, just driving would be boring, so I've spent most of my time in America running along on my own two feet."

That caused Martha's eyes to widen in surprise, then narrow and she looked over at Jon for more of an explanation, but it was Kara who said, "That's part of why I think Ranma's idea of martial artist matches up more to our idea of heroes, Aunt Martha. Well, above and beyond his speed and other physical abilities. He can do things with this ki stuff that is just amazing. Ranma, show her that ki space thing."

"Kara! We were just talking about secrets! I don't know what we should do about his learning your secrets. Just because you keep his is not enough of a guarantor of safety."

"Wait, what? I don't keep my abilities secret," Ranma interjected, reaching into his pocket and pulling out two tubs of ice cream that should never have been able to fit in there, setting them down in front of Aunt Martha. "I've never tried to hide what I can do. The trick is to just, well, not care about other people's opinions. I know it sounds egotistical, but there you go. And you can consider these offerings in exchange for dinner."

"From what my husband says you're something of a drifter, so I rather doubt you have any family that could be targeted by criminals," Martha shot back sharply, trying hard not to show her shock at what Ranma had just done, while Kara was staring at his pockets in some shock.

Ranma's eyes went flat and cold that as Kara turned her attention to the ice cream, reaching down to pick up one of the ice cream tubs. She then took her hand away, shaking it out, her blue eyes lighting up with scientific interest. *That thing is chilled like it had been shot into outer space! More and more I am getting very interested in this whole ki thing.*

"Well, if anyone went after my mom, then they would learn that I'm not a hero, like I've been saying, I'm a martial artist. And if I think I have to, or I'm pushed to it, I'm not going to hesitate to put out to pull out the lethal card. It isn't a card I'm all that happy about using regardless of circumstances, but that doesn't mean I won't use it if I have to."

John nodded in satisfaction at that, understanding what Ranma meant by that, and seeing that he put quite a bit of thought into anything in that area. Kara looked a little put-off, but eventually nodded. She'd spent the last year and a bit with the Amazons, and they had taught her that sometimes, killing was unavoidable. Indeed, she remembered a lecture from the queen about that.

"While your abilities and strengths mean that killing is all too easy, Kara, that cannot mean that you can shirk from it if it comes. I know this is a sad thought for one so young, but

you chose to become a warrior, you chose to use your great powers as you should to defend those weaker. But sometimes, that will mean that you need to kill, Kara. Your powers can give you greater options where regular Men or even Amazons would be forced to it, but it will come. Never take delight in the death of your enemy but do not let the horror of causing death stop you when in doing so, you can save the lives of others," Hippolyta had said at the time.

Along with a lot of other things. That conversation had been one of the hardest she'd ever been a part of, but looking back on it, Kara felt it might have been one of the most important too. *I know Clark bends over backward not to cross that line, and I know why, but the queen had a point too. Sometimes taking someone's life to save someone else is inevitable.*

"... Well, regardless, it's best you come in and clean up before dinner. And thank you, Ranma the ice cream will be a welcome treat, although we'll have to eat one of those tubs tonight as I don't have space in the fridge for both," Martha said, deciding to keep observing the young man in front of her, before deciding if she should get on the phone with Clark, as she had honestly been thinking earlier. Only Jon's approval of the youth had stopped her, that and Kara's interest in him. That conversation just now had gone in some strange directions, but it had given her more of an insight into Ranma's personality.

Despite the tension on Martha's face and the somewhat hangdog look on Kara's, as she followed after them, Ranma smiled happily at the vast spread of country food that waited for them on the kitchen table, reflecting that the best stereotype seemed to be accurate too: that country folk believed in large meals.

As the meal went on, his fulsome praises for Martha's cooking seemed to do just as much, as the actual conversation to wear down her attitude to one of pleasant rather than reluctant welcome. That conversation centered around Ranma's education, what he was currently doing and how he and Kara had met in greater detail. The fact, he had somehow stopped the majority of the falling tractor's momentum astonished Martha and Jon both, while the fact he didn't have any desire to go on to college bothered them.

"What would your parents say about that young man?" Martha admonished when that came up.

"Eh, my mom knows and approves. There isn't anything I want to learn that can be taught in college. As for my old man, he's the one who taught me to put The Art above everything else," Ranma shrugged. "As horrible as some of his teaching methods were, that lesson I've taken to heart for sure."

"Well, if you're not a hero now, you could be one in the future, right?" Kara mumbled between bites of her chicken.

Ranma shook his head at that. "What is up with you and pushing that whole hero thing? I realize you're probably gonna be one or are already one or whatever. But it doesn't seem all

that great a gig to me. I mean, I don't really have a problem with superheroes, not most of them anyway. They seem to do a lot of good. But it isn't for me."

Ranma went on, waving his hands to either side of him as Kara had earlier, trying to lighten the subject. "Come on, have you seen what some of them wear? I know that sounds really girly, but come on, that Superman guy wears his underwear on the outside! Why has no one told him that's not right!"

This worked as Kara burst out into laughter while Jon and Martha both winced, remembering their own discussions on their son's choice of superhero apparel, and Ranma decided to keep going. "And then there's this Robin kid, who apparently goes around sometimes with Batboy? Don't get me started on what he wears. He looks like a freaking clown! And who chose the name Robin anyway? That's about as terrifying as a toddler going 'oogah, oogah' at you."

While Ranma hadn't run into Robin during his time in Gotham, thankfully for both of them, he had seen some images taken of the youth occasionally as he battled alongside his mentor. "If he's supposed to be showing that Batboy has a warm and fuzzy side to him, it doesn't work. It just makes me wonder about letting a fully grown guy go around putting a young boy in that kind of outfit and then having sweaty spandex clad fun with him."

By this point Kara was smacking the table, barely remembering to keep her strength in check as she guffawed. "Oh God! Do people really see Superman and Batman like that? That's hilarious!" As she got her chuckles under control however, she muttered, "And definitely makes me rethink some aspects of my costume."

Ranma heard her, but very politely did not inquire further. Given her powers, Ranma easily understood that she was one of the local superheroes one way or another, although which one he didn't know.

At that point the conversation shifted to what help Ranma could be. Martial Arts Construction got a raised eyebrow, but with Jon and Kara both telling Martha about how well Ranma had repaired the tractor she believed it and mentioned several things around the house that could use a looking at. From there, Martha mentioned Kara and her reading, and it came out that Ranma barely spent any time reading, but when he did, their choice of books was similar, with high fantasy and science fiction dominating. From there, Jon and Ranma got into an argument about whether or not AC/DC or Led Zeppelin were better, while the two ladies rolled their eyes. Then Martha and Ranma talked about cooking of all things, with Ranma once more praising her food. And as the meal went on, Martha was surprised to realize that she had almost completely forgotten the elephant in the room, the fact that this young man knew Kara's secret.

The meal was nearly over when the alarm on Ranma's cell phone went off, and Martha looked up, frowning a little. She didn't like things that interrupted mealtimes, but Ranma was a

newcomer, and she could make allowances for a first offense. Before she could open her mouth though, Ranma spoke.

“Sorry, but with the time difference, I had to set up phone alarm to tell me when I could call my mom.”

Martha’s frown turned into a smile at that, while Jon smiled, having heard a bit about Nodoka already. “I take it you’re close to your mother? Given how you mentioned her before I had thought so, but...”

“Hah, yeah well, with my old man it’s a no-brainer as to the parent I’m closest to. I kind of respect my ops, but I don’t want him within punching range. I mean, the whole reason why I was doing that bodyguard job I mentioned before, was because the woman I was bodyguarding was working for the Japanese government at the time, and they had bought out all of the debt my Pops had created in our name. And it was a big freaking number. And that is the least of the issues he’s caused.”

“Ouch,” Kara winced, as did the married couple, before Martha gave Ranma the go-ahead to call his mother.

When he called, Ranma’s language naturally switched to Japanese. “//Hi mom. Are you sure it’s all right for me to call you so early? I know it’s like seven o’clock or something over there...//”

“Ranma, you should know it’s fine, although I would urge you to work on your math more. Regardless, I’m always happy to speak to you, whatever the time of day,” Nodoka stated instantly. “It isn’t as if I’m doing anything in my old age.”

“Ugh, what’ve I told ya about calling yourself old mom? You’re still good looking, if ya wanted to ya could find yourself a guy... hopefully one who isn’t martial arts mad or a sleaze who will mysteriously disappear if I think he isn’t good enough for ya,” Ranma shot back.

Ranma also knew that the idea of Nodoka not having anything to do was false as well. Nodoka was a dojo master herself, specializing in kendo. In fact, in terms of kendo skills, she was actually a lot better at sword-swinging than Kuno had ever been in Nerima.

“Flatterer. But what have you been doing Ranma? Are you still traveling across America?”

“Yep. Um, in fact, would you mind if we spoke in English? I know you can speak it, but if it’s makes you uncomfortable or something, we don’t have to, it’s just I’m kind of in the middle of dinner with this farming family named the Kents. I’ve been helping out today so they are putting me up for the night and I don’t want to be rude.”

“//Oh, that’s perfectly fine! In fact, if you think you’re being rude just talking to me like this, you can put the phone on video call. I don’t mind.//”

Ranma didn’t do that just yet, but he did switch to English so that the others at the table could follow what he was saying. “Thanks mom. Given the meal. I just got fed, I didn’t really want to come off as rude. Mrs. Kent here cooks as good as you or Kasumi, if in a very different style.”

“//My word, that is high praise indeed coming from a gourmand like you,//” Nodoka teased. Then she abruptly changed the subject, startling Ranma as he was about to bite down some food. “//But are you staying with this family? Do they have a daughter your age? Is she cute?//”

Ranma coughed, shaking his head as the food went down the wrong tube for a moment, switching back to Japanese as he flushed, trying not to catch Kara’s eyes across the table. “//Mom! I’ve told you, I’m not interested in that kind of stuff.//”

“//I never mentioned stuff Ranma, I was just asking if they had a daughter, that’s all.//” His mother said, and Ranma could almost picture her teasing smile, despite not having changed the call to a video call yet. “//Is there any reason why your mind jumped to that?//”

She then let off for a moment, continuing in English now. Her accent was much more noticeable than Ranma’s but her words were clear enough despite that. “And if these people have allowed you to stay with them, I would like to thank them. I know you’ve said before that you’re fine with sleeping out on the road but I worry. Having a roof under your head is simply better.”

Ranma rolled his eyes, then looked over at Martha asking, “Is it alright, if I put it on video call? My mom wants to thank you all for putting up with me.”

“Hah, she should,” Kara snickered. “Your sense of humor alone makes it a chore.”

“Eh, six out of ten. Your timing is perfect, but you should have said it in a deadpan tone. And it would have hit harder if ya hadn’t been laughing at my jokes a moment ago,” Ranma snarked, causing Kara to snort.

“That perfectly fine, Ranma,” Martha said, smiling brightly. Seeing Ranma’s changing body language, Martha had already gotten a small sense of what this woman was going to be like and it would be very interesting to get more.

A moment later, Nodoka’s voice rose from the cell phone that Ranma had set beside his plate while he went back to the serious business of eating. Her image appeared a moment later, smiling out at the Kents, taking in all of them as Ranma aimed the phone at Martha and Jon.

“Hello Mr. and Mrs. Kent. I would like you to thank you for putting up with my son. I know his manners aren’t the best, something I tried my best to change since he and I met once more, but it is an uphill battle, unfortunately. That dratted martial arts trip his father took him on taught Ranma so many bad habits it isn’t even funny to contemplate. I can only thank the other masters he met on the road for letting him retain what sense of normality that he has.”

Ranma scoffed, shaking his head. “Mom, come on. I know my Pops really shouldn’t have taken me away for so long, and we for sure should have kept up communicating with you, but there was a point to it. Without that training journey, I wouldn’t be nearly as good as I am. And you’re right, I’ve studied under dozens of masters and sure they taught me manners and things, especially O-sensei. But I that they taught me in martial arts is more important. I’ve also seen parts of the world I never would have otherwise and...”

“And made enemies in several of those places,” his mother interrupted, scolding him lightly. And Ranma paused, seeing as there really wasn’t anything he could say since that was more than true. For every group of Amazons he made friends with, he’d made enemies too. The Musk and Phoenix tribes were certainly no friends of his, and while he’d made peace with Ryoga, there was Taro and Kumon to consider.

