

It wasn't the only shrine in Juuban, nor was it the largest, most visited, or even terribly important. A grove of trees and a slight elevation screened the compound from the street below. In the courtyard of the shrine, a young priestess sat in meditation. Long reddish-black hair flowed down from her head, perfectly framing her deceptively calm face. Behind her closed eyes, the girl's mind was in turmoil trying to make sense of the... insanity... in a young couple's lives, and the crazy people who caused it.

Rei Hino had come home angry over what had just transpired; her friend Ranma's attempt to reconcile his mother and his situation met with failure. Not even the endorsement of the world's most powerful super heroines had persuaded the Saotome matriarch to let go of a Seppuku promise Ranma had made as a five-year-old. Now it seemed that Ranma and his fiancée Akane would have to make their way without a mother's love and guidance. A frown finally revealed her roiling emotions as she considered whether the love of that jerk of a mother was worth anything. Rei banished memories of Mrs. Saotome's rejection of her only child, finding peace at last. Ranma and Akane needed their friends now, not anger. A wave of calm rolled back in, washing away her angry expression.

As her meditation continued, Rei wondered if there was a way to strengthen the bond between Ranma and Akane. Suddenly, a flash of inspiration pierced the veil that had hidden the answer. The shrine maiden returned to the physical, having received the insight she had sought from the spiritual.

After hurrying inside, the priestess punched Ami's number on the phone.

She waited impatiently for the call to go through. "Hello?"

Ami's mom answered. Rei hoped her friend was home. "This is Rei, is Ami-chan there?"

She was! "Thanks!"

"Hello, Ami-chan?" She waited for her friend's returned greeting.

Excitement increased on her face. "I just got a great idea, could you come up to the shrine?"

"Great! See you soon!" Rei hung up the phone, content to wait for her friend.

Sailor Ranko: Twice In A Millennium

A Ranma 1/2 / Sailor Moon Novella, 3rd in the Sailor Ranko series

By Kevin D. Hammel

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A young woman with closely cropped black hair walked in an unfamiliar corner of Nerima. The young warrior's face showed apprehension as she approached the Saotome home. When Ranma had first told her about his mother's rejection, Akane had almost stormed off in a rage. The Akane of the past might well have, but not now. 'Auntie' Saotome had become quite close to Akane Tendo and her 'cousin' Ranko, how could she do this to both of them? Genma Saotome's contract was a joke in itself, a pathetic attempt to pry a son from his mother. More ludicrous was the contention that the pact was unfulfilled.

Akane looked at the simple ring on her finger with a smile. The months she and Ranma had spent in Jadeite's dimension proved Ranma was the one for her, even though he'd been a girl the whole time. There, at long last, Akane had become Ranma's peer in the Art. She accepted the fact she would never be his equal, but could finally spar with her fiancée knowing that both of them were going all out. A smile grew on her face as she remembered the wonderful, frightening, dirty, and exciting adventure they had shared; and the heroism that she had found in herself at its end. Akane's smile dimmed a little when she realized that Ranma's role as Sailor Sun created a new gulf between them, but things were never easy for the star crossed couple.

As she reached the Saotome house, the smile dimmed a little more. Akane took a few calming breaths. Anger was still her enemy, especially right now. Her smile restored, she walked to the door full of hope for reconciliation. Somehow, Nodoka had forgotten how to love her child. The fact Akane had lost her own mother a decade ago only strengthened her resolve. She had to succeed for Ranma, and herself.

Ami hopped out of a bus and walked down the street to the entrance of the shrine where her friend Rei lived. She wondered just what could have gotten her friend so worked up. *Could it have anything to do with what happened with Ranma's mother?*

It was only a few minutes later that both of them bounded down the stairs, running to catch a bus. They needed a lot of help to make Rei's vision a reality.

Akane hesitantly regarded the button beside the door. A warrior who held off three youma in their home dimension was not going to turn back because of a one-centimeter square of plastic! She pushed the button, summoning the sound of creaking floorboards, as hesitant footsteps came to answer the bell.

Nodoka opened the door and suppressed a gasp. She had seen Akane Tendo before, but never as she was now. A pretty schoolgirl, a bit soft from the pleasures of urban life, had greeted 'Auntie' Saotome when she last visited the Tendo home. Now a warrior came to the Saotome house, presumably to have her revenge on a mother unworthy of the title. Nodoka bowed. "Come in, Akane."

"Thank you... Mrs. Saotome." Akane walked a few meters into the room with both strength and grace Nodoka had never seen in her before. The young martial artist turned, her face bearing none of the rage Nodoka had expected. "We must talk."

Akane finally had a good chance to look at her fiancée's mother. The time since Ranma's departure had not been kind to the woman. Her eyes were bloodshot, and red streaks covered her face.

"Have a seat, Akane. May I ask why you came to visit?" Nodoka asked in a soulless voice, it seemed her very being had been washed away by tears.

The two women sat down, and were silent for a few minutes, Akane speaking at last. "Mrs. Saotome... how could you treat Ranma the way you did?"

Nodoka closed her eyes, then rose and left the room. Akane could hear metal scraping against metal, then the woman returned carrying a small metal mixing bowl. She set it in Akane's lap, and then returned to her seat without a word. Her downcast face made emotions unreadable.

Akane looked into the bowl and saw the yellow-brown ashes of a piece of paper. Warmth and the unmistakable smell of burning told her fire had only recently consumed the document. Akane had a very good idea what had been written on it. She looked up from the container, a ray of hope escaping her control for a fleeting moment. "What's this?"

Nodoka spoke... eyes on her own clasped hands, not her son's fiancée. "Akane, my life has been controlled the last decade by the contents of that bowl. Today, that paper blinded me to honor for the last time." At last she looked up. "The agreement my husband made is gone now, love won over honor in my heart." She closed her eyes, lowering her head. "But, before it was gone... it cost me Ranma today. I saw him... for the first time in ten years... and drove him away. Without him, I am not a mother... I am nothing."

"Mrs. Saotome!" Akane shouted, and then lowered her voice. She took a few moments to compose herself before continuing, "You will always be Ranma's mother. You gave him life." She rose, to stand before the older woman. With a smile she raised Nodoka's chin, pleased there was no resistance. "To me, you're still Auntie Saotome. You made a terrible mistake today, and it's going to be tough to patch things up. But you can, and I'll help you... as long as it doesn't affect my relationship with Ranma." She glanced at her ring finger.

Nodoka followed Akane's eyes and saw the final proof of her son's manhood. "I'll try, Akane."

The twosome on the bus became a foursome before the group reached its final destination, as Minako and Makoto boarded en route. A phone call from Rei's had brought a sixteen-year old girl with two blonde ponytails out to the bus stop to greet her friends. Next to her was her pet black cat, Luna. After Ranma's disastrous attempt at reconciliation with his mother, the inner Senshi had gone to their respective homes, only to be re-assembled a short time later at Rei's request. Now all five girls gathered in Usagi's room.

As the leader of the group, Usagi spoke first. "So, Rei-chan, why did you want to get us together so soon? We just got back, and I'm still a little tired after all that dimension-hopping," she said, as she stifled a yawn.

Rei looked serious. "Well, I got a wonderful idea, though it will certainly need the approval from the Moon Princess to work..."

Akane walked the few blocks from the train station to her home with a concerned smile. Reconciliation was out of her hands now; the next move was Mrs. Saotome's. The Saotome matriarch had taken a big step when she burned the agreement... would Ranma understand just how big it was?

Luna looked as concerned as a cat could. "But, Rei, it's been a millennium since the last was called, and they were all royalty from one of the Kingdom's planets!"

