

Hey all! Here is the next **Homage** Episode, which should be one of two I am posting this weekend for the Superbowl. The next episode-sized work you all will see is another **Semblance** episode. I am thinking of pausing the Homage series after Henrietta is crowned. That seems to be a good place to pause the story, as after that the characters will be all set and the action – and the plots (both FOZ and my own) will start picking up speed. Oh, and Wardes will hopefully have been humiliated and/or thrashed LOL. Down with the Mustache!

From then on, you will see one episode of **Semblance** and one episode of **Death's Avenger** minimum. If one fandom or another dominates the polls, I will add a third of one of those two stories to offset that domination.

Anyway, I have to apologize. I forgot to make it so you all could only make one choice in the poll, so this is a numbers rather than a percentage vote. My bad.

As anyone can see from looking at the previous episode, the winner with 92 total votes was 'What was for dinner. (protective Karin, Ranma being Ranma, Makoto wondering, Henrietta accidentally seductive)'. The other votes did okay, but the winner was never really in doubt.

This has been edited by... and thanks as always go to the original authors and creators.

Episode 18 Eventful Conversations

All around Makoto, Henrietta had created a series of globular almost glasslike balls water, and now they moved in touching the tall girl's shoulders lightly before becoming a stream connecting to Henrietta's scepter, covering it in turn along with her hand. "You don't have to stay still for this, Makoto. In fact, I want you to move, I need to see what happens to the electricity covering you. Are you certain it doesn't hurt?"

"It doesn't hurt at all," Makoto answered after the quickly-becoming normal wait for a translation, speaking as she started to do a series of slow leg lifts and crunches. "If anything I feel a bit revved up, like I'm a car and someone just gave some nitro!"

After Makoto explained what that meant – Ranma had no understanding of how cars worked beyond the bare minimum and didn't think he could blame his memory issue on that - Ranma translated that to hyped up on coffee. They apparently did have that here, though Henrietta was not a fan of the brackish brew. When he finished speaking, watched as the water crackled, but her scepter sucked in the lightning around Makoto, worried it would hurt the princess. But somehow, Henrietta had created almost pure water, which dissipated the lightning so that Henrietta only got a kind of tingle.

After a moment, she smiled. "Well, whatever happened, you have magic or Will as we call it here."

“Heck yes!” Makoto shouted, thrusting her arms up so fast that the water around her wrists couldn’t keep up, pulling away from her body. “Oops.”

Henrietta waved that off, the water moving away from Henrietta and then slowly seeping into the ground nearby. “Hmm... I could only tell where the power behind the lightning was coming from, and it’s coming from within Makoto. That means you might be able to control it.”

As Ranma translated once more, Henrietta looked around, then sighed, and reached down to the ground, her scepter in one hand, while the other hand gently caressed the ground. While the princess was primarily a water mage, she had been taught enough to call herself a pentagram class mage of the other elements. Thus, just as she had been able to create bindings for the prisoners she and Ranma had taken in the ambush heading back to the palace now a series of chairs rose up out of the ground.

After a few seconds, she pulled her hand away and nodded, smiling faintly. “That will do.” Turning to Makoto she gestured the other girl into one chair, noting absently that Makoto was about two, perhaps three inches taller than Henrietta. Now, Let’s see if I can explain how to do this. “Although, since you’re a martial artist, you might know something about meditation already. From what Ranma and I have discovered, there is a connection there to what he calls the soft side of the martial arts.”

“I’ve done some meditation,” Makoto answered with a nod, sitting down across from the excess, and looking at her and Ranma earnestly. “What does she want me to do?”

Instead of answering Makoto, Ranma asked, “Do you want me to help her like I did you, Your Highness?”

Henrietta at first felt a spurt of possessive wariness at the idea, but seeing the lightning still crackling all over Makoto, was forced to admit that speed might be a necessity here and nodded.

While Ranma moved behind Makoto in preparation to start, Makoto looked over at the unconscious crispy form of the pervert she’s dealt with. “What about this one?”

“Hmmm...Agnes, do we have any more Will suppression cuffs?”