“Oh, it’s quite all right,” Martha said, smiling happily. “Young Ranma’s been a good help around the place already and has already volunteered to help repair some of our appliances and things that haven’t been working as well as they should be.”

“And maybe put up a new barn, which will be more fun,” Ranma admitted, smirking at Kara. “I’ll teach you some training exercises I can do when we work on that.”

“You’re on,” Kara smiled, looking forward to spending more time with her new acquaintance despite having already spent most of the day with him.

On the video screen on the phone Nodoka’s eyes lit up, while Martha smiled at Kara’s competitive nature, shaking her head. She winked at the other woman, then reached out and carefully turned the phone so that Ranma and Kara appeared in it. “As I was saying, Ranma’s been a help around the place already, especially in picking up young Kara’s mood. She has been moping around the place for the past few weeks. Your son’s arrival seems to have perked her quite a bit.”

“Aunt Martha!” Kara said, understanding what the older woman was implying despite her admitted lack of social understanding regarding humans. “It’s not like that! And I’m not bored around the place, I’m just... just...”

“Bored with your schoolwork, dear? I understand, and we haven’t called you out on it, but even you have to admit that you were much more lively today with Ranma here than you were yesterday or the day before when you just sort of went through the motions of helping Jon, and then retreated to your room when you got the chance to stare at the ceiling. This has

been a nice break for you from worrying about the coming school year and your fellow students.”

Kara pouted a bit, and deliberately turned away, looking over at Ranma. “So who’s Kasumi, Ranma? You mentioned Akane before but not Kasumi.”

Ranma shrugged. “She was the older sister I mentioned when I talked about the Tendos. And the fact I didn’t mention her more is kind of a sign. Kasumi is a nice girl, but she didn’t really have a, well, a personality, you know? I couldn’t ever tell if that was natural, or if she had just been fit into the mold of the whole housewife surrogate mother kind of thing too early.”

“Ugh,” Kara shivered. “The very idea of that disturbs the hell out of me.”

“Too right on that. I think the strangest thing is, I lived there for two years and beyond her daily duties, and the fact she had a lot of books she liked to read, I couldn’t tell a thing about what Kasumi did when she wasn’t working around the house. And I could count the times she wasn’t smiling that little peaceful motherly smile on one hand. So weird.”

“So, you think this training journey is why you’re faster and stronger than normal people?” Kara changed the subject quickly. She wondered idly what Martha and Nodoka were talking about but set that aside to ask Ranma more questions about his training, wondering if she could learn some of the techniques he had shown her. The ki space for certain looked amazing, something she definitely wanted to learn. “What kind of training did you do? Any specific exercises?” Kara questioned, deliberately reusing the words Ranma had used back when he commented on her strength.

Ranma smirked, having already noticed that, while she was super strong and possibly superfast, Kara’s reaction time didn’t seem as well-trained as it should be. *Whatever else, her brain is closer to human-level than her physical abilities.* She could move her body fast enough to react to a lot, but it seemed to take her mind a moment to tell her she should. And she seemed to also have a slightly inflated view of her invulnerability if her reaction to the little poke he had given her forehead was any indication. “Yep. Heh, actually, there’s one we can do just sitting here.”

So saying, Ranma held out his hands, flat towards Kara. “This is a simple game for training your reaction speed. Slap my hand before I can dodge or slap your hand in turn.”

Kara’s eyes narrowed, but she held out her hands in turn like Ranma was doing, as Jon watched on. Kara’s hand flashed, faster than Jon could follow, but Ranma had already pulled his hand out of the way, and his fingers tapped down on the back of her hand as it passed, where through where his own had been a moment ago. “Better luck next time.”

He then was suddenly holding a pair of chopsticks, twirling there in between his fingers. "This is another one, see if you can grab the chopstick out of my hand. I won't even try to do anything but dodge."

Kara's eyes narrowed in concentration, and both hands came into play now, the food in of her momentarily forgotten, as her hands flashed this way and that, trying to grab the chopsticks out of Ranma's hand as he moved it around, avoiding her with a lazy little smile on his face that seemed to act like a goad, infuriating her further.

"I think that's enough," Ranma smirked at her again as the chopsticks smacked into the back of her hand. "You need to work on your reaction time," he said dryly, and her scowl deepened further.

"Children, not at the table," Martha said finally, interrupting events, snickering quietly to herself.

She held out the phone to face the youngsters as Ranma decided to once more throw his Pops under the bus. "Eh, at least I waited until near the end of the meal and didn't make the food the target. When I was younger, I would go hungry if I wasn't fast enough. Here I figured that would be a waste of good food."

"And where is your father now?" Jon asked, scowling at the idea of someone making their son go hungry like that. Indeed, every time the man had come up in the conversation had made Jon dislike him more. This was just the final straw. "I just want to talk... with my shotgun as a translator. Lead is the universal language."

Ranma shook his head. "I got no idea, and I don't want to know. The Japanese government had me doing odd jobs related to various criminals and bodyguarding this archeologist woman. What they had in mind for Pops to work off his debt to society, I have no clue."

Turning back to Kara, he turned the conversation back to the original topic. "But anyway, there are lots of little games like that we could play to help you train up your hand-eye coordination better.

"My hand-eye coordination is perfect!" Kara protested.

"Nah, see, that's where most people get it wrong. Speed in doing whatever you're doing isn't really hand-eye coordination. It's doing what you want to do the instant you think it. Reaction time is the key."

When Ranma and Kara returned to their own discussion, Nodoka asked quietly, "Mrs. Kent, I hate to presume, but I don't suppose Kara is single, is she? Only, I would love Ranma to

settle down with a nice girl, and Kara seems a nice sort. And you said he seems to bring something out in her too, despite apparently just meeting.”

Martha cackled. Well, she wouldn't call it a cackle, obviously. But Jon, who was still working on his own ice cream, certainly would call it a cackle and a darn good one too. “Nodoka, my dear, you and I are going to get along just fine. I don't know if I'll go that far just yet, but I like the side of Kara your Ranma has pulled out. Now, what was that recipe you mentioned before?”

At the other end of the table, Ranma shivered, looking around as he wondered aloud, “Why the heck am I getting a number twenty shiver?”

“Number twenty?” Kara questioned, trying hard to hide a blush behind one hand. She had heard Nodoka's question, as well as Martha's response and had watched Martha's expression as she spoke. *We just met, for goodness' sake!*

Oh yeah, number twenty, maybe twenty-one. Someone just walked over my grave, but in a totally non-threatening manner, just in a way that will make your life more complicated. It's kind of weird like that.”

Standing up and beginning to clear the table, Jon frowned as a thought occurred to him. “Ranma, you haven't explained why you are here in the US. I mean, you explained what you were up to now, but not how you came to be in the US in the first place.”

Ranma shrugged. “I was bodyguarding this investor scientist guy. Honestly, looking back on it, I'm not sure which aspect he was there for. He acted mostly like an investor for most of the time I knew him and was kinda snooty too. But he seemed to understand a lot of the science behind what he was investing in and spoke to the scientists like they were equals. So, I got no idea. Anyway, he was in Gotham for that, and the government had decided that city was so dangerous they needed to assign me to him as a bodyguard.”

“Bah, knowing what I know of that city that makes a lot of sense to me,” Jon grumbled. “Honestly, the amount of crime there despite the local heroes work is insane.”

“I saw on the news recently that the Joker died, so maybe that will help the overall level of crime. It's to be hoped anyway,” Martha sighed, having listened to this conversation with half an ear, shaking her head and turning from her ongoing talk with Nodoka for a moment. “I could never live in a city at all, but Gotham would be my absolute last place to even visit, despite the architecture there being something to see.”

“Er... yeah,” Ranma decided not to go into detail, less the Kents be Batboy fans. “Anyway, eventually, it got to be time to leave. My work with him was finished, so I left him there.”

“You didn’t want to go back to Japan?” Jon interjected, looking a bit confused. “You made that kind of a decision on the fly like that?”

Ranma shook his head. “Nope. Oh, I thought about visiting my mom, but I was honestly kind of worried the government would have roped me into something else. Or some other trouble of my Pop’s doing would have come home to roost before I could get away again.”

“And I had no problem with him staying in America for a time because of that concern. I had two martial arts masters come by recently looking for Ranma and had to point them toward the government. Who, let us be honest, would indeed try to manipulate Ranma for their gain,” Nodoka interjected from the phone, ending with a long sigh.

“I’ll head home eventually, maybe kidnap Mom from her job and run off ta see Europe?” Ranma joked, causing Nodoka to laugh, while the Kents all winced at the idea of governmental interference. “In the meantime, I was hoping to see a few sights, maybe learn a few martial arts styles here in America, although that’s doubtful. But mostly, I just wanted to travel. As much as Mom thinks that my Pops and my training journey were bad, I’ve always liked traveling.”

Nodoka sighed melodramatically at that, but so did Kara, her lips twisting into a jealous moue. Ranma caught it and looked at her quizzically, but he didn’t say anything, seeing Kara’s lips pressing together in a very straight, dangerous looking line. Instead, he hopped to his feet and joined Jon in cleaning up.

After dinner had been cleared up, Jon and Ranma moved around the farm for a bit, with Ranma giving his opinion on the wood, lights and some other things that were visible around the place. There honestly weren’t many. Jon and Martha ran a tight ship, so to speak, and beyond the small outer barn where the stuff Clark had broken in inexplicable ways was stored, there were not a lot of broken appliances or anything else. But there were a few areas Jon and Martha didn’t have the expert knowledge Ranma did.

They did have access to Kara’s ears though, and Kara could tell that a few of the pipes needed replacing, just as Jon had warned might be the case from his experience with the dishwasher. Although Kara didn’t have enough knowledge to tell when something was wrong unless she mentioned a specific noise and the two experienced farmers recognized it.

After that, Kara split off to take a bath, while Jon and Ranma aired out the small guest room on the first floor, noticing as they did that the ceiling looked a bit warped and had what might be water damage. Unfortunately, this observation came too late, as the floor of the bathroom above decided to give up at that moment due to a mishap made by a super-strong Kryptonian.

There was a sound like a ‘THUNCRACK!’ and Ranma looked up and he saw a portion of the ceiling collapsing downward and hastily began to block or redirect bits of wood from Jon. Water cascaded down on him transforming Ranma into a girl was just par for the course in the

now-redhead's opinion. The fact that it was accompanied by a shout of, "Oh not again!" And the sight of Kara hovering above where the flooring had just collapsed wearing a towel was something new, as well as the lyrics, "I'm a bitch, I'm a lover..." rang out in the background was quite new though.

The angle she was falling should have given Ranma a literally to kill-for view up Kara's cream-colored legs. But since this Ranma had lived through Nerima with all his boy bits intact, the now female Ranma quickly turned her head away, shaking her wet hair as she said dryly, "I take it that your issue with the piping was a bit more serious than you thought upstairs? Those boards look water damaged to me, weakened over time."

The female voice coming from below caused Kara to turn, before seeing Jon and Ranma there. She quickly 'eeped,' backing away from the hole until only her head was in view, staring down through the hole in the floor, as Jon also rapidly backed away from Ranma. "Who the heck are you?" *I didn't hear anyone come in, and where is Ranma? I'm only hearing Aunt Martha, Uncle Jon and this girl's heartbeat...*

"Er, maybe ya should go get dressed and come down before I give that explanation?" Ranma said, still resolutely looking away from the girl, not knowing she had already backed away.

While Kara did so reluctantly, Jon kept staring at Ranma, and Martha walked over from the kitchen where she had been putting away the last of the utensils, having cheerfully been talking to Nodoka the entire time. The two of them had gotten along quite well and were very interested in the other cooking styles. She alone seemed unsurprised by the curse, poking her head in and staring up at the ceiling instead. "I told you those floorboards were squeaking when I got into the bath, Jon. As good as Kara is about controlling her strength in her upper body, sometimes she just steps a little too hard. I don't want to make her feel bad, but..."

"I can replace that easy," Jon and Ranma said as one, the man turning to the redhead, crossing his arms and going on, "but you will really need to explain what happened there, Ranma."