Rei scowled at the cat. "Doesn't bravery and skill account for something? Look at Sailor Sun, SHE was a commoner."

Usagi responded with a distant expression. "She wasn't even made a Senshi until after her sacrifice." She smiled slightly before continuing. "But her rebirth shows that she became a true Sailor Senshi."

Rei smiled. "It does, but... it's better to have a living Senshi than a dead heroine."

Luna responded. "We have no idea of the dangers to us, let alone the candidate you propose, Rei. Besides there are no planets left; Earth is Endymion's power base, after all!"

Ami looked up from the computer she had been typing furiously on as the conversation progressed. "But there are other worlds in our Solar System besides planets..." Her expression became a little downcast. "And a lot of them are bigger than Mercury. Look at some of the ones I've found!"

Never had a piece of paper looked so terrifying, or so empty. Taking pen in hand, Saotome Nodoka began to put words to the paper. It was a struggle to pour her heart onto the page, but it was the only way. She honestly didn't think she could face her son again. Perhaps words could bridge the chasm her thoughtlessness had created.

Hours passed, or were they minutes? A glance outside at gathering darkness proved it to be the former. The matriarch looked once more at the paper. It said all she felt, and all it must. It was ready. A stamp of her hanko finalized the document. As she folded the paper, a few droplets fell to betray the emotions that raged just beneath her facade of control.

Nodoka went to the bureau and withdrew two envelopes. She addressed both to 'Ranma'. In one, she placed the recently completed note. The tears had dried, providing mute testimony on her emotional state. In the other, she dumped the cold ashes of the document she should have forgotten; hoping her son would understand the message of the now illegible paper.

Ranma's mother closed the documents, and then sealed them. She would not trust anyone save herself to deliver them safely. A glance at her watch showed there was more than enough time to take them to the Tendo home today.

The bus ride of a few kilometers seemed unending; events that so recently took place replayed over and over in the mother's mind. She had spat at her own son's feet, not waiting to hear what happened. Her mind had been made up in an instant. Just as suddenly, her

heart had been broken as she heard the reality of what happened, first from one of the Sailor Senshi, then the young warrior Ranma would take as a wife.

So deep and painful were her recollections that she missed her stop. Nodoka stopped the bus then walked back to her stop, a short walk further taking her to the Tendo home.

The doorbell summoned a young woman Nodoka knew well, Kasumi. The young matriarch blinked once, then smiled for her guest. "Good evening, Auntie. What brings you here?" There was an edge to her voice, a strain not normally present.

Nodoka closed her eyes for a moment, searching for composure as she squeezed tears from her tightly shut eyelids. Opening her red stained eyes, she thrust the two envelopes at her hostess. "Please make sure Ranma gets these, Kasumi-chan."

Kasumi accepted the packages with a small bow. "Of course, Aunt... Saotome-san. Ranma and Akane are visiting if you wish to see them..." Her sentence died as she saw the horrible anxiety on Nodoka's face.

"No... Thank you." Nodoka bowed one last time, then turned away. She fought with all her willpower to keep from breaking down. Her composure lasted until she was home. As she collapsed on her bed, she wondered if her self-control would ever return. If HE would ever return... home.

Kasumi walked into the living room, then over to the couch her sister and her sister's fiancé shared. "Ranma?"

"Yeah, Kasumi? What was that about?"

Kasumi looked thoughtful before proceeding. "These messages were left for you. Would you like to look at them?"

"Sure... I guess." Ranma replied as he took the two envelopes. Both were addressed to him using only his given name.

He opened the first, withdrawing a document pockmarked with dried tears. Unfolding the paper, he began to read. As he studied the letter anger grew on his face, vanishing quickly.

Akane looked at her fiancée with concern. "What's wrong, Ranma? What does it say?" Finished with it, Ranma handed the document to his soul mate, who began to read.

Ranma,

It is amazing how a moment or two of pride can cause years, or a lifetime, of suffering. A life based on supposed honor can be destroyed if one forgets for even a moment the true meaning of the word.

I have made two terrible mistakes in my life, accepting the document from your father was the first. A piece of paper is a poor substitute for a child. The second I made today, letting his written words, a newsreader's commentary, and my own stubborn pride blind me to your honor.

Knowing the secrets you were kind enough to share with me this morning, I will not repeat them here. I will tell you how I feel, though. After

you and nine of your friends left, one of them stayed behind. She told me the true story of your love for Akane, and the lengths you went to save her, and our world. My world and life collapsed when her tale was finished.

I realized too late just how much a man you became, both brave and loving. A child I would be proud of, but one my own foolish pride lost to me. Imagine having your child taken away for ten years, and then lost forever in a moment of arrogance and ignorance.

I had another visitor today, I won't mention her name but I will mention that she provided perspective on events recently concluded. She showed me what she herself learned; physical gender has nothing to do with the heart or spirit of a "Man Amongst Men".

I will not stand as judge for your father or you, Ranma. You will find the document that destroyed my life in the other envelope. That was the first signpost on my personal road to ruin, but it will misguide me no more. I stand ready to do as honor dictates, if that is your request. I am a failure as a mother, that is certain. I am fully prepared to rectify my mistakes with my lifeblood, if required to finally know honor at last.

I now ask you in humility for forgiveness. I just want to have my child back. I beg you give me the chance to be your mother, Ranma. All I ask for is a chance to start anew. Know that if that is not to be, I will die happy. My son has made me very proud.

Your Mother,

The impression of a hanko at the bottom concluded the document.

Akane turned from the paper to look at Ranma, who opened the second envelope to see the cooled ashes she had observed earlier. Ranma closed the envelope, engrossed in thought. Akane kissed him gently on the cheek. "Ranma... please tell me what you're thinking."

"I don't know what to think. Just a few minutes ago, I'd pushed her out of my mind. Now... I dunno..." He closed his eyes for a moment, and then came to a realization as he opened them. "It was you, wasn't it Akane? You visited her didn't ya? Why?"

Akane looked into her fiancé's beautiful blue eyes, "Because, Ranma. Because your mom deserves a second chance... I... I want her to be there for us and our children. My... my mom can't be." Akane closed her eyes for a moment before opening them to continue. "But I also told her you come first in my heart. If you don't want her..."

"I need to think about it, Akane. I'm not gonna be like her and talk before I think. Though us Saotomes are experts at it." He smiled at his love for a moment. "Thanks, Akane." He looked thoughtful before continuing. "Maybe there's somebody else I need to thank..." He kissed the top of her head. "Sorry, Akane. Gotta to do this visit alone."

"I... understand, Ranma." Akane added to herself, wondering who the other person mentioned in the letter was. "See you back in Juuban, Ranma."

"Yeah, Akane." Ranma said as he returned the letter to its envelope, then headed for the door.

Replaying the scene with his mother in his head, Ranma had a good idea who the Senshi that confronted her was. His two closest friends in the group were Ami and Rei. He doubted Mercury would have gone on the offensive, but Mars certainly would have. He'd seen the paper, ink streaked by tears. What had the Senshi said to his mother? Familiar scenery pulled him from his musings; his stop was coming up.

Rei was catching up on some chores as she saw Ranma walk up the steps with a concerned expression. He greeted her with a serious face as he drew a letter from an envelope. "Hey, Rei! I need to talk to you about what happened earlier."

The shrine maiden scowled as she thought of the last time that she'd seen Ranma, at his lousy mother's house. "What, Ranma? Don't tell me that you let that jerk get to you!"

Ranma was clearly taken aback. "I hope you aren't callin' my mom a jerk, Rei. Just think of what she went through."