“We do not, Your Highness,” Agnes sighed. “I only brought along the normal two, and the Academy only has one for recalcitrant students.”

“Darn,” Henrietta muttered. She looked at the vile human being who had apparently attempted to force Siesta into ‘service’. This was not exactly abnormal, many a peasant girl had been taken advantage of similarly, not that the fact it happened so often made it right, of course. It was one of the misuses of power in the nobility that Henrietta hated it with every fiber of her being. “Will he live without medical attention?”

Agnes grimaced. "Your Majesty, you're the one with the healing magic. Unless you want one of my girls to get the Academy's healer?"

"Do so please. I have no desire to touch him, let alone aid the letch in any way. Beyond that, grab one of the Academy's wind mages and send them to the capital for another pair of magic suppression cuffs." These were specially prepared cold iron cuffs which clenched the prisoners hands in such a way that moving their hands caused pain and also kept them from making gestures. Even the best mages, those who didn't need mediums like Henrietta's scepter, used gestures. Without them, and with the pain of the cuffs added on, it was somewhat impossible for nearly any mage to use his or her power.

With that taken care of, Henrietta looked over at Siesta who had been standing nearby looking worried. The princess now put those worries to rest in no uncertain terms. "You did the right thing. In fact, you did the only thing you should have. You told Mott your current circumstances and stood by your rights as a citizen of this country. Good grief, Tarbes isn't even Count Mott's territory! He had no rights to even buy out your contract."

Siesta blinked looked utterly surprised. "T, truly, but it's happened b...b...before..." She trailed off as Henrietta's look turned into one of anger, one Siesta hadn't seen before on the princess's face. *Is she really getting this angry about what almost happened to me?*

"I wish to be clear on this," Henrietta said, in much the same time that she had once spoken to Ranma about how he had been treated when he had initially arrived in this world. "You have seen this for yourself, a servant's contract to this school or somewhere else?"

Siesta nodded, quite frightened of the Princess now, not for herself, but because of the anger she could see boiling in the other young woman. "And you would say that these other lords also did not come from the same lands as the servant whose commission had been bought off?"

There Siesta hesitated, and honesty forced her to admit, "I don't know, Your Majesty."

"Could you find someone who might?"

At that, Ranma clicked his fingers. "That head chef guy. He's like well the majordomo of the Academy or whatever, right? At least he seemed to think of himself as looking out for ya and the other servants."

"Oh, yes!!" Siesta clapped her hands together. "Marteau certainly would know if anyone would."

"Good. If Chef Marteau can get that information together to me, written down I think, and perhaps with himself marked as a witness, I will see what I can do about following up on the ladies who have thus been misplaced against their will or the law," Henrietta said, each word coming out clipped and clear before she shook her head and looked over at her musketeers. "That was very prompt."

It was only then that Ranma realized that two of the other musketeers with them had already raced off, and were currently coming back already, carrying between them - literally - an older woman who was protesting her treatment in no uncertain terms. "Unhand me, I say! If the princess is not the one hurt, there is no need for such haste, or for me to..." she fell silent as she saw Henrietta and the two musketeers let go of her arms, stepping back and bowing to the princess.

"Thank you for being so quick and efficient Amie, Samantha. Although, perhaps carrying her might have been a step too far," Henrietta observed clinically. "Still, I will give you points for effort."

"They're trying to get back into my good side Your Highness," Agnes said grimly, playing the bad cop to Henrietta's good cop with the ease of long practice. "They're not there yet."

Henrietta and Ranma both chuckled at that, while Makoto who had not been able to follow anything given that no one was translating for her looked confused. Chad too looked confused, but he was better at reading body language than Makoto and had deduced that the princess was angry at something connected to the man on the ground, but not their treatment of him. Now his tone rumbled out asking the question that was on both their minds. "What are you all talking about?"

Ranma and Siesta began to explain while the academy's healer looked Mott over. "He'll live of course, but really, you could have brought him to me rather than force me out of my office like this," she grumbled, waving her hands.

At her gesture a globe of water surrounded the man, slowly seeping into his chard skin here and there, as she worked a healing spell, using the man's own water and the conjured water as a medium.