"So, this is the curse your mother mentioned," Martha mused, holding up the phone so that Nodoka could see as well, walking around the still bedraggled-looking redhead for a moment and is Ranma title for hair again after bringing it out, back into the tub. "You are a petite little thing, aren't you?" *And if I'd had curves like that when I was a teenager, I think I would've been a very happy girl. For about a month, maybe, before all the issues with it cropped up.*

"Curse? Like magic?" Kara asked, joining them in her pajamas. This was a flannel outfit with a top and bottom, the bottom loose around her hips and going down to her ankles. The top covered her just as much but had a few buttons undone in the shirt at the bottom, showing

a flat, semi-toned stomach and belly button. For some reason, Ranma blushed looking at her, even though the outfit wasn't all that sexy.

On the phone screen, his mother noticed the redhead's blush and hid a smile behind her hand.

"That's right. Although I'm surprised an alien girl leaps to that conclusion without me going into a major explanation. It's nice not to have to try and convince ya, though," Ranma deadpanned, looking at Kara with one eyebrow rising in question.

Again, Kara was somewhat hampered by the fact that some secrets really were not hers to share, and she simply replied with a bland, "I've run into magic a time or two since waking up here on earth. It was a shock at first, but I got used to it." *The fact that Kal's run into enemies who use it and that magic is a huge weakness for us is another reason why I know about it, of course.* Thankfully, that was a weakness they had known about, and the Amazons had been very quick to promise Kara a chest plate in the future that she could borrow if she ever ran into a magical enemy.

Of course, that implied that Kara would have time enough to prepare to do so unless she made it a part of her regular superhero costume. Which was a little too warlike for Kara's tastes and her cousin's. The last thing Kal wanted to do was to seem too threatening, even though Diana had yet to convince her mother to let anyone but Kara have such a thing. The Amazons were somewhat leery of giving out arms and armor, considering what that might lead to if such things fell into the wrong hands.

Shaking her head, Kara turned to her aunt and cousin. "Er, before that, I'm sorry, I was listening to music and I wasn't thinking when I put my foot down in the tub I..."

"It's all right dear," Martha said, shaking her head. "A certain someone we both know ran into some of the same issues when he was younger. You might be having more trouble with it admittedly, but we understand the reasons behind that."

"And like I said, those wooden slats look wet, and warped." Hopping up, Ranma took up Kara's previous position and glanced into the area between the floors, before dropping back down and looking over at Jon. "The bath pipe also looks eroded. It's been leaking into the area between floors for a while. I can see trails of water damage on at least a dozen unbroken boards."

The older man nodded his head, indicating with a flick of a finger that would be their first job tomorrow. "I don't have enough floorboards on hand to deal with it right now, but I'll head into town first thing. Do you have any ideas of reinforcing it?"

"Metal bands maybe? An insulating layer between floors too, although that's more of a major project and would obviously need to cover the whole second floor," Ranma mused.

“For you to get on with that, I’d like an explanation on the curse please, I know this is my fault but I’m staring at the redhead, where I should be staring at a guy who is taller than me, although admittedly not by much,” Kara said shaking her head a bit.

Knowing that Ranma what was always annoyed by the need to explain his curse, Nodoka took up the tale from where she was still on the phone, making Kara wonder who was paying for a long-distance video chat.

Although she needn’t have worried. Nodoka was actually somewhat wealthy, having come from a decently well-off family, and not having used a lot of that money. That, and the Japanese government was more than willing to give her a small stipend every month, in order to track her calls to her son. Just because they were done with him now to mean that they wanted to lose sight of him entirely.

Kara listened to the explanation of the curse with half an ear, staring at Ranma thoughtfully, high end mathematics going through her mind. “Exactly how tall are you in your male form?”

“Five ten, I think? I might be a little taller now.”

And in this form, you’re shorter than me. Even if you are almost as busty,” Kara murmured. “But fat doesn’t weigh as much as muscles. Hmm... I don’t suppose I could ask you to weigh yourself?” she finished, a pout on her face. “I know magic is inexplicable, but matter transference like that, the amount of power needed would be incredibly high!”

“I’d be okay with that, although I’d want something in return. You’ve mentioned training a time or two, and I’d be interested in a spar,” Ranma announced firmly. “I am fine with working around the place but I want to spar at least three times a day as long as I’m here.”

Kara snorted. “If you want to be thrashed, I will certainly oblige you.”

“Hah! I look forward ta showin’ ya training beats out raw physicality every time,” Ranma retorted, throwing her head back arrogantly.

“That sounds like an interesting idea, but perhaps you should put that off until tomorrow? It is after all dark out, and indoors is no place for that kind of thing,” Martha stepped in quickly. “Ranma, are you comfortable staying in that form? If you are, I wouldn’t mind putting you up in Kara’s room for the night provided you promise not to change back into your male form.”

That caused Jon to choke a bit, and he looked at his wife somewhat scandalized but Martha shushed him with a look, while on the other side of the world Nodoka bit back another giggle.

“Aunt Martha!” Kara blushed heavily. “Whatever Ranma might be now he is a guy inside... er, right?” she ended more hesitantly, staring at Ranma for a second. “Your preferences or whatever don’t change?”

“God no! Why do some people think that? I’ve never understood that! My mind stays the same for the most part, it’s just my body that changes. My taste buds change a bit I’ll admit, since those are a bit of a gray area. There’s a reason one of the tubs of ice cream I showed you from my ki is mint chocolate chip. Chocolate is just amazing in this form.”

That Kara could honestly agree with. Chocolate had not existed on Krypton, and it had been an **amazing** treat for her when she was woken up from stasis. Right now, though, she had something else on her mind. “See what I mean?”

“Therefore, you don’t trust him?” Martha shot back archly. “Why have you been so friendly then?”

“It’s not that I don’t trust him. I kind of do.” *Even though we’ve only known each other a few hours, Ranma seems about as straightforward as a spear, and he’s so open and... simple isn’t the right word, but I don’t know what is. He reminds me of Cassie a lot for some reason, which is weird, but there you are.* “It’s just you’re always going on about propriety, right? Just because he turns into a girl doesn’t mean he isn’t a guy who would be in a girl’s room.”

Martha smiled at that, shaking her head in some amusement, then announced it had been just a joke, then began to order the others to start cleaning up as she bid farewell to Nodoka, handing the phone back to Ranma. The younger redhead spoke to her mother in Japanese for a few moments before they ended the conversation. “That phone is quite a marvel. Jon and I have been getting by with flip-top phones, but if that is the latest kind of smartphone, I might have to budget them in sooner rather than later.”

Kara hid a bit of a scowl at that. While Clark was more than willing to send his parents money, they had turned him down, not willing to live off him. The Kents were well off, but not rich, and it would only take a few bad harvests to really hurt them. The agrarian economy annoyed the Kryptonian in her, although she understood this world was still extremely primitive by her standards.

“They are fun. I like being able to play games on that one a bit and accessing the Internet too. There are even some apps that let you share your location with people, or figure out where you are on a map,” Ranma said before chuckling. “Although I will say, I’m kind of new at these kind of phones too, so don’t ask me how that part works. I went most of my life without knowing much of technology at all.”

She then gestured to herself. “Seriously though, if you all are uncertain you want a young man you’ve only just met under your roof, I can go sleep in the barn, or I can stay in this form when I sleep down here on the sofa.” The small bed that the Kents kept around for guests

had been a casualty of the following tub and Ranma had been too busy deflecting debris from Jon to save it.

Looking in that direction, Kara hastily moved over, lifting the porcelain bathtub, which had somehow survived in one piece thanks to the mattress of the bed cushioning its fall. Holding it over her head, Kara raced out of the room, saying over her shoulder that she would help clean up the bathroom.

Watching this, Martha shook her head, then inquired politely if Ranma would be willing to stay in his female form. "As much as I teased her about it, I do think that you staying in that form would be a better idea, as long as you're under our roof," Martha said apologetically. "Until we get to know you better."

Really by this point, Martha felt Ranma was trustworthy based on observations and her talk with Nodoka. There was nothing like talking to the mother of a boy to get a feeling for his character. But she knew that Clark would eventually get involved, and since Kara had come on the scene, he had let his male overprotectiveness out at inopportune times. So, Martha wanted to make certain she could honestly tell Clark there hadn't been anything inappropriate about putting Ranma up during his stay with them.

Ranma nodded, understanding that Martha and Jon were still concerned about him, although they weren't trying to make Kara feel bad, still very leery about her having come out with her secret to Ranma as it was. A show of understanding like this from him (currently her, which was sort of the point) would be a good idea. "I'm fine with that. It wouldn't be the first time I've spent a night as a girl."

Smiling in thanks at Ranma's words, Martha and Jon both bent to work on cleaning up the area with Kara coming back and helping the trio quickly. Soon, the area was cleaned up, and Jon and Martha had left to watch some TV in the main room. This left Kara and Ranma alone, although the door to the guest bedroom was open.

Kara took one look at the show the married couple was watching, made a face, and then looked over at Ranma and the chair he had made from the remnants of the bed's mattress, against the far wall. That plus a series of bags he pulled out from his ki space allowed for two chairs at least, and she walked over to one, slumping into it as she said, "Well I'm not tired yet, and I have so many questions it's not even funny."

"So long as it isn't about the monthly monster or anything like that, I'm more than willing to play twenty questions," So saying, Ranma slumped into her own seat, kicking her feet out along the floor, smacking them against Kara's.

"None of that! I'm just well I've made a friend here on earth my own age, but she's not American, and she is not really a social person. So, I have a lot of questions about well culture and clothing and things of that nature. I tried to talk to some students who were taking part-

time classes over the summer, but... it didn't go so well." Kara winced, looking away shyly, although happy that the redhead was willing to answer her questions. "Apparently reading ahead is enough to make me a nerd or whatever that is."

She then shook her head, Ranma's earlier words registering. "But what is the monthly monster?"

"A nerd... well if you are an alien who comes from a more advanced culture, I suppose our science stuff is kind of a letdown, so it makes sense ya breeze through it. The term nerd is supposed to be derogatory, but honestly outside of a fight I've never seen the point of name-calling like that. It just comes off as if you're jealous of the other person's abilities, be it physically or mentally."

Ranma shrugged her shoulders, scooting around a bit to get comfortable, before pulling out a deck of cards, and doing some tricks with them in her hand as she shuffled them. "As for the monthly monster, that is what I call my period."

"OOohh," Kara grimaced a bit. "Yeah, I can definitely see that. I had barely begun to have mine back on my home planet, but we had these really nifty pills called Zolarathemu I think that helped a lot with them, and when I had my first one here on earth, it wasn't pretty. Um, I don't think any of us handled it very well, although my cousin's freak out moment about it was kind of hilarious."

"Yeah. You don't want to talk to a guy about that kind of thing at all, unless you're looking for pity or to freak them out," Ranma snorted. "And this is me saying it, although that pill of yours sounds like a magnificent item. I've heard of some things like that, but I'm always leery about pills and stuff unless I can understand what goes into them."

"I've looked at those, and they do have some side effects, and they aren't nearly as effective at controlling the actual bodily changes. Although that is kind of par for the course when it comes to medicine here on Earth. You all are still giving birth from your body instead of in vitro for goodness' sake!" Kara waved her arms wildly to either side, a look of fear on her face.

"I was shocked when I saw a pregnant woman for the first time, way more than I was by the chaos the big cities called traffic, and don't get me started on traffic laws. I mean, you have the technology, why are you still building cars for the road rather than the sky, oh wait, no one could be trusted with that technology because all of you humans are so primitive you don't care about your own rules! The sign says thirty-five, go thirty-five!"

Kara's minor rant caused Ranma to laugh, and the Kryptonian snickered a bit, showing that most of that had been a joke, although she was very serious about the in vitro thing.

Something that Ranma seemed to pick up on, saying, "I think you'd have a lot of mothers who'd agree with you on that, although you would have to come up with the tech."

Kara's eyes widened, and she looked at Ranma askance, but she simply shrugged her shoulders and added a "Yes, I'm serious, although that kind of debate is one, I'm never going to be a real part of. The very idea of a guy even touching me in this form makes me want to both shiver in terror and then tear the spine out of the stupid moron who does it let alone anything else." *The fact that I lost my first kiss to a guy and wasn't allowed to snap his neck like a dry twig still bothers me!* Ranma grumbled internally.

Alas for Ranma, even with all of the changes to his training and abilities, his first meeting with Mikado Sanzenin and his kleptomaniac partner had not been a highlight in his time in Nerima, to say the least. On the other hand, Mikado had been forced to invite his food via a straw for several months afterward, and still tended to shriek in fear whenever he saw the redhead.