"What she went through! What about you? She spat at you! She actually wanted you to KILL yourself! Why... if... she... were... here... I'd..." Anger consumed the young priestess' ability to talk as her face reddened.

Ranma thrust the paper at his friend. "Read this, Rei. My mom just wrote it..."

Rei snatched the paper from Ranma's hand, nearly tearing it in her haste to get it over with. As she read it, a lot of her anger left. A quieter girl looked up from the paper. "I guess she took it really hard, Ranma," The priestess said as she handed the paper back to her teammate.

Ranma accepted it with a grin expression, "Yeah. Now I need to decide if I want a mother or not."

Anger blossomed on Rei's face again, only to be washed away by a more sober expression. "Ranma, I think your mom needs you and..." She looked up straight into her taller friend's eyes. "You and Akane need her."

"What did you say to her, Rei? What did you do?"

"I gave her a piece of my mind. I told her WHY you weren't on Earth while the rest of us were." Rei looked down as she struggled to continue. Glancing up into Ranma's eyes, she finished, "The last thing I said was that I hoped our paths never cross again."

Guilt and sadness combined with understanding to mask Ranma's reaction to Rei's actions. "I... guess I see what you were tryin' to do, Rei..."

Rei glanced at the paper as Ranma carefully folded it up. "But it sounds like your mom finally caught a clue. Maybe you'll be able to patch things up." She looked thoughtful for a moment. "I hope I do get to cross paths with her again."

Ranma gently took her hand and offered a tentative shake. "Thanks, Rei. I gotta think about this s'more."

"Sure, anytime," the girl said to Ranma's back. She wondered if Ranma could win his mother's heart back... or was it if his mom could win Ranma back? From what little she'd seen of Nodoka, she seemed every bit a stubborn as her son.

Ranma walked the short distance to the Miyagi dojo from Rei's. He wasn't surprised to see his fiancée waiting for him. "Hey, Akane!" he shouted as he approached the entryway.

"Hi, Ranma. How was your meeting?" Akane asked with genuine concern darkening her face.

"Good, Akane. Really Good. I figured out who talked to mom today..."

"Who, Ranma?"

"One of my friends... Sailor Mars."

"So what are you going to do? Visit Auntie Saotome?"

"Not today, but SOON." Ranma said with a bit of hope on his face.

"Good." Akane replied with a cute smile.

Ranma smiled back as he offered a hand to his fiancée. Hand in hand, both reentered the house where they lived in Juuban.

Makoto, Setsuna, and Rei gathered for a meeting at Ami's. Her mother was working at the hospital, providing an excellent opportunity for the girls to meet without outside interference. All four had agreed Rei's plan was a good one, and were prepared to see it through.

As host of the meeting, Ami spoke first. "I thought we should get together to finalize our choice of a focus target." She turned to Makoto. "Mako-chan, it's going to have to be one of your satellites. I have a definite preference, do you have any?"

Makoto looked thoughtful. Living on Earth, she didn't often visit the world that was her power's focus. The Senshi of Jupiter did know the feel of the four major moons intimately, however... icy Callisto, rocky Ganymede, tempestuous Europa, and fiery Io. Which would she suggest? Makoto came to a conclusion, speaking at last. "Well, if it were me..."

Ami shook her head in the affirmative. "It IS up to you, Mako-chan. You're going to have to channel the power to help us create a new transformation stick."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. Anyway, I think I've picked a good one out..."

Upon hearing the name, Ami smiled. It was her choice as well.

Wedding preparations, oh brother! Was all Ranma could think as he followed Akane and Kasumi from shop to shop as they made sure everything was perfect. It was amazing that so

much work and worry could be invested in a short ceremony. Flowers, clothing, decorations for the dojo... So much to fret over. It was, it seemed, easy to say 'I love you' and darn near impossible to say 'I do'. But, considering all that happened for them to say 'I love you', was it REALLY that easy, or just in the past?

At home, Nabiki set to work undoing all her little sister was doing. She didn't want Akane to be stuck in a marriage neither Ranma nor little sister wanted. They needed some breathing room to decide if they really were in love, if marriage was really what they wanted.

Just a few invitations to some people who had somehow been left off the guest list, but knew Ranma and Akane well... It would be a pity if THEY couldn't come, too. Nabiki gave a self-contented smile as she mailed the envelopes; the wedding would be very interesting indeed.

A tired Ranma and Akane returned to Juuban. All the preparations had been made; all they had to do now was wait... and train.

Princess Jupiter surveyed a little-visited corner of her vast domain. The very world itself was vital, exhaling mighty plumes of fire. However, its surface was desolate; devoid of all life except the worldlet's mighty show of a geologic approximation of organic ebb and flow.

Death would come in mere moments were it not for the protection their magic offered the Jovian Ruler and her guests. Each of the other young women was princess of an inner planet or Terra's moon. Sailor Jupiter searched the landscape looking for a suitable rock to transform for a higher purpose, finding a solid dark brown stone that would serve as the basis for a new transformation stick. Nodding to her friends, she joined their hands and the group used a Sailor Teleport to travel to nearby Castle Io.

The inner Senshi materialized across from the massive stone table that dominated the Great Hall of Castle Io. Seated at the table were the remaining Sailor Senshi, save Sol's new warrior who remained behind on Earth unaware of events far away. Pluto sat before the center of the table studying a dusty tome, flanked by Uranus and Neptune on one side, and Saturn on the other.

Jupiter approached the Guardian of Time with the stone she had found, traversing the mosaic of Jupiter, its rings, and its four great moons that decorated the floor. All eyes focused on the stone she carried, the only sound in the room the reverberating click of the tall Senshi's boots against the polished stone. Her walk, and her reflection's, provided the only motion in the tableaux.

Pluto looked up from her book to gaze at the rock Jupiter carried, and then broke the silence. "That specimen will be fine, Princess Jupiter. Are you ready to channel the power of the moon to create the transformation stick?"

Jupiter stopped, thought clearly marked on her furrowed brow. Rei or Ami would have been better choices; they were good friends of Ranko. But Phobos and Deimos were much too small and Mercury had no moons. So the duty and honor fell to her. Soon there would be a new Sailor Senshi, powered by one of HER moons. A proud smile bloomed on her face as she answered the question at last, "Yes, I am."

"Excellent." Pluto intoned then gazed at the book, rereading the words she had long before memorized yet again. "The instructions are quite specific. Concentrate on your planet's power, then try to separate out the moon's."

First the stone then the Senshi herself began to glow. The bright light surrounding her became fire and arcs of lightning as she found and began to channel the moon's energies. As the cold flames leapt higher, Pluto added an incantation from her book; fixing the image of the young woman who would use the stick as she chanted the words...

Back on Earth the next day, Makoto looked at the small wand she had made with Setsuna's help. It was transparent yellow, shot through with red to give the appearance of flames frozen and sealed within. The wand was perfect for both the world it represented and the warrior who would wield it. Storing the rod away with a thought, Makoto returned to her preparations. She and her friends were going to throw a very special party for two very special people. If all went well, the Senshi's number would swell to eleven. All would go well.

Each day for Nodoka was like the one before. Each was almost like an out-of-body experience as she almost floated through her work, then her time at home. Waiting for HER judgment by her child. The mat was laid out in the living room, and she checked the tanto each day. She knew well the cuts required for Seppuku by a woman, and was ready for her son to provide her release whether by death or rebirth. It was obvious Ranma was giving it much more thought than she had.

Ten years of planning and hoping. Ten seconds of denial. Two seconds of utter stupidity mistaken for honor. And now she waited for it all to end.