"You are a healer," Henrietta growled out, turning to the woman as Ranma and Siesta finish speaking to Chad and Makoto. "Your job is to heal people, regardless of station, craft or where they are. If you believe that you are above that calling, that sitting on your rear in your office is more important, then perhaps you should find employment elsewhere than at the premier magical academy of **my** country. And if I learn that attitude goes further, and you have withheld healing from the staff here, finding new employment will be the least of your worries!"

When this was translated by an awestruck and laughing Ranma, Makoto whooped, reaching out to pat the princess on the thigh. "Woot, you go girl!"

The woman's face had paled under the younger princesses tirade, and she resolutely turned back to her current task, keeping her mouth shut now although her eyes were tracking towards the light show still going off all around Makoto. For her part, Henrietta smiled, noticing that as Makoto had touched her knee, the lightning around her hand had receded. *She's already gaining some subconscious control of it, excellent.*

What followed was a brief introduction with Ranma translating about how to meditate, mages were taught to connect to their inner Will. “Now, considering that you seem to have an affinity with lightning, let us assume that your powers will be based off of wind.”

From there, Henrietta began to describe the first series of exercises that mages were taught in order to reach their Will, the reservoir of magic within themselves. These were breathing exercises as well as mental ones, which superficially had something in common with how Ranma had taught Henrietta to meditate, and he now began to help Makoto in a similar manner, his ki slowly winding into Makoto’s own.

For Makoto this experience was what she thought getting a really, really good head and shoulder massage might feel like. The kind that got all your nerve endings tingling in a really good way, which she had read about a time or two. The fact Ranma was basically ignoring the lightning still covering her body was kind of weird, but this feeling was, well it was strangely intimate, and touching Ranma’s ki like this, even if he was the one in control, was like all of that and getting to know the boy she was becoming very interested in.

For Ranma, the connection he forged while helping Makoto find her center wasn’t as deep as it had been with Henrietta. Henrietta already had control of her Will and her mind and Will were interconnected, coloring her aura with her personality, which made it, as Ranma had said at the time, beautiful. In contrast, Makoto didn’t have conscious connection to her own ki yet. That Will reserve was kind of huge, Ranma reflected, but he wasn’t getting as much of an impression of Makoto as he had Henrietta. He could feel her vibrant energy, her friendliness and loneliness in equal measure, but that was all. *Something to look forward to in the future, maybe?*

Unfortunately for Makoto the visualizations they first chose were lacking, and, alas, Makoto wasn’t nearly as calm an individual as Henrietta. Moreover, establishing that first conscious connection to one’s Will was extremely difficult. She began to fidget and scowl after only a few minutes. But Henrietta was ready for that, and the two of them began to meditate on the image of a cloud encompassing her body while performing the mental task that mages here did to get in touch with their magic: imagining a spark within their bodies, beating along with their heart.

But again, this didn’t work fast enough for the tall girl, and Makoto began to get frustrated, the lightning around her flashing from her skin even more than before despite sitting down on a chair made of the ground, which should have been impossible. But Henrietta persevered, suggesting a new kind of mental exercise. “Ranma, what were those other elements you mentioned your world had?”

“Wood and steel, Your Highness,” Ranma replied promptly, using her title as he should in public since the healer was there.

She chuckled, internally amused by seeing Ranma on her best behavior but kept most of her attention on the fidgeting girl covered with lightning. "Wood, I think. I don't see Makoto as a steel sort of person. Iron rigidity does not seem in your nature, and indeed I would assume that wood is closer to a feminine kind of magic than steel, much like that yin-yang concept you mentioned."

After he translated this, Ranma frowned, thinking. "Um, maybe? I can't remember much beyond the names of the elements."

"I've always liked tree climbing and forests. And besides, the only way I can see lightning, or what you said is wind power, coming together is with a lightning rod, and I don't think that's, well, me." Makoto confessed after Ranma had translated, scowling in annoyance at how much trouble she was having with this, glaring down at her lightning-covered hands. *What the heck is having power worth if you can't control it!?*

"In that case, let us try a new visual. Let us see... how about a tree on a hill, being struck with lightning? That should work as a starting point Makoto, but as with the earlier images, don't hesitate to change it."