Not being able to follow Ranma's thoughts, Kara stood up abruptly, zooming upstairs so fast she left a gust of air in her wake, and aunt Martha shouting, "No flying indoors!" behind her. She was soon back, writing that down on a piece of paper. "I think I could actually do that, I certainly know enough about stasis pods. The trouble would be when it came to the liquid, that would certainly be time consuming to figure out the right chemical balance. ..."

She began to mutter at that point, putting some notes down, but Ranma interrupted her, flicking a bit of debris they had missed from the bed at her forehead. It hit, and she glared up at him, the piece of wood obviously not having hurt her despite Ranma having toasted with a decent amount of strength behind it. "What?"

"You're the one that wanted to play twenty questions. If you're just going to start writing down stuff, tell me and I will find something else to do."

Kara winced, realizing she was being kind of rude, and apologized quickly. "Sorry, I just wanted to write that down quickly before I forgot. Whatever else I end up doing, introducing with my life that kind of technology could be a great idea. Yeah, I've got a lot of questions although given what you just said earlier about not talking periods with men, is there some taboo about talking fashion with them? And frankly, why are there so many differences between men and women in human society? Honestly, when I was trying to speak to the teens at the local high school, it almost felt like I was speaking to representatives of entirely different cultures when I spoke to a man or a woman."

"Okay, so first I'm not the one to talk about normal high school. At my high school, not a day would go by without someone trying to attack me interrupting class by smashing down walls or the door. Freaking Ryoga, almost as bad as Kuno for not caring about his surroundings," Ranma added under her breath before shaking her head and going on. "I would say that's kind of an oversimplification, but I really can't help you much with normal interaction with people. I

was serious when I told you I had dedicated my life to the Art, so I barely paid attention to cliques, rumors, or anything like that. But I can give you my opinion on culture stuff like clothing and music. I recently got into music myself, it's kind of cool."

Ranma then pointed at Kara, wagging a finger at her. "Just remember that I'm going to be asking you questions too, you know?"

"So long as I don't have to answer, that's cool with me," Kara tried out using the colloquialism, deciding that it made some sense unlike many of the others she had heard since returning to the USA. "And since I've been asking questions of you, I think it's your turn."

Ranma nodded, and completely unsurprising to Kara, the first few questions out of the redhead's mouth was about her training, what kind of styles she was learning, and if she had any more powers that Ranma had yet to see. The only one she didn't answer was that last one, simply smirking at Ranma and teasing the redhead with a, "Wouldn't you like to know?" although, by this point, only her extreme speed remained a secret.

In turn, her own questions stayed on culture and clothing and things of that nature for a time, although before that, she asked Ranma where the curse came from. Jusenkyo worried her. The nature of the various curses, the idea of a place that was so inherently magical, and their various effects worried her. If Kara had been amazed before with the amount of energy transference inherent in Rama's gender change, that was nothing to how horrified she became at the idea of some of the human-to-animal curses. *Where does the mass go!?*

Despite her mind threatening to break as she thought about Jusenkyo, the conversation about fashion was equally interesting for her. Between them, Ranma and Kara discovered that she didn't really like the idea of dresses for the most part. Skirts were okay, so long as they didn't impede her range of movement, something Ranma deeply approved of. She also preferred lighter, friendlier colors to the black or dark red that Ranma favored. Beyond that, both of them quickly realized that Kara didn't care all that much about what was fashionable or not. That was proven as she quickly became bored after asking Ranma a few questions from a magazine she'd read, and through mutual agreement, they decided to move on.

Questions on culture were a bit different, although there Ranma wasn't as much help, simply because in her own words, "I really don't care about what other people think is important, and I've never really cared about society rules or anything like that. My whole life has been off the grid, as I've heard it called, so I'm not a part of normal Japanese culture, let alone anything else."

That conversation mostly segued into talking about anime for a time, the only thing of Japanese culture Kara had seen, before Ranma turned the conversation back on Kara, asking her more questions about her training, seemingly appalled by the fact that she wasn't learning specific styles, rather simply learning how to fight. While that works to a certain degree, having a specific style you could use or call upon in any situation was more helpful, in Ranma's opinion.

There had to be a balance there, just like Ranma had learned there needed to be a balance between the physical and mental.

In turn, Kara raised several dozen questions about Ranma's ki powers, which Ranma answered easily, if not deeply, warning Kara that learning about ki was a lifetime's study and dangerous, asking questions about Kara's powers in turn. The idea that it came from the sun – an admission that caused the clandestinely listening Martha and Jon to wince - was weird to Ranma. The redhead's deadpan, "So you're like a kind of super plant person then, aren't you? I mean, it plants who take in the sun and turn it into other stuff, right?" earned the redhead a pillow to the face, and a laugh from Kara and set the two secret listeners at ease despite the silliness of it.

Eventually, the conversation turned to Ranma's travels, and Ranma, carefully leaving out some bits, described some of the places she had seen.

At that point, however, Ranma saw Kara's face fall, and she cocked her head thoughtfully as she looked at the blonde alien. *And isn't it weird to think that aliens look just like humans? Weird.* But right now, Ranma had more important things to think of than how strange evolution could be. "What's up?"

The blonde scowled a little, "It's nothing." Ranma just kept on looking at her, and she sighed. "It's just, I think I'd like to travel to, and not just by flying everywhere either. I mean really seeing stuff, having fun doing it." *Rather than just traveling for business, I suppose you could say, like Clark does.*

"Why can't you?"

Kara's scowl deepened. "Color me silly..."

"What color would that be?"

Kara lightly kicked Ranma on the leg, an attack that would have possibly broken the bone of any normal person, but Ranma simply smirked at it, and she went on. "I mean, there are my powers, and other obligations. I want to be a hero, that's not a huge secret given you already know about my powers and stuff. But because of that, I also need to understand humanity, and for that I need an alter ego. It can, can let me unwind too, so my work as a superhero isn't all I do."

"Ya don't sound so sure about that?"

"Um, I..." Kara looked at Ranma's neutral face and sighed. "I mean I understand why, it just feels as if I'm, I'm setting myself up for a jacket that isn't going to fit. However, I try to make it fit. I love my cousin, and I love Aunt Martha and Uncle Jon, and I understand why it has to be like this, why I need an alter ego and everything, but I just don't know if I'm going to ever

fit in with normal human society, not after my first fifteen years of life was spent in an entirely different one.”

And then I spent a year with the Amazons. Kara added mentally, *Which was a great idea, and I'm way better at controlling my strength and way more coordinated than I was for sure.* After all, Kara had been the daughter of two scientists, they weren't warriors or anything like that. Kara had never had a day's martial arts training in her life before coming to earth, heck she had only ever smacked someone once before that if you didn't count childhood squabbles. But there was a big difference between Amazonian culture and normal human culture, regardless of what nation you looked at when you said that.

Ranma looked at her in silence for a moment, then said, “Well, I'm kinda sorry that my talking about traveling make you sad, but if you're asking my opinion on what yer doin'...”

Kara interrupted Ranma, smacking her again on the thigh with a little more power, causing her to grunt, but otherwise not react to a slap that would possibly have caved in a small house. “Drop the hick accent, drat it! How the heck did you even learn how to speak like that anyway? You're not fooling me. There's a brain in there, I know it and there's no reason to hide it from me.”

Ranma laughed at that and went on in a much smoother American accent, the difference as startling as a Kentucky accent when compared to a Californian. “All right, I'll drop the accent then. But that doesn't make what I was about to say change. If you just want my opinion, I'll give it to you, but I'm not going to try to make the decision for you. It seems to me that too many people are already doing that.”

Kara blinked at that, then nodded, understanding her point. “Okay, you'll have to unpack that a bit.”

“What do you want in life?” she asked bluntly.

Her brow furrowing, Kara looked at Ranma quizzically. “What does that even mean?”

Ranma held up her hand, the hand then flashing towards Kara's face so fast she couldn't dodge again, her finger bopping into the blonde's nose. “What do you want in life?” she said again, pulling her hand back just in time to avoid getting punched by Kara's wildly flailing arm, the glare she gave Ranma causing the redhead to grin cheerily at Kara before becoming serious.

“Seriously, what do you want from life? Earlier, you said you want to become a hero, that it's expected that you need to have a alter ego to fit in so that you could live among normal human beings, get down time and understand how normal people are. Personally, I always thought normal is overrated, and in fact, I think you've got the best bits of being normal, right here, a loving family, a home overhead, good food.”

“How did I know that was going to come up,” Kara muttered, rolling her eyes at Ranma’s predictability.

“I’m serious. You’ve got a home, people who love you, and everything that comes with it. That’ll ground your idea of right and wrong and is a great thing to have. I know my own rationality and morals are kind of skewed,” Ranma admitted, shrugging her shoulders. “But beyond a sense of right and wrong, don’t let yourself be tethered by other people’s goals or aspirations. Don’t be normal if you can be something else. Don’t just go along to get along, that’s dumb...” she paused, then smirked. “And might just be Un-American. Mind you, this is a Japanese guy saying it so...”

Kara snorted at that, then questioned hesitantly, “Do, do you really think that’s a good idea? I, I’m not a normal human girl. I, I’d be lying if I said most of the other teens I met weren’t really boring. But my family is really certain about this, and so are all of the other heroes they went to for advice about it. I mean, every hero has a normal kind of alter ego.”

Of course, the would-be Supergirl didn’t know what most of those alter egos were. She had just been told by several of the heroes she had met before being sent to the Amazons had said they had them.

“Eh, I can’t say that I know much about that. I sure as heck don’t need downtime since the Art is a twenty-four-seven thing. But if ya need one, who says ya need to have a normal one? Why not be a genius girl? Or, if you seriously need time off the clock, ignore what’s happening around you, dye your hair brown, and blend in. That’s easy.”

“Ugh, you just went from really insightful to really dumb. Let’s move on,” Kara grumbled. “Tell me about some of your fights. I know you’re dying to.”

Ranma grinned and did so quickly. Several of these pushed Kara’s ability to accept what Ranma was saying, and eventually, when Kara mentioned that some of those should have become known worldwide, Ranma simply shrugged her shoulders and said, “How?”

“What do you mean, how? Not a day goes by without some superhero being caught fighting some super villain on camera, and you have a smart phone yourself. Surely someone would’ve been recording those fights!” Kara exclaimed.

“Technology stuff like that gets broken all the time, so in Nerima, only a few people could really afford them. Most of those fights I’ve mentioned happened well away from civilization, so the only people recording would be the people doing the fighting. The ones that didn’t, well I suppose I can think of few flights that should’ve been recorded, my martial arts gymnastics match with Kodachi for one, a few of my fights with Kuno and Ryoga. But that was in Nerima. That kind of thing was normal there, so why would anyone record it?”

Ranma then smirked at Kara. "The few exceptions to that rule were probably not recorded though because people were too busy running away like sensible people. Americans must not have as good survival instincts as Asians do."

Kara twisted that back onto culture issues, sharing some of the issues she had run into since being revived here on Earth. That had Ranma laughing like a hyena occasionally, but Ranma returned the favor with stories of 'his' younger years, talking about mishaps this time rather than fights or the places she had seen.

Eventually the talk was interrupted by Martha coming into the room, knocking on the door frame and announcing it was well past the blonde girl's bedtime. "Ranma, I know I'm not your mother, and I can't make you go to bed, but Kara is living under my roof, which means my rules. Which means getting up early in the morning."

"Aunt Martha, you know I don't need that much sleep! Can't I stay up and talk to him, er her, a little while longer?" Kara pouted pleadingly at the older woman. She had occasionally slipped in terms of pronoun use to Ranma, which honestly made Ranma quite happy. She had been telling the truth earlier. Ranma was still male in his head, regardless of his body.

"For someone who mentioned propriety earlier when I had my little joke on you, Kara, you're awfully quick to want to stay up without a chaperone now," Martha noted, causing Kara to blush but wildly point towards where the very female Ranma was sprawled out on her side of the room, a deck of cards set between them and several cards flung about the place as the two of them had taken to playing random card games while they talked. The fact Ranma couldn't control her face

to save his/her life had been hilarious, although his knowledge of the card games had still let him win occasionally.

"Yes, I know Ranma is a girl, but she can turn into a guy with an application of hot water, and my hearing isn't so good that I would notice up in my room." Martha softened her face, coming over and getting Kara hug even as she gently tugged at the girl indicating she should stand up. "You can keep talking to your new friend tomorrow, dear."