A knock at the door jolted her back to her home. She hoped it would be Ranma. Nodoka rose and walked to the door, dread vying with faint hope for her heart. She opened the portal to see three... girls? Akane she immediately recognized, she remembered the Sailor Mars from her previous encounter, finally, the girl she had grown to love as her own... Ranko... Ranma. Her wait was over. Nodoka bowed to her child. "Thank you for returning, Ranma. I pray that you will end my suffering. Sailor Mars and Akane, thank you both for showing an old woman the error of her ways." She looked up to see three illegible faces.

As one, the three girls offered a curt bow and a "Thank you."

Nodoka motioned for them to enter then directed her guests to take a seat on a sofa. She knelt down on the mat she had prepared for her moment of truth. Looking down, she picked up the katana and handed it to Ranma, who would serve as her judge and second.

The girl accepted the weapon, her face remaining noncommittal.

Nodoka picked up the tanto, then placed it in front of her, focusing her eyes on the deadly weapon as she waited.

After several minutes of utter silence in the room, Ranma spoke. "Mom, I have thought long and hard on what happened a few days ago. Though I don't wanna judge my own parent, your letter kinda forces me to. First, you spoke before you knew all the facts... BUT when you knew what was goin' on, you tried as hard as you could to fix things. Pop never woulda done that, ya know." Ranma struggled to maintain her composure as she continued, a free flow of tears showing her true emotions. "Please, mom, put that knife down, you might hurt

yourself... You might hurt Akane and me." She waited a few moments before continuing. "I forgive you, I don't wanna see you die over a dumb mistake, please? God knows me 'n pop 'ave made plenty of 'em."

Nodoka hesitantly looked up into eyes filled with pain, tears, and some love. Words came with difficulty as she adjusted to the possibility of a future beyond this day, this moment. A life with... "Ranma." She almost whispered, pausing a few heartbeats as she looked for the courage to continue, "Thank you."

Ranma found a small smile to put on. "Aww, it wasn't much. You deserved a second chance, mom."

Ranma and Akane emerged from the station in Nerima holding hands. Ranma turned to the girl who would, in just a few days become his wife. "Well Akane, I guess we really are gonna do it... right? After that time in Jadeite's dimension and with all the weight training you do now, you ain't even uncute any more..."

A small, dark cloud appeared above Akane's head "RRRRanmaaaa! Why I could..."

Ranma turned to her and finished his line. "You went from uncute to beautiful, Akane!" After giving her quick peck on the cheek, Akane's fiancé turned and ran... straight into a sprinkler watering a flowerbed.

Akane blinked in shock at Ranma's admission, and then burst into laughter. "You're still cute, Ranko... wanna be friends?"

A soaking Ranko, who forgot being drenched and female replied to her fiancée. "Yeah, Akane I'd like that."

Akane put her arm around the smaller girl, finally noticing how cold the water was. "Let's get you home, I think you could really use some hot water."

"Thanks." She turned the Akane and whispered in her ear. "You've gotta be the most macho, beautiful, over-muscled, wonderful, tomboy on Earth, Akane."

"I never thought I'd fall for an insensitive, cute, macho, pervert like you, Ranma." Akane whispered back.

Nabiki watched in shock as Ranko and Akane turned off the street and headed to the house. Each had an arm over the other's shoulder, right where each of them wanted those arms to be. Looking at the two girls, she saw only smiles of friendship and love. There was no anger on Akane's face or flustered confusion on Ranma's; only two people who obviously cared deeply for each other. NOT the two people she had sought to break up. Gears in the middle daughter's head went into hyperdrive as she thought of a way to avert disaster the day after tomorrow. Eyes narrowing, she came up with a plan as she stepped out the front door.

"Hi, Akane and RANKO! I was wondering if I could interest the two of you in a little wedding insurance?"

"Hey, Nabiki!" Ranma's eyes narrowed, "Why would we need insurance, huh? This another scam of yours?"

"Believe me, Ranma, it's not like that at all. Tomorrow, let's go downtown and I'll help you two get some wedding insurance, okay?"

Akane glared at her sister. "Sure Nabiki! How much is it gonna cost?"

"It's free, honest." Her forced smile slipped to a moment to show a little guilt. "So, will you two go with me tomorrow? It'll only take an hour or so..."

"Okay, Nabiki!" Both girls replied in perfect unison, and then laughed as they looked at each other.

Nabiki looked very relieved. "Great! See you two tomorrow morning early, okay?"

"Sure!" Akane pivoted to look to look at her fiancé again, "Let's get you some hot water, Ranko!" She said with enthusiasm. Akane then turned toward the house and hustled in, followed by Ranma.

Waiting for the two was a letter with beautiful calligraphy on the envelope. 'To Akane and Ranma' the outside said. Akane carefully opened the letter, resulting in a shredded envelope and a relatively legible, if ripped, missive. The manuscript was beautiful, obviously painstakingly written.

Ranma and Akane,

You two make a wonderful couple, and we wish you all the best. To help start your life together; we have a special gift for the two of you. Please come to Rei's house tomorrow night to pick it up.

Your friend,

Ami

Ranma and Akane kissed each other after marking the insurance policy, then headed for the door. The lines had been long, a few hours turned into the better part of the day. Well, they didn't have any pressing engagements today... save the one in Juuban that night.

Nabiki's actions when they finally got up to the window were really bizarre. Distracting hand gestures, small talk from a girl who HATED same... It was almost as if she was trying to pull something over on them. Fortunately Ranma and Akane were too observant to let THAT happen. They didn't get a chance to really study the documents, but Akane's big sister assured them everything was in order.

The paperwork marked at last, Ranma turned to Nabiki with a genuine smile of gratitude. "Thanks, Nabiki. Akane and I really appreciate your help."

"Not a problem, Ranma." Nabiki looked around to verify no one she knew was in earshot. "I hate to say this, but... You two deserve some happiness." With that and glance in both directions, she hurried away.

Ranma started after only to be stopped by Akane's gentle tug. "Don't go after her, Ranma. Nabiki's got a rep to protect, you know."

Ranma stopped in his tracks then offered a smirk to Akane. "You're right. It was awfully nice of her, though." He looked thoughtful. "Let's hop a train to Juuban and see what Ami's gift is."

"Yeah, Ranma, let's go."

The young couple headed out the door, hurrying to the nearest station.

Rei kept a lookout from the hill overlooking the street. She was glad the temple's other two residents were gone to the 'mountains' for a night of... meditation, or so they said. A bus pulled up and two very familiar people hopped out. Turning around, she gave a signal that brought Ami from the temple door to her side. Both girls traded a broad smile, and then tried to keep their enthusiasm under wraps.

Ami hurried to greet her two friends. "Hi, you two! I'm so glad you could make it."

Ranma smiled at his friend. "It's no problem, Ami! Why do you have to give us a present today instead of at the reception tomorrow?"

Ami blinked for a moment. "Because it's a special present, Ranma. That's all I'll say."

Rei met the three at the top of the hill. "Hi, I'm glad you two could make it!"

Akane crossed her arms. "Okay, why did you drag us all the way across the city?"

A voice rang out from behind a tree. "Because, this is a very special gift. It's for both of you, but you're going to have to accept it Akane."

Ranma and Akane turned to the voice, not noticing Ami and Rei's noiseless departure.

Walking out from behind the tree was a warrior Akane knew well. Her face showed surprise as she identified the girl. "Sailor Jupiter! Why are you here?"

The girl walked with graceful deliberation worthy of her station as the Princess of Jupiter and the gravity of the situation. Stopping just short of Akane, she looked down at the shorter girl with eyes that spoke of anticipation. "I came to give you this." One of her white-gloved hands reached up and seemed to pluck something out of the air.