"Right, let's do this." Makoto said, closing her eyes and leaning back into Ranma's waiting hands once more.

"First let us begin again with breathing exercises. Those really helped me when Ranma explained to me, and you seemed to get something out of them too."

The image Makoto thought up was a tree, growing from a butte. There was lightning in the sky, the leaves rustling, its boughs moving in a storm.

This image worked, and Henrietta smiled, seeing Makoto's face relax, her breathing coming in a simple, well-controlled movement as she described the scene. "Good...now, those breezes are your thoughts. Let the boughs of the tree catch them. Then allow the lightning, the image of your new power, to strike the tree. Do not imagine them damaging the tree. The tree is you, as is the lightning. Simply ground each bolt in turn in yourself. Let your thoughts fade one after another until you have stillness, only the tree, only yourself, remaining."

After a few moments, the lightning around Makoto began to recede slowly but surely as her image of the tree started to glow with internal energy, the leaves glinting with coruscating pulses of electrical energy. At last, the lightning completely disappeared,

By the time she was done, Colbert had joined them and was already taking readings from both Chad and Makoto, with Siesta translating his words for Chad, as the fire-mage explained what his own magic was telling him. The idea of using fire based magic to analyze things was kind of strange to Chad, but he couldn't deny that it worked.

What Colbert was telling him though was way more surprising.

Chad had known since he was a child living with his Abeulo that he was tougher stronger, than other boys. In simple durability he was more iron than man. After all, he had walked off being hit by a truck the day before, and it hadn't been the first time Chad had walked away from such things.

To know that there was some kind of power within him, which Colbert called almost spiritual in nature, was a surprise, however. "I don't know what kind of magic it is, yet it is obviously there, paired to your normal life signature, not quite Will as we understand it, but something else entirely. Perhaps your world has more elements than ours, as I heard Ranma saying earlier. That translation spell is truly amazing."

For a moment he seemed to go off on a tangent on that score which Siesta did not translate. She allowed him to continue for a few moments, but then coughed politely. "Sir, um, what kind of power do you think Chad has?"

"Ah, I do apologize, it's just so fascinating, that translation spell." He coughed, shaking his head, and then moved on. "Um, well, if Makoto has a connection to wood perhaps, which is possible given how easily she latched onto that kind of visual cue, a silly idea that, but one that obviously works, you would be Steel."

"Hmmm..." Chad muttered, keeping his own thoughts to himself. It would work, yet something about it also seemed off to him somehow. *Then again, they don't know about those strange monsters Ichigo was fighting or anything similar. Perhaps I possess something from Ichigo's new world?*

As Makoto opened her eyes Henrietta could still see some of the lightning in her eyes for a few seconds before it faded once more. *Yes, the princess reflected, Makoto will be an extremely powerful wind mage, I think.* "How do you feel?"

When Ranma translated this, Makoto blinked, grinned up at him, winked, then smiled over at the princess saying "Well, while I'm not putting on a light show anymore, I'm still feeling energized, you know?"

Ranma's groan needed no translation, and Henrietta giggled. "I take it bad jokes are universal?"

"Yep," Ranma answered.

"Hey, I thought it was punny! And er, I'm also hungry," Makoto added, patting her stomach. "How long was I..."

"Nearly two hours," Colbert said with a chuckle, "Still, to start commanding your own Will, that is somewhat fast."

"Indeed, it normally takes days to get to the point of conscious control of Will." Henrietta stood up from chair, touching it lightly and swiftly the chair and the one that Makoto

had been sitting in shrank, the earth integrating back into the ground beneath them. "I too think I'm rather hungry, let us go to dinner. I'm sorry Makoto, but your idea of us stopping tonight for a picnic is just not going to happen, it will be far too late for that kind of thing by the time we leave the academy."

Indeed it would be night by then, which was dangerous, but Henrietta needed to get back to the palace tonight. Gaining Karin and the other powerful noble's backing was just part one of gaining her crown after all.