Of course, even if she had tried to pull Kara to her feet and the girl didn't want to go, Kara wouldn't move in both of them knew it, but Kara was a good girl, and shifted to her feet readily enough, reflecting that yes, Ranma was indeed a new friend. Nowhere near what she had with Cassie, but Kara could sense they might become good friends given time. "See you tomorrow, Ranma."

"Yep, I'll be up with the rest of ya, waiting for my first spar," Ranma retorted, her eyes glinting. "I'm interested ta knock that ego of yours down a peg."

Kara rolled her eyes but was still smiling at having made another friend as she exited the guest room.

OOOOOO

At the same time that Ranma was spending time getting to know Kara, Diana was busy in her own alter ego with Cassie, who was also having a few cultural issues, although not nearly as many as Kara. Part of this was because Cassie knew more about the culture of Man's World to begin with, and Diana had spent several days drilling some information into her, such as what cars were, obeying stop signs and so forth, before leaving Amazon Island.

The two Amazons were helped further by the fact that Diana had made the simple decision that Cassie would be homeschooled up to the college level rather than enter normal high school like the Kents had decided Kara should. While she had no trouble understanding where Clark's decision on that point was coming from, she felt that Cassie did not require that level of immersion, and in fact did not want her to have it in the first place. Cassie was an Amazon, she didn't need to be too Americanized.

Meanwhile Clark was on the clock, meeting with the Batman in his cave. "It really was an accident then? That is... well, a part of me wants to say that's highly ironic. Another part of me is somewhat sad to hear of anyone dying, but if it had to be someone, the Joker is most definitely one of the candidates I'd choose. Even Lex Luther has more redeeming qualities than most of your rogue gallery, Bruce. With the exception of Mr. Freeze, maybe."

"I would put Two-Face up there as well, since before his mental break Harvey was one of the greatest anti-criminal lawyers in the city. Which unfortunately directly led to his new persona," Batman sighed faintly, remembering his old friend Harvey Dent and wishing that even in his alter ego is Bruce Wayne had been there to stop that accident from occurring. Having a lawyer who he could trust completely to be on the side of angels would've been a magnificent thing.

Turning back to the conversation at hand however, he shook his head. "I am still unhappy with how blasé the young meta-human was, and how little information I can find on governmental computers about him. I've hacked them entirely over the past few days and I could tell you some things about both the Chinese government and the Japanese government that would possibly start World War III, and I'm not going to tell you which side America would be on, because that would be up in the air as to how the information came out. But if the information is there to be found I'm not seeing it."

Bruce let out a short hiss in frustration. "And then there's the way he disappeared entirely. I'm good, hell, I'm one of the League's best trackers, and even without my electronic devices, there's no way someone should have been able to give me the slip as easily as Ranma seems able to. One moment he was there, the next gone. Could it be a part of his meta-ability?"

Somehow turning invisible, silent? I've dealt with people who can turn invisible before, and there should have been some means of detecting him regardless but I just don't know enough."

"That would be a bit scary, someone with this Ranma's combat abilities, able to disappear like that. You say he fought you to a standstill?"

Bruce grimaced at Clark's question. "Yes and no. Yes, he fought me to a standstill, but you well understand my physical abilities are only half of my skill set." Clark snorted at that, and Bruce allowed a wry grin to appear on his face for a second knowing how much that was an understatement. "I wasn't prepared to face someone with his speed and power, if I had the fight might've gone differently. Although even in that case, like I said the death of the Joker was an accident, brought about by his own weapon. So, I doubt I would have been able to keep Ranma in prison for long, even if I could have gotten his diplomatic immunity exposed."

"But it would have made you feel better," Clark drawled, earning a dirty glare from Bruce, although he did not disagree.

"So it could be on local computers that are just not hooked up to the general grid? Or just not on computers at all," Clark mused, turning back to the main subject at hand. "Do you want me to send over some questions to the Daily Planet's reporters in Japan?" The Daily Planet was a worldwide news agency, with branches in nearly every first world country. Clark Kent and Lois Lane were among its best reporters, and very well known among their fellows. "I could even go there myself, try to find a back trail, I even have my cover story ready. The Japanese government recently announced the capture of a super villain, and his trial has already begun.

"Dragon Man I know, I was thinking about doing the same thing, but I'm needed here in Gotham. And you have that upcoming mission off world anyway." Bruce turned back from his computer to stare up at Clark, feeling both camaraderie towards the man and off-balance at the fact that someone who wasn't part of his small band of normally street-level crime fighters in his cave, a feeling he always felt when Clark stopped by. But that didn't mean he welcomed the other superhero any less. Indeed, now more than seven years after Clark had come onto the scene, Bruce could safely say that the other man was his best friend.

"I'm still worried about that mission. Both the fact that we haven't gotten as much information upfront about it from the Thanagarians as I could wish, and the fact that you and Wonder Woman are both going along with the Martian Manhunter and Green Lantern."

"I know, but Doctor Fate and Zatanna are both staying here, and I sent a message to Aquaman. He and his two followers are also going to be staying here, up here on the Watchtower I mean, ready to act in our places. I could also ask Green Lantern if one of his fellow lanterns would be willing to swing by just in case."

Bruce nodded at that, indicating he was a good idea, not letting his relief show, although Clark picked up on it via his heartbeat, shaking his head slightly at how controlled the other man was. "That is acceptable, I suppose. And then there's always your supposed cousin to call on and Diana's young project."

The tone of voice Bruce spoke with told Clark that he really was still leery of Kara and dismissed Diana's too. *Double standard, much, my friend? Or is it the fact both have natural superpowers to go with their teenage ages that bother you?* Clark mused, shaking his head. "Kara might be more help than you think, she nearly beat me in a spar a few days ago thanks to the Amazon training she got. As for Cassie, the same might be true if she is anywhere near as strong as Diana. Still, we'll all have those communicators J'onn made for us. So long as we have access to power they can reach across solar systems."

"Which is the only reason why my objections were not more strenuous," Bruce grumbled. Their conversation was interrupted by an alarm going off, and some video appearing showing a robbery in progress. "Get out of here Clark. I need to get back out there. Just remember to check back with us when you're gone. We'll be doing the same."

Clark nodded and was gone by the time Batman slid into the driving seat of his car.

OOOOOO

Ra's al Ghul stared at his chief spy in the New England Territories of America, cocking a wry eyebrow. "Truly, those rumors that the Joker is dead were correct? I was suspicious of them given how quickly it was reported in the news, and how often that man has been involved in similar events only to turn up alive in the past. But you're telling me those rags the locals call news agencies were actually accurate for once?"

"Yes sir," one of his informants said, shrugging his shoulders. "The Joker was connected via DNA to his original rap sheet, back when he was simply Jack Napier. What's more, his whole gang has since begun to decompose, some of them going crazy, acting out horribly as should be expected, and others almost going into hiding or trying to leave the criminal life behind."

"Excellent, yet perhaps a sign of more to come. Does this mean that Batman is no longer so foolishly allowing criminals to go free when they should rather be slain out of hand?" Ra's sneered a bit, shaking his head. If there was one thing he hated, it was the idea of people assuming that just because someone was insane meant that they should not be held accountable for their actions.

"It wasn't the Batman sir, it was a random bodyguard who was at the party guarding his principal, an investor named Matsumoto. Oddly, we haven't discovered much about how he made his fortune, but it is certain he was there, being protected by this young martial artist."

Ra's blinked, frowning a little. "Truly? As much as I disdain the man, the Joker was a capable fighter for a normal person, his normal brand of insanity working quite well to make him extremely unpredictable."

When his informer nodded, Ra's began to laugh quietly. "Magnificent, that is honestly quite hilarious. But if not Batman, who was it?"

The man worked the controls on a nearby computer for a few moments, and an image popped up, causing Ra's to snap his fingers quickly, silencing whatever the man had been about to say as he stared. The young horse, the wayward youth who was taken back by his father, it can be no other. Fascinating.

"And you said he killed the Joker?" He had far more contacts in Asia than Batman did and had been watching Ranma at several points in his adventures. He even knew of the Amazons, and had even been to their village, although he hadn't stayed for very long. When he had learned about the cursed Springs he had left quickly, understanding the implications of them far more than the locals seemed to. They were even more of a chaotic mess than his own Lazarus pools.

But if Ranma was now free from outside influence of his father, and the Japanese government... I wish a report to go out to All of our agents in America. They should be on the watch for young Ranma. Do not engage him, I repeat, they are not to engage him. In point of fact, do nothing out of the ordinary, simply report any sightings. He could be useful in some form, but we will need to be very careful."

Ra's thought for a moment, then went on. "I also want our agents in Asia, in particular, to be on the lookout for his father."

He strode over to the computer, and the other man backed away hastily, letting him input some controls for a few moments, and then the image of Ranma was replaced by the latest one his people had gotten of Genma. "Be very much on the lookout for this man as well. I understand what the Japanese government is doing with them, and I even approve. They are a very practical organization in many ways. But that is no means reason to assume that we in turn cannot make use of him at some point..."

OOOOOO

True to Martha's warning, life on the farm started well before the sun was up. Despite the early start, Kara hopped out of bed eagerly. After greeting Martha in the kitchen, she found Ranma awake in his room as well, having taken a moment to change back into his male body. While Jon headed out to start checking the animals, and Martha began to make breakfast, Ranma smirked at her, gesturing with a jerk of his head outside. "I think one of us has a meeting with some humble pie. Shall we?"

“Yeah,” Kara snorted. “Let’s get to it.”

Moments later, Kara stood across from Ranma, and the young man took a moment to notice what the blonde wore in the slowly rising light of dawn and the light of the open doorway. Kara had chosen to wear a pair of exercise shorts that hugged her waist and bum tighter than jeans she had been wearing the other day, coupled with a T-shirt with the words ‘Can’t Touch This’ on the front of it.

It made her look both cute as a button and sexy in a tomboy kind of way, causing Ranma to wonder if this was what Hiroshi and Daisuke had been talking about when they mentioned Ranma in his female form. *If they weren’t such horny idiots, I might think I owe them an apology.*

For her part, Kara frowned, seeing Ranma not take any kind of martial arts stance, instead letting his arms hang loose at his side as he bounced lightly on his feet. “Are you sure you’re taking this seriously?” *Just because he’s funny and... er... kind of cute I guess, doesn’t mean I’m not going to make him pay for not taking me seriously!*

“We’ll see, won’t we?” Ranma quipped, smirking that special smirk he had that had always served as a goad to his rivals in Nerima and elsewhere. *Heck it even worked with that chief samurai-oni bastard back on the Island o’ cannibal idiots.*

It worked here too, as without another word, Kara charged forwards her fists up protecting her upper body before she entered her range, a light jab flashing out.

Kara knew that she was fast. She had often got the drop on Cassie when the two of them trained and thought that maybe Ranma really wasn’t taking this seriously despite seeing her strength. *If he thinks I’m not as fast as I am strong, he needs a bit of a wake-up call.*

Holy hell is she fast! Ranma yelled internally, but even as he thought that, he was already moving, jumping straight up. A second before her blow landed, Ranma was in the air, and his foot kicked out into her head, crashing into her face, causing her to blink in surprise. Although the blow didn’t hurt, it was quite clear that if the two of them were equal in strength it would have laid Kara out.

Kara however had been trained by the Amazons in their school of hard knocks, and even as Ranma’s next blow landed she moved her head with the blow, her hand coming up in a punch to catch Ranma’s leg.

But Ranma had already pulled his leg back, twirling around into another kick while still in midair. Kara blocked this kick with her forearm and launched a quick punch, but somehow Ranma turned the point of impact to his advantage, flipping up and over Kara’s head, raining down several blows.

“Okay, how the heck is he doing that?!” Kara grumbled. While Kara could see them coming, as she had realized when sparring with Cassie, it was a different thing entirely to block so many strikes from hitting her. Ranma’s strikes lacked the power that Cassie had been able to put into her strikes, which meant they were well below the point where they could actually hurt her, but the martial artist was able to somehow redirect his blows at the last moment, making block them extremely difficult.

Maybe I was the one who wasn’t taking this seriously, Kara thought as a blow crashed through her defenses into the side of her head. “Time to change tactics.”

“You know, saying that aloud is kind of silly,” Ranma quipped.

“Quiet, you, you gnat!” Kara grumbled. “Fine, you’re quick if I keep to this level of speed but what it I up the ante!”