Akane looked wide-eyed, first at the Sailor Senshi, then at the beautiful gem-quality yellow rod with a fierce red flame frozen within. Amazement became puzzlement as she accepted it. "It's beautiful, but what is it?"

Ranma looked in awe from the rod to Jupiter, who gave him a wink. He knew what it was, and couldn't believe there was another one. "B... b... but," he stammered as his old eloquence returned for a moment.

"Akane Tendo." A voice came from the Temple entrance. It was the greatest and most famous of the Sailor Senshi who spoke, Sailor Moon. "A thousand years ago, a commoner gave her

life in defense of her kingdom, and by the grace of the Kami was reborn to serve her... his... whatever! Queen's daughter in her time of need. One thousand years later, the reborn Sailor Senshi owe their lives to another commoner, who risked HER life to protect themselves and their Princess as they prepared an attack. So..."

There was a loud hiss, as four people breathed in after noticing a rock Sailor Moon didn't.

"I..." The leader of the Sailor Senshi came crashing to Earth, then executed a rather sloppy roll and came up with a slightly bleeding knee. "Ouch! Now where was I? Oh, yes..." Pain and a few tears showed through her disguise field as she continued to speak and walk, with a noticeable limp. "So we have decided to offer another commoner a position as a Sailor Senshi." Dismissing pain, and summoning up all the regal bearing she still possessed, Sailor Moon continued. "Akane Tendo, will you join us in the fight for Love and Justice?"

Ranma reached for his transformation stick then held it so Akane could see it.

Akane gazed open-mouthed from her fiancé's stick to hers. She looked faint, but Ranma grabbed her and held his fiancée up for the few moments it took the shocked girl to recover. What should she do now? She knelt before the Princess and future Queen, replying, "I, Akane of Clan Tendo, would be honored to serve you as a Sailor Senshi."

A bright gem flared on Sailor Moon's chest, generating a beam of blinding light which engulfed Akane and the stick she held of a few moments, then seemed to flow into Akane and the stick, eventually vanishing. Sailor Moon turned behind to the remaining Sailor Senshi and Tuxedo Kamen, all of whom were approaching from the temple. "Did I do it right?"

A nod from Sailor Pluto put a smile on her face as Sailor Moon turned back to face her newest warrior. "Rise, Akane Tendo."

Akane stood. "Uh... what do I do now?" She asked in complete befuddlement.

A woman in a black-skirted Sailor Senshi uniform replied. "Raise the stick, and shout your transformation phrase, 'Io Lumina Power, Make Up!'"

Akane swallowed and raised the rod high, shouting "Io Lumina Power, Make Up!" Flames seemed to flow from the stick and engulfed her. As her body became a glowing light, she rose slowly and turned as her new uniform formed around her. Each part was etched on her body by a bolt of lightning: skirt, boots, bodysuit, and collar. The lightning coalesced to form two bows, a large one in front, and a smaller one in back. Finally, the energy flowed into a gem at the bigger bow's center. As the light show died down, Sailor Io was lowered to the ground to end with a pose of hands on her hips with clenched fists.

Ranma looked at his fiancée in awe. Sailor Io wore a white body suit with a yellow skirt and collar. A light blue bow decorated her chest, with a similar ribbon tied behind her skirt. Yellow piping decorated her long white gloves. Finally, a pair of calf-high laced flat-soled yellow boots completed her outfit.

The Sailor uniform did nothing to hide the incredible musculature her stay in Jadeite's dimension and continued weight training since had developed. First it had been Jupiter, then Uranus, followed by Sun. Now, a new girl took the title of 'Strongest Sailor Senshi'.

Ranma struggled to pick his jaw up off the floor, as he tried to speak... "Aka... Sailor Io!"

Io turned to Ranma, offering a playful pose with one hand behind her head and the other outstretched toward him. "Hey, Sailor!"

Ranma looked sheepish, "Uh, yeah..." Raising his stick, after a few moments of her own blinding light, Sailor Sun stood by Sailor Io. Sun threw her arms around the larger girl, then planted a deep kiss on her love's lips to the applause of the assembled multitude of girls in short skirts. The one guy still present clapped too.

Sailor Neptune and Sailor Uranus gave each other's hand a squeeze; this love wasn't QUITE the same as theirs, but... It was obvious which two Sailor Senshi would be married first, darn.

Sailor Moon and Tuxedo Kamen gave each other's hand a squeeze; this love wasn't QUITE the same as theirs, but... It was obvious which Sailor Senshi would be married first, darn.

Breaking their kiss, the two Senshi looked with love at each other for a few moments more, then turned to their friends. One by one, each of the other warriors de-transformed to reveal his or her mundane identity to newest Sailor Senshi.

Sailor Pluto, Setsuna Meioh was a woman Akane had never met. She seemed a bit aloof, as did Sailor Uranus, Haruka Ten'oh, who Io did recognize as a member of the upper class at Juuban. The tall blonde was obviously enamored of Neptune's Senshi, Michiru Kaioh, another older student Akane recalled from school. The new Senshi smiled at how similar the two beautiful women's relationship was to her own with Ranma... at least part of the time.

Next was Saturn who, despite her youth and diminutive stature, wielded a NASTY looking pole arm, the Silence Glaive. With a purple glow, she became a young girl, perhaps twelve or so. She introduced herself as Hotaru Tomoe.

Akane noted that Hotaru went to stand with Haruka and Michiru, looking up to each with a smile; then refocusing her glance back on the littlest Sailor Senshi herself. The three young women seemed to be almost a family... 'Father' with an arm wrapped protectively around Michiru's waist, Mother with two hands gently resting on Hotaru's shoulders, and Child. Akane sighed, anticipating the day she and Ranma would have their own children.

On hearing Io's sigh, Michiru smiled at her. The young woman knew Akane and Ranma's day would come. No need to check with Pluto on that account.

Now the other couple de-transformed. Akane sucked in a gasp, as Sailor Moon became Usagi Tsukino, the bottomless pit of the ice cream shop, crybaby, scholastic slacker, and general klutz... With a smile, Io recalled Sailor Moon's antics just a few minutes previous. Behind her, Tuxedo Kamen became a handsome college-age man... Mamoru Chiba. Akane noted that Mamoru and Usagi were an item much the same way she and Ranma were.... at least part of the time.

Next, Sailor Venus became the athletic Minako Aino and Sailor Jupiter became Makoto Kino. Both girls were well known to Akane. Minako was an excellent volleyball player, and Makoto was quite good with - and quick to use - her fists. Akane had to admit a special feeling of kinship with the Kino girl. Not only did they both like to brawl, but also Makoto had lost BOTH her parents. If only Akane could cook like Makoto did... Thank the Kami for takeout.

Io now had a very good idea who the last two Senshi were. Sailor Mars became Rei Hino; they were at her temple after all! Finally, Sailor Mercury became their good friend and Ranma's tutor Ami Mizuno. Akane wondered what Ami thought about her Sailor Senshi outfit, though she did look great in it. The new Senshi hoped her own didn't make her look too fat.

Finally, only Io and Sun remained in Senshi guise. Sun spoke first; tears she didn't even notice falling. "Gosh, I don't know what to say, but I don't think we'll ever get any present tomorrow as nice as this..." She looked at Io; "Maybe we WILL need to look into transferring to Juuban High for good."

Io just shook her head back and forth, still in disbelief. "I don't know how to... this is like a dream, every girl's dream... Thank you, all of you."