Colbert squawked, staring at the princess, then over at Makoto. "B, but Your Highness, there so many tests to run, so much information we could glean! Surely you're not going to be taking her with you!"

"You have discovered enough for now Colbert," Henrietta shook her head. "Beside would understanding the nature of the power within Chad or Makoto help you in your current mission to return them home?" she asked pointedly.

At that Colbert looked a little abashed and turned away. Henrietta chuckled, then smiled and held out her hand, palm down, towards Ranma. "Would you mind escorting us to the cafeteria, Ranma?"

"Not a problem Your Highness," Ranma said with a grin, holding out his elbow to her. That caused her to smile a bit wider. She linked her own arm with his and then giggled aloud as Makoto did the same thing with Henrietta's other arm. "That isn't supposed to be the way this works, you know," she said dryly.

Makoto shrugged. "I'm just a country girl from a good democratic nation, whose Emperor is basically a religious peace brought out on special occasions. What am I supposed to know about royalty?" she quipped.

Something about Makoto's tone bothered Henrietta, a hint at something there. But when Ranma translated her words Henrietta still laughed and the three of them off, with Agnes and her musketeers once more spreading out, on watch as always.

Kazuma met them at a crossway near the cafeteria, looking a little sweaty and annoyed. Ranma looked at him and shook his head. "What the heck happened to you? And where have you been all day?"

The other Japanese youth looked at Siesta, then away. "Um, I er, made a bit of an ass of myself this morning. Er, morning issues. So I um, went on a run around the academy." His face firmed as he looked back at Ranma while Siesta flushed, looking away, embarrassed but not screaming or backing away from him. *That's a good sign, I think*, Kazuma thought. "Then when I came back and was trying to get people to understand I wanted to use the baths, I think I ran into trouble that you set me up for. You remember a blonde ponce, who thought he could fight?"

“Oh you mean Quiche? I remember him why?”

“From the gestures and body language, he seemed angry at me for something you did,” Kazuma growled, before shaking his head. “Anyway, he attacked me in front of an audience of a few little girls. Like three years younger than him I think? And all of them were cheering him on until I started well...” Kazuma faltered, looking over at Siesta “let’s just say that what they call swordsmanship here is a joke!”

“Yeah, they use rapiers here from what I’ve seen. And unless you’re really, really good with one, you’re not going to stand up against someone with a samurai sword. Which doesn’t mention the fact your sword’s made of ki, and Quiche uses something like tin.”

“How did he get you to fight him? Chad asked, frowning at the other young man. “You can’t understand the local language.”

“He saw me, mimed pulling out my sword, and I did it,” Kazuma looked away, embarrassed. “By the time I figured out what he wanted, he was already attacking me, and the girls were cheering him on. Well, after that, I just really wanted to hurt him. I’d still be wailing on the moron if one of the maids hadn’t found us and mimed that it was time to eat.”

“You humiliated him a bit?” Ranma smirked. “Personally he just has a really punchable face, ya know?”

“Yep!” Kazuma snorted. “I disarmed him, cut some of those Valkyrie to pieces and then started smacking him on the ass for a bit. Moron.”

After Ranma had translated all this, pressing her lips firmly together to keep from giggling, while Makoto had no such reservations, and even Siesta was looking very red in the face. Finally, Henrietta had herself under control, and said, “W, well, If Quiche did challenge you like that, then anything that happened during the engagement is on his head. I see no fault on yours.”

“Unless, she added, narrowing her eyes as she stared at the other young foreigner “you did more than simply chop up his Valkyries and, um, abuse his bottom?” Ranma couldn’t translate that one he was snickering so hard, so Siesta did, and even she had trouble controlling herself again. But Henrietta’s point, if not her words was kind of serious. “I really would prefer not to have to deal with general Guiche’s ire on how his youngest son was treated.”

“I didn’t hit him with my soul sword,” Kazuma answered, then mimed smacking something with the flat of his hand. “I just smacked him around a bit.”

Henrietta smiled cheerfully at that, as Ranma translated it as Agnes and many of the musketeers joined in the general snickering. “Boys at their play then. But on another note, have you agreed to come with me to my palace?”