Actually, that wasn’t her plan. Kara had determined to keep her strength and speed to what she thought Ranma’s were from seeing him yesterday. That way, she could actually learn from this spar rather than just overwhelm Ranma, despite a small, ignoble part of her wanting to do just that. *Cousin Clark never overwhelms Batman when they spar, if he did, he wouldn’t learn.*

She didn’t count Clark’s spars with Diana. Those were... different. Different in a way that made Kara feel kind of uncomfortable at times watching them for reasons she didn’t quite understand.

Instead, Kara really did try to change her tactics, trying to grab at Ranma’s arms or legs and pull him in.

But that didn’t work either as Ranma seemed to realize what she was doing. Even stranger, every time, EVERY TIME, their hands struck one another, Ranma somehow used the momentum of that contact to remain in the air, dodging all around Kara as she danced around on the ground.

For his part, Ranma was becoming more impressed with Kara’s training than he had been initially. It was clear by this point, she had a good grounding in combat, her teachers probably emphasized sparring over form. *She ain’t used to fighting someone who emphasizes dodging like I do, I can tell I’m frustrating her. But there is something weird here, her style, it, it kind of remindsSSSS CRAP Is she strong!*

Ranma’s thoughts shifted as Kara forgot herself for a moment, letting loose with a much stronger punch. Even as it barely made contact with Ranma’s arm, the bone there broke, causing Ranma’s ki healing to go to work automatically. The next blow nearly blew out his ears as it flashed past his head, breaking the sound barrier. *GAH! Fine, let’s see if she likes this!*

In reply, Ranma's hands disappeared almost to even Kara's sight and her head was suddenly rattled by hundreds of impacts. "OWWOWOWOW, what the hell!?" The blows didn't hurt a lot, more like so many bee stings, but there were so damn many of them landing, and bee sting or no, if it hits your ear or eye it still hurt! "Stop it you!"

Fine! If he wants to just sort of stay in the air like that, I'll show Ranma what real aerial combat is! With that, Kara hurled herself into the air, lashing out with a quick punch as Ranma dodged her lunge but again Ranma was able to dodge enough of it, although it almost looked like his arm went limp for a second as she grazed the limb. Then Ranma's other hand grabbed her arm, and flipped himself up, his legs hammering into the side of her head with a mule kick as he flipped through the air several times to land on the ground well away from her.

That blow had actually rung Kara's head a bit, and she growled as she charged down towards him.

"Whatever happened to not using all your powers against me?" Ranma quipped, as he rolled ones to the side, then kicked off the ground into the air once more, dodging another kick from her, following up with a punch that again Ranma was somehow able to dodge.

"I'm still not using all my power! I don't think even you would be able to dodge my heat beam after all. How the heck are you dodging like this anyway!? *Cassie couldn't dodge like this, in fact the only one I've seen able to dodge even halfway well it was Queen Hippolyta. But with her it was more... more pinpoint I guess?* The vastly more experienced queen dodged Kara's punches by no more than inches, putting forth the least amount of effort while always being somewhere else whenever Kara attacked.

She said she could read me somehow, is Ranma somehow doing the same thing? Even Diana couldn't dodge me as well as this!

"You have a lot of tells. For one thing, your eye is always trying to track your own blows rather than mine which is just silly. For another, it's as if you are trying to think your way through every punch and kick," Ranma mused, using the momentum of another blow from Kara to flip through the air once more to gain some distance, clapping his hands together in front of his face, the traditional signal for a timeout as he landed. "And for someone who can fly, your remarkably stationary even when you do. You need to start moving around in the air more fluidly if you're going to fight in the air like that, bounce around, dodge up and down, don't treat the air like you're standing on solid ground."

Kara winced. "I've heard that first bit before. I think I'm falling into bad habits without someone to spar with. Darn. My sparring partner always said I was trying to overanalyze everything, that I needed to build up a feel of a fight's flow."

Ranma blinked at that but was happy that Kara had had someone who could advise her before this. "I think you need to start learning actual styles. Maybe that will help you with your

overthinking problem. And yes, I know that normally overthinking things isn't really a problem, but in a fight, instinct, observation and thought all need to interact seamlessly."

Running one hand through her hair, Kara eventually nodded, not noticing how Ranma's eyes had tracked the movement for a moment a faint flush on his face, thankfully hidden thanks to the poor light. "I can see that I suppose. And because I'm starting training so much later than you or my other sparring partner, I haven't had enough time to build up any kind of combat instinct."

"Don't beat yourself up over that. Your observation skills are pretty good. You started to adapt to what I was trying to do to you several times. You tried to go for grapples, which is a natural defense against the mobile style, and throughout the fight you... mostly kept your strength down to the level you needed to in order to actually learn something. Even if you began to up your speed quickly to match mine, although there, I think we need to work on your reaction time."

Kara grumbled a bit, stuffing the ground with a foot. "I wouldn't have believed you if I had already run into people who could react faster than I could."

The Flash could react faster than she could, she knew, and her cousin could as well. *Although isn't nearly as obvious as it was with 'Call me Wally, Cutie,' ugh.* And occasionally, Clark's reaction time left much to be desired. *Or is it situational awareness with him? What is the line there, I wonder?*

The two were interrupted at that point by Jon walking up to them from the farm, gesturing them back into the house for breakfast. "Who won?" he inquired jokingly.

"As if you weren't watching from the door to the barn, Uncle Jon," Kara scoffed, smiling at the man in thanks as he held the door open for them. It had felt nice to know he was watching out for her, although after fighting Ranma, she didn't think a normal person would be able to do anything to him, not really.

Moments later, Ranma was once more sitting down to a meal fit for his stomach and gleefully began to eat, explaining between bites some exercises that Kara could do on her own time or could do as they helped around the farm to help her hand-eye coordination and reaction time. Martha listened intently, watching the two youngsters interact with a faint smile on her face.

I wonder if this version of Kara is how she was while on that Amazon Island she went to. If so, it's a marked change from the bewildered, somewhat shocked girl I met up with back at the truck that day at the high school. I wonder if we really are doing the right thing trying to push her into a normal high school girl mold?

That was something she and Nodoka had talked about the night before in their long conversation. Somewhat dismayed at how open and unguarded Ranma was about his beyond-normal abilities despite his good humor and what she had seen of his character, she had wondered if Nodoka had ever made an attempt to fit Ranma into a more normal lifestyle

When Nodoka admitted she'd tried at first and had gotten quite a lot of pushback and had stopped, Martha had asked whether or not she regretted her inability to do so. Instead of answering, Nodoka simply mentioned how proud she was of Ranma as a martial artist and how proud she was that Ranma was his own person despite the horrible influence of his father.

"Make no mistake, if I had known half of what my husband was doing on that training trip, I would have done my utmost to drag both of them home and divorce the lout to raise Ranma on my own. But somehow, Ranma seems to have survived and taken on only the best of the lessons that Genma tried to instill in him. I am not nearly as proud of his martial arts skills? No. Does Ranma conform to what modern Japanese society is like? No. But I can only approve of his sense of honor, if not his overall attitude occasionally, and while I would prefer that he broadened his horizons beyond the art, even if he did, I doubt he would suddenly become normal. And I am fine with that," the younger woman had said.

Much of that matched Martha's worries and hopes for the future Kara. Clark was fantastic, perhaps the best son she could ever ask for, but he had had his entire life here on Earth fitting in, building a life from the ground up. Kara had come to them fully grown, and the fifteen years she had spent as a Kryptonian had left their mark. *I think Jon and I need to set down with Clark and think about this some more. The last thing we want is to have Kara start to resent this for pushing her to be something she can't be.*

Jon however steered the conversation away from martial arts and exercising to what he wanted done around the farm that day by the two youngsters. For Kara, a goodly portion of that was preparing the second floor. He and Martha had decided between them before falling asleep last night that maybe they should get the entire floor of the second floor renovated, especially after the disaster last night.

"I'm willing to trust you with the repairs to the bathroom young man, given what I've seen you do with those hands of yours." Why Martha chuckled at that eluded both teens, but Jon continued on, his own lips twitching. "But I'll make the final decision on whether or not you're actually capable of such a big job from what you do the rest of the day. I can go into town and by the necessary wooden beams and the other resources we need and then hire a contractor if you're not up to it."

"I've put up walls, put down foundations and even repaired whole houses from being at the center of martial arts fights. Replacing a floor is nothing to me," Ranma answered firmly, his pride a little pricked at that, which was what Jon had hoped for.

“Good. In that case, you too can start mending the outer fence, a few of those fence posts were damaged in the recent storm, and we need to lay down some electrical wiring as well to keep in the animals.” While the Kent farmstead was mainly a wheat farm, they did keep animals as well, a small dairy herd of ten, a few horses for work and travel around the farm and lots of chicken. “From there, I want you to work on...”

Jon took most of the meal to explain the workings of the farm. There was always something around the farm for a handyman to get to grips with, but the majority of what he wanted Ranma to look into specifically was to empty out the barn they had used to store the bits and pieces of appliances that Clark and Kara had accidentally ruined over the years, finishing his work from yesterday and help to put down a new electrical fence underneath the physical one currently keeping the animals inside.

“So long as Kara and I have some time to spar between jobs, I’m fine with whatever you need,” Ranma said near the end of the meal, and Kara nodded agreeably, eager to both learn more from Ranma, and happy to have his help around the place. She had to admit to being a bit of a klutz what it came to things like digging holes or putting down wire... or using tools at all really. Low tech stuff like that always threw her, even more than the idea of fighting hand to hand had.

After breakfast, Jon let out the animals to range, and then headed off to town, leaving Ranma and Kara behind. Martha told them to start on the fence first, and the two of them quickly got to work. First Ranma would remove a segment of the fence, while Kara dug a trench using her eye beams. This, Ranma was quick to point out, was “Cheating of the highest order.”

“Sour grapes,” Kara teased.

Ranma promptly turned around and demanded they switch jobs for the next segment of fence. As Kara removed it, Ranma held out a palm. “Moko Takabisha!”

The attack came out, blasting a long furrow in the ground. It was a bit too wide, admittedly, but Ranma felt the honor of martial arts had been restored as he snorted at Kara. “You were saying?”

“More of your ki stuff, I suppose?” Kara grumbled. *Weird, it looks almost like a mix of a solid-state strike and a moderately heated bolt of energy. How bizarre... I really do need to think about this ki stuff in more depth. He did say that it was fueled by his life energy, and he had to eat a lot after using it up. That means unlike magic it’s quantifiable! That could be a fascinating study.*

As they kept working though, Kara noticed something about the animals. At first, they seemed wary of Ranma, their ears flattening, the horses stamping their hooves at him, while the cows mooed loudly and moved well away from where the two were working. But this seemingly faded over time, and the cats around the farm seemed immune to whatever was

bothering the other animals. In the case of one of the cats the Kents kept around to take care of the vermin around the place, it walked straight up to Ranma and rubbed against his lower leg, purring despite being a rather standoffish, solitary creature from what Kara had seen of it before.

“The animals seem to like you,” she said, cocking her head to one side. “It took them far longer to get used to me. No matter how human I look, I still smell alien apparently.”

Ranma shrugged. “It’s sort of a side effect of a martial arts technique I was taught, both sides of that.”

“Everything comes back to martial arts with you, doesn’t it?” Kara shook her head with a snort. “You are a little obsessed.”

Ranma shrugged. “Being a little obsessed is how you get good at something.” Ranma then moved over to one of the posts they had a place, holding it up. His other hand glowed for a moment a light blue color, and Kara gasped, staring at it, her eyes narrowed as she wondered how he was doing it, but she couldn’t see anything. There was no change in Ranma’s heartbeat, no change in anything in his body she could detect.

Then that strange light formed into several claws at the end of Ranma’s fingertips, which Ranma began to use to peel away the wood as if his claws were sharper than the sharpest whittling knife. “Okay, that’s kind of amazing. They look almost like claws.”

“That’s because the technique was called Neko-Ken, or Cat Fist in English,” Ranma shrugged. “You don’t want to know the training to master it. The training for it was bizarre, like mind-breakingly horrible.”

Kara frowned, staring at the energy around Ranma’s hand, setting aside the feeling that Ranma was not joking or using hyperbole when he said his mind broke during that training. But her curiosity as to what ki really was compelled her to ignore that for a moment. “Where exactly are you... I mean I can’t see anything, no kind of energy within you or a source for that power, not now, not earlier with that bolt of energy you demonstrated...”