Sun stood on tiptoes and whispered something to Io, getting a broad smile and an affirmative nod from the latter. The redheaded Senshi turned to her friends. "Sailor Io and I are going to go for a moonlight tour of rooftop Tokyo, see all of you tomorrow!"

A chorus of good-byes responded, then two streaks of flames flew down the street.

Rei turned to Makoto. "Thanks, Mako-chan."

Makoto sighed, and then flushed a little. "It's so romantic. Someday I'll find someone who..."

"Looks like your old boyfriend," the remaining people helpfully finished Makoto's sentence before going their separate ways.

Two Sailor Senshi stood overlooking Tokyo, each with an arm around the waist of her partner. Unsure what building they ended up atop after an exciting night of roof hopping, they just soaked up the astonishing view. Lights and signs blinked as they do only in the part of Tokyo known as Ginza. A glow on the eastern horizon attracted their attention. The grays of pre-dawn had diminished the neon a bit, but finally thin daggers of light heralded a new day, THEIR day.

Sailor Io looked a little bleary eyed, but her eyes sparkled with the excitement she still felt. "We stayed up ALL NIGHT? What about the wedding?"

"Don't sweat it, Io-chan. That ain't till... TOMORROW... uh... today? Lets get going!"

Two fiery streaks flew across the rooftops of Tokyo, coming to light in Nerima district near the Tendo dojo. After de-transforming, Ranma and Akane crept into the house.

Ranma idly wondered if Sailor Saturn could 'cure' tiredness. There were still a few hours left. He'd sleep for just a few...

"BOY! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?" His father's shaking and shouting jerked Ranma awake. "You're supposed to be getting married, not sleeping!"

"Okay... Okay. I'll get ready." The catnap allowed Ranma to actually feel somewhat refreshed. After washing quickly, he was ready to get ready. He figured it wouldn't take long.

It didn't take long as both Soun and Genma almost ripped off his clothes to replace them with a white tuxedo.

"Who is it?" Came the muffled response from inside.

Ranma turned the knob and slowly opened it. "Hey, Akane, you better get..." The sight in front of him took his words away. "Akane, you look beautiful." Ranma said, flushing bright red. She did look beautiful in a long, fancy western-style wedding dress. Lace, satin, and flowers combined to enhanced Akane's beauty past any threshold Ranma was capable of withstanding unaffected.

"Thanks, Ranma." Akane replied. Somehow, she was unable to look at her husband-to-be in the eyes despite all they went through. Today she was a bride and she was going to do her best to act like one.

"See ya, Akane." Ranma turned and left.

Akane shared a smile with her mirror. Since moving to Juuban, trading the Nerima madness for that of another district, both their lives had changed. She wondered how different today had been if their fathers hadn't conspired to force them together away from the distractions of Nerima. What if Ranma hadn't trained her in the Art to be a peer? What if Ranma hadn't become Sailor Sun and run off to save her? What if they hadn't spent the most intense couple of months imaginable alone together on a planet infested with demons? What if she hadn't beaten the heck out of that bird woman who tried to break into her bedroom after they came back? What if...

There was a knock on her door. "Akane, please come downstairs," Filtered through the door.

"Thanks Kasumi!" Akane followed her sister. Today they would cement what had started not long ago in that very dojo. She would move beyond friendship with the only person she wanted to spend her life with... She was getting married... THEY were getting married.

Soun hid what seemed to be a cask of sake away from prying eyes. He didn't escape the most prying eyes in the Tendo family, however.

"So, Daddy, are you saving that for the big blowout you and 'Uncle' Saotome are going to have after the wedding?" His middle daughter asked.

"Well, that guide from Jusenkyo sent only enough for one person, so I wanted to save it for Ranma... But only after the wedding."

"So, you're engaging in a bit of blackmail, huh?" Nabiki asked with a smirk.

Soun looked both ways, to assure the conversation didn't fall on... unwelcome ears. "No, Nabiki, nothing of the sort. I haven't even told him of my purchase. I just want to make sure he gets it... after the wedding."

"Whatever, call it what you want." Nabiki said with a tiny smile.

A new voice entered the room "Tendo, why?"

"What, Saotome?"

"How could you hide it from me? I understand about the boy, but ME?" His face hardened with a little resolve. "I'll look after it, in fact, I'll take it!" Grabbing the cask, he ran off... or at least started to. An exploding wall stopped him short, and flung the precious cask from his hands.

"Is this the Tendo dojo?" a bewildered Ryoga asked. As his eyes widened in surprise, he saw a cask flying through the air then realized it was, aided by a large banner attached to the container. "Nannichuan!" Ryoga shouted in joy. Perhaps he could become a real man for Akari...

Ranma entered the dojo to hear words that would have elated him a few months ago. Nannichuan, the promise of a cure... But what of the Sailor Senshi? What of Sailors Sun and Io? Would the transformation stick still work if his curse were removed? Did he want... need a cure anymore?

Ranma looked at the cask with grim anticipation, and a healthy amount of dread. He turned to Akane, who had entered the room; "Do I want a cure? Akane, do you want me cured?"

Akane stopped short... she had to think about it; this was no time for hasty answers. A small smile grew on her face as her heart told her what to reply. The bride-to-be shook her head no. "I said I'm marrying you, Ranma... as you are... I'm sure it wouldn't go to waste on someone else."

Out of the corner of his eye, Ranma saw a series of projectiles coming his way. With a quick leap, he dodged them, landing on the floor.

"Shampoo exploding food miss Akane!"

Ukyou looked disappointed, her gift for Ranma missed its mark. "I've got lots more of this SPECIAL okonomiyaki for you... Ranma honey!"

A tall, blonde-haired young man wearing a suit and an elegantly dressed young woman with emerald hair grabbed Shampoo and pinned her to the wall. The man spoke with a touch of uncharacteristic anger. "I heard Akane beat you in a challenge for Ranma's hand. Your lack of honor gives Amazons a bad name!"

"Husband no tell Shampoo no love Shampoo. Violent girl may beat Shampoo, but husband still love." Her expression darkened. "Violent girl get kiss of death from Shampoo. Shampoo kill!"

Increasing the pressure a bit, Haruka continued. "Well, let's talk this over while those two get married, okay?"

Michiru nodded in agreement.

Two girls in formal dresses double-teamed Ukyou. The taller one had brown hair in a ponytail, the shorter one had long, unencumbered reddish-black hair. The shorter girl spoke first. "I thought Ranma had an agreement with you... I thought you were his friend!"

The taller one added her thoughts as the two pinned Ukyou against the wall. "Ranma and Akane love each other. Doesn't love mean anything to you?"

A shout of "Ukyou-sama!" Pierced the air to the rear of the girls.

In counterpoint, a young woman in an elaborate black wedding dress knelt to speak to Ranma "Ranma-sama! Are you all right?"

Ranma sprang to his feet just as a katana struck were he had lain moments before. Dodging both katana and Kodachi, he turned to see who had struck at him. His assailant shouted out his judgment. "By all the gods, this wedding is an abomination. I shall not permit it!"

"Get off it, Kuno!" Ranma took a swipe at the kendoist, and then tripped over a bucket of water. Water always had a tendency to show up at the least convenient times in Ranma's life... Times like right now.

Kuno's face transformed as quickly as Ranma's. "My beloved pigtailed girl, you are a vision dressed in white! Let the wedding today be ours!"

"Oh, yeah, Kuno? How do ya like this, huh?" Ranma said as she expressed her love for Kuno the way that she always did, with a few punches. Kuno was soon down, right in the puddle of water. The cold liquid would hasten his return to consciousness, but he wasn't up yet.