“You said that your eyesight is like x-ray vision right, not heat, like those night vision goggles soldiers use?” Kara nodded at that, and Ranma shrugged. “Ki doesn’t have anything like a central point where it gathers, no matter what the idiots who think chakra points are a thing might think. It’s just the energy of the body pulled out and made into a physical thing, and it only has heat if the user adds it in.”

Kara reached over and took Ranma’s hand, pressing a finger into one of the claws before Ranma could pull his hand away. “Damn girl don’t touch them! They’re not...”

Before he could finish speaking, Kara hissed, pulling her finger away. Raising it to her face, Kara stared at a tiny bit of blood that had appeared there. "I, I have impervious skin. I've seen, that is, I've had bullets bounce off me before," Kara stammered, shocked but still remembering to keep her connection to Superman a secret. "That shouldn't have done anything!"

Ranma shrugged. "The cutting edge of my ki claws is kind of based on my imagination, in a way. It's a very weird line there, but pretty much if I think my ki claws should be sharp, they're going to be insanely sharp."

"I really want to test that, yet at the same time, I really don't," Kara muttered, staring at her finger, then licking away the blood, shaking her head slightly.

She didn't notice Ranma blinking at the site, then flushing a bit and looking away. *Yeah, accidentally sexy is definitely one of my kinks*, he thought, snorting as he recalled a somewhat drunken conversation with Lara during their time trapped on the island of zombie annoyances.

Once they were done with the fence, they had finished about half of the jobs that Jon had told Ranma and Kara to look into. So they had a bit of a break before he returned from town.

This time when they sparred, Ranma had some stipulations. He would fight purely defensively, forcing Kara to come to him, while both stayed in the air. That confused Kara at first, but that confusion faded the first time Ranma once more used the momentum of her strike to flip around to the side, showing no sign of losing the battle with gravity any more than she was.

"How the heck are you doing that?! I can't tell what is more amazing, the whole ki thing you can do or your ability to simply mark 'not applicable' when gravity comes calling. I mean, I can fly, that's part of the power I get from the yellow sun, but how are you doing it!?" She growled as Ranma once more moved around her. *Drat it, I should be more mobile than he is up here but GRAAAHHH!*

"More than a decade of training in the aerial style, studying momentum, angles, how to shift my body weight and how to manipulate all of them at once," Ranma explained, even as he winced as a graze. The more she got frustrated, the more Kara's self-control faded, and the harder it was to keep up with her. "My mastery of the art is like old man Jon's mastery of farming, or Martha's mastery of cooking. Lots and lots of little bits coming together into a single whole."

Kara nodded at that, remembering a similar speech from Cassie about swordwork being a mixture of hand-eye coordination, upper body strength, footwork, control and speed merging into one. That reminded her of when Ranma had mentioned this Cologne woman being an

Amazon. Deciding to bring that up now, she asked, "By the way, you said you knew Chinese Amazons at one point, right? How do they stack up against you?"

She figured that was as good a way as any to discern whether or not the Chinese Amazons had any connection to the Amazons of Amazon Island. At this point, Kara wanted to talk to Ranma about her training on the island, what Kara had done there and learned, maybe even break out the small stabbing dagger Cassie had given her as a going-away present. But until she knew he knew about at least the Amazons, that wouldn't happen. *Secrets, secrets and more secrets drat it.*

"Urgh. Cologne proves that old theory about the elderly being super dangerous because they outlive all their opponents. She wasn't as strong as me, wasn't as fast, but if you think my dancing around you like this is annoying, imagine a wrinkled old wicked witch type in miniature, say about two and a half feet tall, who bounces around on a cane like a pogo stick doing the same thing," Ranma grumbled a bit at the memory while also dodging Kara's strikes. *She's really good about linking her attacks, at least.* "While her training was incredible, and I could say she and I are kind of friends, the first few times I trained with her were seriously annoying."

Kara's eyes crossed as she tried to picture this, but there were a few problems with doing so. While she had seen the Wizard of Oz, she was having trouble picturing a dwarf version. And as for the other issue, that one she had to ask about. "What's a pogo stick?"

"Something you will never need considering you can jump around and fly too!" Ranma quipped in reply, snickering slightly. Kara tried to take advantage of his seeming distraction, but instead Ranma was able to dodge her attack and return a punch to her head that nearly caught her in the eye as so many of his super-fast attacks had during their morning spar.

Soon however the timer Kara had set up for the match went off. The two of them parted ways. Kara headed back to the farmhouse to remove the bits of furniture still inside the bathroom on the second floor. She had reluctantly decided that the Chinese Amazons had no connection to the Isle of Women Amazons, seeming to be far too weak in terms of sheer physical ability, if not skill. That annoyed her a bit, but she couldn't do anything about it. *Those really aren't my secrets to share not unless Ranma's already aware of them. And why does that annoy me, his name, something about Ranma's name is still bothering me.*

Meanwhile Ranma headed into the small barn near the end of the farm to get back to work repairing appliances.

They both came together with Martha for lunch, where they were joined by Jon. He had come back with the truck laden with the wooden slats necessary for a full rebuild of the second floor, but not the bits needed to replace the water pipes and then gone on to work the field for a bit, although he would ask Kara to help for that later. "I ordered them, but we'll need to wait for them to be delivered here tomorrow."

He looked at Kara, and pulled out a small bag, handing it over to her and going on as she peered inside, an embarrassed look crossing her features. "And I also bought that mask for you, Kara. Hopefully we won't have another Allergy Moment."

After lunch Jon joined Kara on the second floor, walking her through removing some more of the floorboards, tracking down further water damage, and then junking the wrecked slats, before heading out to the fields. With Kara there to literally fly the tractor's storage bin back to the barn every time it became full, the two of them were able to clear most of the wheat field that day, although they would be back tomorrow to bail the stalks left in the field once the wheat had been harvested. It was something that Jon had gotten used to when Clark was around, and thankfully, it seemed the mask he had bought Kara seemed to work to keep her allergies at bay today.

After the field was done, Jon moved over to take care of the house, and went over the work two youngsters had done on the outer fence that morning. He found that fence very well done, although he wondered where some of the stakes had come from, since it looked as if Ranma and Kara had replaced more than he had expected. The electrical was also well in place, something he had not anticipated they could do in a single day, and he resolved to thank them later. For now, he let the two of them have another spar, which apparently was Ranma's equivalent of a break. What Kara thought about it he didn't know, although he felt that Ranma's ability to keep up with her had seemingly lit a competitive fire within Kara.

What are we going to do with that girl? I really thought she needed a better grounding being... well, human rather than Kryptonian, and that going to high school would be a part of that. But given how far advanced she is in science and math and frankly how much more intelligent Kara is than a normal teenager I don't know if that's the case any longer. Clark had friends, he had aspirations and goals going into high school that being there helped him reach. Kara doesn't have any of that.

"I can't tell if you're getting anything out of these spars," Kara grumbled, launching a kick at Ranma. He had convinced her that she needed to work on her footwork and kicking more, so both of them had their arms tied behind their backs. The fact that Ranma didn't seem at all put off by this annoyed her greatly.

And maybe she had stopped caring so much about holding her strength back. The loud crack of a broken bone that occurred when their legs met in midair seems to indicate that, and her eyes widened in shock.

Before she could apologize though, Ranma had already twisted around and launched another kick towards Kara, causing Kara to back away through the air again, dodging the kick but not returning one of her own, instead backing away. She had finally figured out that if she just broke contact in midair Ranma's ability to stay there with her ended quickly.

"I am actually. You might not think it, but you are really fast!" Ranma joked, earning a laugh from Kara as she landed lightly on her feet. For this spar, she had transformed back into her female body. "That, and ya hit like a freight train. So, my ki healings also gets a workout. I won't learn any new style or anything like that unless I can figure out how you're doing that whole flying thing. But it's still a good matchup for me." *And if I can get used to fighting stronger opponents in my normal bodies, then when I need to break out Shazam's power, I will be able to easily.*

"That's precisely the opposite way it is for me then. I'm not getting anything physical out of this. It's all metal," Kara said, somewhat pleased to hear Ranma was learning something from this and very pleased to see the redhead able to heal herself so easily.

Then she cocked her head to one side, staring at Ranma. "Are you really comfortable in that form? I don't think I could ever be comfortable as a guy."

Ranma shrugged and, with a sigh, realized that this spar was over for the moment. "I will admit that it's caused me a few problems along the way, and it taught me a lot more about, you know, the whole woman thing..." she paused then to let Kara snicker at his wording before going on, "then any man should know. But I deliberately chose this curse for myself when Pops had us train at Jusenkyo. I still don't know why he sought it out like he did, but I got what I wanted out of it for sure."

"Wait, what? You wanted to be a girl? But you already said you don't like guys, so..." Kara wasn't going to jump to conclusions like a certain young Tendo had, but she was very confused at the moment. *Maybe he thought all the other choices were worse and felt he couldn't get away without be cursed?*

When Kara voice this question, Ranma shook his head. "Nope. There's a place I want to go, and to get there, I have to be a girl. I was kicked out because I was a boy, but I figure they'll have to let me in if I can turn into a girl, even if I don't stay that way."

That finally allowed Kara to make the final connection her memory needed to remember where she had heard the martial artist's name before and she gaped at Ranma. "Wait a minute, wait a minute! You're Ranma!" Before Ranma could comment on that patently obvious statement, Kara moved on, pointing at him wildly. "The, the Ranma that Cassie always talked about from years ago! The boy who wound up on Amazon Island!"

Now it was Ranma's turn to gape and Kara whooped, throwing a fist into the air. "You are!! Oh man, Cassie is going to flip!"

"You, you know Cassie?" Ranma stammered.

“Know her, she’s my best friend!” Kara laughed. “She’s told me about you, about some of the adventures he went on. Is it true you somehow got an entire horde of monkeys to attack you at one point?”

“Yeah, we kind of startled them when they were up in the trees, and for some reason they really didn’t like my taunting them,” Ranma muttered, still staring slack-jawed at Kara. Then her hands began to twitch. “And it’s taken you this long to realize that the Ranma Cassie mentioned and I were one and the same? Are you that bad with names, or did you just think my name was common in Japan or something?”

Blushing Kara looked away someone embarrassed. “I’m horrible at names, okay? I could barely remember my cousin’s name when I met up with him again here on Earth, let alone his new one. Do not get me...”

That was as far as she got before Ranma’s finger poked her in the side. This didn’t do anything, and she smirked at him. “Forgot about my durability for a second there, did you? Your threat of tickling me is patently impossible,” she taunted him. “Maybe I shouldn’t tell you more about how Cassie has been since the two of you met when you were so young, or how she might be coming to America with Wonder Woman.”

Even though she knew Ranma would probably be acquainted with Diana as well, until he mentioned her, Kara was going to keep that secret for a moment.

That was as far as she got before one of Ranma’s fingers began to glow with ki, shaping into a claw. Before her eyes could widen in shock at the sudden violent attack, one of those fingers poked her in the side. This did nothing but startle her, causing her to let out a small yip, and swatting at Ranma’s hand but he had already pulled back.

Kara looked down at her side and found that her skin hadn’t been pierced at all, and she frowned at Ranma, who wagged his fingers, now all of whom were glowing with ki. “I told you that the sharpness of my ki claws is based on my imagination. If I don’t want them to be sharp, they won’t be. Now, what was that about you not being ticklish?”

Before Kara could back away Ranma pounced, tickling her from all sides, using ki not only in his claws but to heighten his body’s speed as his arms moved Amaguriken quick. Kara yelped again and tried to dodge. But caught on the back foot both by Ranma’s speed, Kara didn’t think of just flying away. She did discover however, that yes, she was quite ticklish, and soon her gales of laughter peeled out interspersed with, “Gah, no, stop! Eep! Stop it, this is so undignified!”

In the doorway of the nearby farmhouse, Martha stood watching this giggling a bit. She was close enough to have heard the entire conversation, and although she was still a little thrown by the idea of the curse and the fact that Ranma had apparently chosen the curse form he was stuck with, which she had overheard, it was the why of it that was the most important.

The last vestige of Martha's concerns about his keeping Kara's power secret vanished now. And frankly, the sight of the two young friends simply having fun together like this was enough to warm her heart given the past few weeks of Kara becoming more and more morose as the school year came closer.