In the rear of the dojo, Akane turned to confront a smug Nabiki. "You sent out those... extra... invitations, didn't you?" Akane inhaled. She had to keep the rage inside, and then release it slowly. No need to hurt her Big Sister.

Nabiki returned a feline smile. "Maybe I did." She almost purred. "Look at all the yen it brought in!"

"It was kind of you to remember all the friends Ranma and Akane forgot to invite!" Kasumi beamed.

"Kind is NOT the word!" Akane replied as she stormed off.

The battle of the Nannichuan continued, with neither Mousse, Ryoga, nor Genma giving any quarter. As if it had a life of its own, the cask flew from them and cracked open, threatening to spill the precious liquid on the floor, or on Ranma, who had the misfortune to stumble away from her 'love' into its path.

Ranma looked on, frozen in fascinated horror. The cure, her dream of a few months ago had become a nightmare. Swallowing, the girl prepared to dodge the rapidly advancing cask. All she had done as Sailor Sun passed before her eyes and all that she and Akane could have done as Sailor Senshi might soon be washed away.

Nodoka looked on in horror of her own. Her son had finally come to terms with his dual nature and become more that she had ever dreamed of. Perhaps there was one thing she could still do for Ranma. Decorum and manners were cast aside as she launched herself on a course to intercept the 'cure'. Ranma and Akane's future was different than what Nodoka had dreamed, but she would not let it be denied. She was Ranma's mother, no matter his gender.

From behind the mother and son arose a cry of "Sake!" A small form leapt past Ranma and the hurtling Nodoka to down the cask's contents in one gulp. "What? SOUN! What is the meaning of this? This is just water!" Happosai said as he smashed the empty cask at the floor.

The young martial artist was still in shock. After the wedding she, and Akane, would tell Soun how they really felt about her... condition. For once in her life, she almost wanted to thank the old lecher. She saw her mother fly in front of her to hit the ground, hard. Realization of just how much her mother loved her fought with concern for her mom's well being. Ranma knelt down to attend her. "Mom, why didja have to do it?" But Ranma knew the answer... her mother loved her.

Meanwhile, the three combatants had grabbed Happosai. No matter how hard they tried, Mouse, Genma, and Ryoga couldn't get a drop of precious fluid out of the old lecher. Even prying his mouth open over a funnel proved fruitless.

Akane was almost beside herself in the shadows at the edge of the dojo. This was their special day. HOW could Nabiki do this to Ranma and her own sister?

Happosai leapt free and with a shout of "Happo Daikarin!" escaped, leaving a bomb in his wake. Of course, it landed right where Ranma was kneeling, trying to revive her mother. The bomb exploded, leaving an unconscious girl in a tuxedo collapsed on top of an unconscious woman. Ami and Hotaru rushed to their aid.

His pigtailed girl now down for the count, Kuno turned his attention to his other love. The beautiful Akane stood apart from the tumult, contemplating her love for him at the edge of the dojo floor. It seemed that she was using the pigtailed girl as a focus in her meditations, which had already brought love's tears to her eyes. He walked over to her, finishing with his most courtly bow. "Perhaps it is our day, Akane Tendo. Today, we shall marry."

Akane, roused from her sad contemplation of a mother's love and her fallen fiancé, replied with a "Thunder Hammer Strike!" Kuno was blasted to the ground, unconscious.

"Well, done, Akane! You are truly a fitting bride for the master... Marry me!" Happosai shouted as he grabbed the hem of her wedding dress.

Akane looked down at him with a glare of pure hatred. "You Jerk! You HURT my fiancé and his mother! How on EARTH do you think I could have any love for you?" Akane said as she dragged Happosai along in her rush to be at Ranma's side, not even bothering to push him off as he inched his way up, ever closer to her chest. Pushing Kodachi out of the way, Akane knelt beside her fallen love. Ami and Hotaru concentrated on Nodoka as a weeping Akane cradled Ranma's head in her arms.

The minister entered the dojo and took a glance around at the mayhem within. He sighed and turned to the sobbing man at the doorway. "I take it that my services are not required today?"

Soun bawled, "WAAHHH!!!"

The minister put his hat back on and walked away calmly. "See you next week."

Kasumi commented on the wild chaos in front of her. "What an exciting wedding!"

Ranma awoke to two small hands on his head, still generating warmth that filled his body. "H... Hotaru?" he asked.

"Yes, Ranma. I'm glad you're better." The girl replied with a smile, withdrawing her hands.

Ranma sat up to see a beaming Akane next to a smug Nabiki. "Akane, what are you happy about? Our wedding just... uh... kinda blew up."

"Ranma, Nabiki just explained what our wedding insurance was... That paper we marked yesterday... was our marriage document." She plopped down and hugged Ranma. "We've been married since yesterday."

Ranma blinked a couple of times, then pulled Akane's face around to kiss his wife.

Ami had amused herself with her portable computer as she waited for Ranma to recover. She had found some information that would certainly be of interest to the young couple. It seemed a certain orbital station from the Silver Millennium was still in orbit. Perhaps it might provide a place for them to get away from all this chaos, at least for a while.

Even a million kilometers from its surface, the sun is hot, VERY hot. Almost infinitesimal against the face of the star at the center of the Solar System, a tiny bubble of metal and crystal orbited the flaming nuclear furnace. It was only because of powerful magic that the bubble even existed, as it had for a millennium. For the first time in nearly a thousand years, footfalls of Sailor Senshi echoed through its confined metal corridors. For the second time in a millennium, the station was inhabited.

Ranma looked up from the book she was studying to see her wife looking up from the volume SHE was studying. The young women exchanged smiles. The books they were poring over consisted mostly of technical data collected by the woman who became Sailor Sun over the years she lived here. But their research had yet to turn up any details of the woman who built the station, just her legacy. They knew what she did, but not HER.

Both women were dressed in their Senshi garb, because this wasn't a place a normal human could live for more than a few minutes. The temperature was pleasant and air both plentiful and breathable, but while the radiation this distance from Sol would quickly kill a human, it could not kill a Sailor Senshi. Pseudonyms were not needed here, however. Sailor Sun was Ranma and Io was Akane.

The honeymoon hadn't been anything like what they had expected, but what was in their lives? Before they teleported back to Mercury on the way back to Earth, Pluto and the inner Senshi had said they would return in 4 days. Ranma looked over her shoulder at their 'romantic' honeymoon suite... two cots, a small ice chest, and a box of canned food.

Breaking the silence, Akane spoke. "Ranma, do you remember ANYTHING about this place?"

Ranma's face showed some thoughtful concern. "It's hard to say. I don't have any real memories about it, but it just feels right. Kinda like a kata of the school, it's comfortable."

Akane had a contemplative look as she digested what her spouse just said. "Well, why don't you try to let go a bit, let your instincts guide you... like in a familiar kata. Maybe you'll remember something."

Ranma concentrated for quite a few minutes, but couldn't come up with more than the comfortable feeling she'd had since coming here. "Why can't I do it?" She asked not one in particular, frustrated.

"Ranma, you idiot! I said let go; let your instincts guide you. Thinking just makes it tougher."

The redheaded Senshi gave her wife a smile. "Oh, I get it. Good idea, Akane!" Ranma tried to relax and clear her head so she could focus on the shreds of memories she possessed. It was kind of like trying to reconstruct a building from a handful of sawdust. Her vision kept being drawn to an ornate metallic figure on the bookcase. The figure was of a bird in flight, on a metallic base. It was intricately detailed, looking almost like a real bird, though it was of the same burnished coppery metal as the rest of the station. She realized it was very important. Getting up, Ranma walked over to the figure and caressed it with her delicate fingers, trying to see if she could feel anything.

As she continued to try to understand, she began an almost instinctive series of hand movements, guiding the bird in an elaborate flight over the shelf. With a crack, a whine began as machinery dormant for hundreds of years struggled to life.

With an almost inaudible click, a door opened just to the left of the bookcase, but only a few millimeters. The machinery continued to whine for scant additional moments then stopped. Ranma, followed by an excited Akane, walked over to the frozen panel. "Let's see what a little muscle will do!" Ranma said as she threw herself into an attempt to lift the door. Straining, sweating, and huffing proved to no avail. The door remained locked.

Akane rubbed her hands in anticipation. "Okay, that's what a little muscle will do, let's try a lot... On a count of 3. 1... 2... 3!" Akane and Ranma threw themselves into it. With a report like a rifle shot, the door flew open revealing a spiral staircase leading down. Akane turned to her husband, "Well, it's your place... You first."

"Thanks, Akane!" Ranma responded as she excitedly clambered down the stairs, spouse in only slightly more cautious pursuit.

The stairway led to a study with an ornate door in one wall. A beautiful stone desk had a series of crystal globes arranged in a hexagon. Each of the globes had a delicate mechanism inside it. As Ranma stared at the globes, small gears whirred inside each. In a moment, a cylinder of light formed which the six spheres marking points on its base. A three dimensional image of a woman appeared, and she began to speak in halting Japanese.

"Greetings, Sailor Sun." The woman said as she bowed deeply. The apparition bore a distinct resemblance to Ranma's mother Nodoka, except with longer hair. Years of hard life showed clearly on her face. A few small wrinkles and some grey hair marked her as thirty-something. Despite advancing years however, her beauty was undiminished. The ancient Sailor's garb was identical to that neo-Sailor Sun wore, from red metal headband to the red boots on her feet. Long Auburn hair ran free beneath the headband down to her waist. "I know not when I greet you, only that it is in the future. Today I go with the vanguard of our

fleet to face the Dark Kingdom. I will not survive." She clenched her fists for a few moments, gathering composure to continue.

"When am I speaking to you? Is it a week, a generation, or a hundred generations hence? That I am speaking to you at all means that there is at last a Sailor Senshi for the Sun." She couldn't keep a proud smile off her face before continuing. "I invite you to visit the adjacent room, my... daughter. In there you will find my personal journals, and autobiography. Though I will never see you, know this: You have made me very proud." The image flickered and faded out as the tiny gears stopped.

Ranma was stunned, roiling emotions taking even her speech away. Noticing her love's concern, Akane wrapped both arms around Ranma's waist, letting her husband know that she was there, that she cared. At last Akane spoke. "Ranma, are you all right?"

Ranma sniffled a bit... "Yeah, Akane. I'm fine. Let's go in her room and look at those books. I really want to know who she... I... was back then."

Akane kissed the smaller girl on top of her head. "So do I love, so do I."

Opening the door revealed a bedroom containing a beautiful bed, a desk, and a bookcase. On the desk was a box filled with sand. Roughly a half-meter square, in its center was a frozen bird of prey surrounded by swirling yellow waves of magic. Ranma found herself drawn to it. Walking up to the box, she hesitantly brought a hand to the magical barrier. First she touched it, feeling nothing. Gathering courage, she pushed her hand through the barrier that then soundlessly dissolved. As a sunburst pattern flared on its head, the bird came to life.

Chizuko hoped Angwyn... Sailor Sun would get done with her spell. She told her to close her eyes, but the bird was getting impatient. Blinking her eyes open, she was unknowingly propelled a thousand years into the future. The girl looked enough like Angwyn to be her daughter... *Could she be?* Perhaps the spell did work, time to find out. "Hello? Sailor Sun?" She asked with the bow she usually reserved for her mistress.

Ranma had seen many things in her short life, but a talking hawk was certainly on the short list of most amazing. "Yeah, I'm Sailor Sun. Who are you?"

"I am your advisor, Chizuko, of course!" Tilting her head to the side a bit, the hawk turned to see Akane. "And who are you, young Senshi?"

Akane took a few hesitant steps forward before responding. "I'm Sailor Io."

"Sailor Io? What planet is that?"

Akane smiled with pride. "Io is one of the great moons of Jupiter, and I am its Senshi."

"So are you a friend of Sailor Sun's?"

Akane turned a bit red. "Actually, I'm her... his wife."

The hawk just blinked then asked again. "I'm sorry, did you just say... wife?"

"Yeah, she said wife... but we can't walk around here without the protection the Senshi magic gives us."

The bird spread her wings and flew over to a desk next to the bed. "Hmm... It looks like the radiation shields have gone out, so I guess you're right. Let me check out the station a bit. I'll leave you two girls alone." The bird flew to the door, a mumbled "husband and wife?" and a shaken head not going unnoticed by the two Sailor Senshi.

Sailors Sun and Io smiled at each other, and then sat down to try to finally get to know the first Sailor Sun.

That night, they shared Angwyn's bed. They had to be fully dressed because they were STILL in a hostile environment, but it was wonderful anyway.

A week later, Ranma and Akane squared off in the Miyagi dojo. The young couple had persuaded the master to allow them to stay on through High School as instructors and students. Miyagi was only too happy to oblige.

Ranma ducked under Akane's kick, "Come on Akane, you can do better..." A solid blow to the midsection abruptly ended his taunt.

"Yeah, I can! See?" Akane replied with a smile.

"Yeah, but do you see?" Ranma asked as a quick move swept Akane to the floor then offered her a hand up. "That's enough for today, don't you think Akane-chan?" Ranma always liked to stop when he landed the last blow...

"Okay, Ranma." She shook her head slowly. "I, uh WE... could use a nice... hot..." Her sentence was interrupted by the buzz of a small wristband each of them wore.

Hearing the noise, Chizuko glided into the room, lighting on Ranma's shoulder. " I wonder what it is this time?"

"So do I," Akane added.

"Let's get ready, Akane-chan!" Ranma concluded with a smile for his wife.

Soon, two Sailor Senshi raced across Tokyo's rooftops, with their advisor soaring above. The three were ready, ready to fight for their Queen, love, justice, and their worlds; be it Earth, Io or the Sun.

The End?

First of all, I must thank Fire for his wonderful story, "Sailor Ranko".

I read "Sailor Ranko" on his webpage, which has a special "Sailor Ranko" section...

http://www.ozemail.com.au/~dzillman/fire/sailor_ranko/sr_index.htm

The story itself is at: http://www.ozemail.com.au/~dzillman/fire/sailor_ranko/s_ranko.txt

I was struck by his characterization of both Ranma AND Akane, but I felt that a little could be added to his story, so I typed this up. The first 10K was written in a week or two, then I had no inspiration for about 3 months or so. Finally I figured out how to finish the story and did, in only about a week for the first draft. Of course fine-tuning took a few more weeks.

Thanks to my pre-readers: Fire (of course), William Dix, Louis- Philippe Giroux, Mike Koos, Nicholas Leifker, Isaac Marchionna, Bryan Neef, Andrew Norris, and Chad Walker. Any errors which remain are my responsibility, not theirs! If I forgot anyone, please let me know...

Special thanks go to Lord Archive. The first chapter of his story "The Insanity Continues" <http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Fuji/9061/TIC/> , provides a frame-by frame transcription of the original 'wedding' scene from Ranma volume 38. I found it very helpful in writing my own bizarre version of the classic end of the Ranma Manga.

Additional public and private C&C welcomed!

Thanks for your time, and I hope you enjoyed the story!

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September 19, 1999

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