The sound of the house phone going off behind her caused Martha to turn, reaching for a phone set near the doorway. "Kent residence."

"Hi mom," a male voice said from the other side. "How are you, dad and my cousin doing down there?"

"We're doing quite well, Kara is through the work she needs for school, although Jon and I are both kind of concerned about her on the social side of things, Martha confessed.

Clark sighed, then seemed to pause, before asking, "What is that noise I'm hearing the background?"

"Kara is getting to know a contractor that Jon brought in for somewhat work around the place. Unfortunately, Kara doesn't have as good a handle on controlling her strength all the time, and it's added a bit to the wear and tear around here. While she wasn't able to make friends over at the high school, this young fellow seems to have brought her out of her funk."

Martha decided not to mention Ranma by name or his curse. For one thing, she wasn't certain how Clark would act knowing a young man was becoming friendly with his little cousin. She had detected more than a bit of overbearing male protectiveness around her time or two before this and didn't want Clark to overreact. As for the curse, that was so unusual that there was no way anyone would believe it if they didn't see it for themselves.

As she spoke, Martha could almost feel the grimace on Clark's face. When Kara had first fallen into her right after visiting the school Clark had stopped by to try to jolly her along, it hadn't worked very well.

But when he spoke, he didn't address that, instead the fact that Kara was getting along with a guy, proving Martha's concerns on that front accurate. "And you say this is a young man? Perhaps Jon and I should have a talk with him. I'm also kind of concerned about anyone beyond the Amazons getting close to Kara before she has a better handle on controlling her strength around people who aren't super-strong themselves. Don't tell her I said this, but I think while her training with the Amazons was a good thing in a lot of ways, they did fall short of what I hoped they'd achieve there."

"Perhaps, but I think that was simply a miscommunication there. She certainly knows how to fight far better than you did when you first took up see heroing, and by the way, we will be talking about your costume again in the future young man. I was in town the other day and I heard still more comments about how Superman needs a costume change. According to them,

wearing your underwear on the outside is never a good thing," Martha teased, changing where she had heard that comment from so as to not add fuel to the fire.

As Clark sputtered indignantly, Martha went on. "Besides, I do not think you need to come down and speak to the young man in question. He seems to be a very good sort who hasn't tried to look at Kara's rear or chest at all as far as I can tell. And I've been on the watch for it. I've even talked to his mother, and if that's not a good sign, I don't know what is."

Clark was so off-balance by Martha's earlier joke at his expense that he didn't realize that Martha hadn't mentioned the name of the young man in question yet, which again was very deliberate. After all, Ranma wasn't exactly a local name. And the last thing that she wanted was for Clark to come down and act overbearingly, as she was worried, he would. Even from barely a day getting to know him, Martha was certain that kind of thing would get right up Ranma's nose. No, it was best that the two of them meet in person, and Clark make his own judgment on Ranma as an individual rather than see him (currently her) first and foremost as that boy near my cousin.

"Just so long as you are sure that there's nothing romantic or anything like that going on between them. I won't lie and say I'm concerned about Kara being taken advantage of by some boy, but I'm similarly concerned about what might happen to him if she forgets her strength," Clark finally replied.

"There isn't anything romantic going on, they are not becoming developing crushes on one another as teenagers are so often wont to do. Kara is far too levelheaded for that. Unlike you and Lois..." she drawled. "I think they're becoming friends, and that is something Kara needs going forward."

And friendship is a far better basis for later romance than the instant attraction you felt toward that Lois girl, Martha added internally, a faint scowl on her face. Her opinion on Lois Lane had changed over the past few months. At first, she had been cautiously approving of the relationship. She had been concerned about how different Lois was in comparison to any other girl that Clark had ever spend time around, yet at the same time, Martha had approved of Lois as a woman who had become quite famous in a field dominated by men.

However, it was very obviously not a relationship of equals, and after hearing more about their relationship, Martha realized, as Diana had, that Lois seemed far more in love with Superman than Clark Kent. Which was a travesty in Martha's mind. Why, she hadn't even agreed to come and meet Jon and Martha yet, saying it was a waste of time at their age! The nerve!

Martha's frown didn't stay on her face however, as she watched the youngsters break off their little tickle fight, with Kara, finally having gotten the upper hand, rolling on the ground and getting the redhead in a bearhug that she couldn't escape. Their talk couldn't quite reach

where Martha was now on the phone, but whatever Ranma had said it put a grin on Kara's face, then a pensive expression as she let the other girl up.

"I suppose you're right. And while I know, I come over a little too overprotective, I know I need to let Kara go at some point. Give her my love and my love to Dad as well. I'm afraid I will not be around for a while. I'm heading out-system on a mission with Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and Martian Manhunter. A war is going on a nearby planet, and we've been asked to step in as peacekeepers."

"You stay safe out there," Martha ordered. "I don't want you or any of your friends coming back hurt."

"We'll try our best, Mom," Clark chuckled. "And I will make a point to stop by when we get back. I get the impression that some time on the farm will do me some good by that point."

OOOOOOO

Elsewhere, Diana was also preparing to leave Earth by giving a very stern series of instructions to her young charge. This included the normal things a parent would say to their teenage son or daughter when leaving them alone in the house for a long period: not to spend the money she was leaving on anything but food, not to open the door to strangers, not to mention to anyone that she was living here on her own and to keep up with her studies on the history of Man's World.

That was about it for Cassie as, unlike Kara, since she was being homeschooled and Kara had already taught Cassie quite a lot about math and science. More than Diana knew, really.

Of course, some of these injunctions were not so normal. "There's a city map over there. Take it with you whenever you leave the house. Your sense of direction is somewhat bad and won't get any better until you start memorizing landmarks around here. And don't go looking for fights. I don't want a repeat of what happened when those young men tried to flirt with you the other day. You can't just go around stuffing them into trash compactors, no matter how much you feel that putting trash with trash is appropriate."

Kara pouted a bit but shrugged her shoulders and agreed to remember. "I'll be fine, Mistress Diana."

"And yet you're still calling me Mistress," Diana said, gently popping the other girl on the nose. "Still, I'll allow it this time. You can practice your lasso inside in the training area, but not the sword for now. I don't have enough dummies for you to practice with. You can practice your forms, but not strikes."

"Understood."

“And no more use of the Internet either. I don’t trust the adult lock I put on it, and there are many, many things out there you are not ready for. Good grief, I wasn’t ready for them when I discovered them,” Diana grumbled, shaking her head. “While understanding the nature of men means that some of that was quite obvious, it doesn’t make me any happier about what can be found there.”

Diana was pleased to see Cassie actually shudder a bit at that, nodding her head rapidly to the older woman. “Yeah, no way am I going on there again without someone else around. Even their music videos are weird. I mean some of them are okay but some are just wrong. And what the heck is up with how little women wear in a lot of them?”

The older Amazon nodded at that and pulled the other girl into a hug which was quickly returned. “I’ll see you when I get back. And when we do, I’ll ask Clark to tell me where the Kents live, so you can spend some time with Kara, all right? I think that would be good for both of you.”

Cassie nodded enthusiastically at that, and Diana pulled out of the hug, ruffled her hair, and left quickly, wondering to herself if she wasn’t making a big mistake leaving Kara behind. *Still, I have to do it eventually, and getting her used to being on her own only be a good thing, right? Right?*

OOOOOO

Ranma spent several days on the major project on the farm, replacing the second story floor, and repairing the various items Clark and broken over the years. Most of those he was able to do with relative speed. So successful was he that it gave the Kents several items they could now sell in town. The eroded or broken bits of plumbing were replaced, the floor reinforced, and insulation added between the floors.

The work was so well done that Jon had to shake his head in amazement at how well Ranma could work with just his hands and the bare minimum of tools. He’d even taught Kara how to do a lot of the different exercises for martial arts construction in that time, using her hands as hammers, which was great for self-control and technique, shaping the pipes with her strength, and several other things of that nature.

Throughout that time Ranma had shared more of his adventures with Kara and the Kents, including the meeting with the undead that he and Lara had run into, which horrified both Kents to a degree, although they were thankful the undead had been dealt with. In return, Kara had shared her time on Amazon Island, telling Ranma how much Cassie had missed him, and the news that Cassie might be brought into man’s world soon.

That only emphasized Ranma’s desire to get back on the road and head to Star City to see if he could find his ‘Diana-nee,’ a name that had Kara giggling when she first heard it. Alas,

while she knew Diana did indeed live in Star City, she didn't know where, nor did she have a phone number to call.

Eventually, all the work Jon needed Ranma's help with around the farm was done, and after breakfast on his fourth day on the farm, Ranma announced he was leaving. This didn't surprise either Jon or Martha, and they had already put together a large bag of food and some money. The money was hidden among the food, as Jon suspected Ranma would be a little annoyed by it.

"Well Ranma, I can honestly say having you around has been fun and interesting, although I could deal without you and Kara here causing shockwaves when you exchange punches in the morning during your spars. I hope you can find Miss Diana as you want to, and young Cassie too, of course."

As Martha spoke, Kara looked down at the ground, scuffing it with her foot in annoyance. She really, really wanted to go with Ranma, but she couldn't quite get up the courage to say so. The Kents had put up with her and had tried to help the displaced Kryptonian teen as best they could to understand human society. Jon, in particular, had helped her create, as Ranma had mentioned her idea of right and wrong. Both Kents had borne through without much complaint the issues Kara ran into controlling her strength and abilities. Kara couldn't just toss their plans for her aside.

Her head whipped up, and she stared at Jon in astonishment when Jon spoke up. "I think having you around has been interesting as well, Ranma, and I speak for both Martha and me when I say we can trust you to watch over Kara while she helps you find your friends."

"Wait, what/What!?" Ranma and Kara shouted, speaking over one another as they stared at the married couple.

"Kara has been missing Cassie something fierce, and I heard you both talk about how Kara wants to see the world. This way, she can at least see a bit of America in your company, and after all, if she runs into anything she can't handle, Kara can always fly back here." Jon answered blithely. Before becoming serious as Martha reached over and pulled the younger girl into a sideways hug.

"Your Uncle and I have been talking about it, and we think we were wrong in pushing you into trying to be a normal teenage girl. If you think you can make a life for yourself in some other fashion, well, traveling with Ranma to see Cassie will not only give you a second opinion from someone your own age but also be a test for if you can get along traveling as he does. Take a few weeks before school starts to think about whether or not school is really for you, darling, or if it was just a bad first impression. If it is, we'll happily put you up here throughout the school year. Gracious, as long as you like, you'll always have a home here. That ain't gonna change if you don't go to school," Martha said, still hugging Kara.

Ranma looked at the family and thought for a moment about cheekily asking what was in it for him to bring Kara long, but I did against it. She had become a friend these past few days, and he knew that she and Cassie were close as well. *I liked traveling with Lara, so traveling with another girl wasn't that big of a hardship. It, um, it doesn't hurt Kara's also cute... shouldn't really think that, but there it is.*

"Thanks, Aunt Martha, Uncle Jon! I promise I won't cause trouble!" Kara exclaimed.

Ranma winced at that but said nothing again, just shaking his head behind Kara's back as she gave the Kents hugs once more before stepping outside, letting the trio have their farewells. Soon though, Kara joined him, smacking him lightly on the shoulder to indicate they could leave. Ranma nodded, waved farewell to the older couple and led the way towards the road at a jog.

Despite having stayed behind to exchange more waves with her aunt and Uncle, Kara caught up with him easily, lightly jogging alongside him, causing Ranma to notice she was still wearing the same clothing she had earlier, although she had a bundle on her back. He held out a hand, and after a second, she handed the bag over, and he stuffed it into his ki space to join his own clothing.

When he was finished, Kara asked, "So, are we going to just run all the way to Star City?"

"Why not? It's good endurance training for me, at least. Not certain you, little Miss Alien, will get anything out of it. But hey, at least this way, you'll be able to see the country, right?" Ranma joked back.

Rolling her eyes, Kara put a little more speed into her steps, racing ahead of Ranma and then turning backward, running backward as she joked, "Well then, come on, slowpoke!"

Ranma growled and sped up, racing after her as she continued to laugh, and the two youngsters raced on, heading towards Star City and their friend.

End Chapter

And there you have it. The action will start in the next chapter... when this story shows up in the polls again. Which will be after **ATP** and **Horse** are finished.