"I I've been thinking about it Your Highness. That, well... Siesta, er..." Kazuma started to mumble, looking at the pretty maid, his cheeks flushing just a bit. "Are, are you a servant here at the Academy, or are you the princess's servant?"

"I am the princess's servant now. I was serving here in the academy. However, the princess has asked me to start working for her, although, I might be out of the of the child if Miss Louise is able to discover a way to repeat her the spell of translation that she used on Ranma," Siesta mused.

"Nah, remember Siesta, none of us can read the local language. We'll need you to teach us how to do that too," interjected Ranma.

"Er, In that case, I'll come with you to the palace I think. So long as I can be transported back here fast if they figure out a way to send us back home. Er, I'm really worried about what my sister might think if I'm gone for too long. But er... I don't actually like schools all that much normally. Even if the midget's spell works on me, I probably wouldn't want to stay here." Kazuma scowled at that. "Especially given some of the glares I'm getting. And I mean from some of the landscapers. I don't think that has anything to do with me beating down the blonde pretty-boy."

Henrietta nodded in satisfaction at that. This way all of the Earther's would be under royal auspices, although she was a little concerned. Part of the legend of the Void mage, the Founder Brimir, was that his familiar had been human. That meant at least one of these were these was Louise's her familiar. She suspected it was Kazuma, although, it could also be Chad. *It is most certainly not Ranma* she thought, a hint of possessive delight entering her thoughts. *Or else he would have been transported to her when she read it the summoning spell.*

As they entered, Makoto glanced over her shoulder at Kazuma as he stood by Siesta, and as they walked down the corridor to the cafeteria, nudged Henrietta. The princess frowned at her, but Makoto twitched her head over her shoulder, and quizzically, Henrietta looked in that direction. "What do you think she?" the taller girl questioned, before recalling that Henrietta couldn't really understand her.

Not that that was needed at the moment. Henrietta took one look at Kazuma's face as he stood next to Siesta trying to engage the maiden in a conversation, and giggled, nodding her head wildly.

"Wait, you can understand Japanese now?" Ranma frowned. "How?" *I didn't see any kind of magic or whatever between the two of them.*

"Oh nothing like that, my knight," Henrietta laughed. "It's just, girl language is universal."

At that point, Ranma quickly disengaged from Henrietta, taking a step backwards, and looking at Henrietta with one eyebrow rising in question.

Henrietta thought about it for a moment, then shook her head. "I don't think we will need your red-eyed gaze tonight Ranma. But do keep it ready just in case. I am still not exactly amused by how well the responsibility and duties of nobility have been taught here, rather than just the rights of said. I might need you to help me terrify Colbert if he doesn't cooperate."

"You got it Your Highness," Ranma said with a nod, as Siesta translated her words for Makoto, the maid blushing faintly as she understood that her own circumstances had caused Henrietta's ire with Colbert. Makoto looked at Ranma speculatively, then shrugged her shoulders and stepped back, joining Kazuma and Siesta.

Scene break

Karin the Heavy Wind wasn't certain what to expect from this meal. While it should normally be just a meal with the princess and her family, a chance to talk politics and watch her daughter and the princess hopefully renew their presences. But it had been one surprise after another since she had arrived to see Louise's second attempt at the Familiar Summoning ritual.

Before coming here, Karin had been informed that, some foreign magic had interfered in the first, and about how much trouble Louise had been happening here in the Academy. However, she had already begun to harbor some suspicions about the cause behind those troubles before Louise herself had come to her earlier this day.

A Void Mage in my family! On the one hand, magnificent. Louise can do so much good for our country as avoid mage. And yet, void mages are only truly need it in times of strife. That does not make me happy, Karin was a student of history, and unlike her daughter knew that there had been a few void mages since the of the Founder. Void mages appeared in times of trouble, more often than not when the elves began to try to leave the Holy Land from what whatever reason.

But both of the other void mages had been part of the church. Although, whether or not that was for or after the became void mages is in question. And of course, my daughter has been influenced by my husband. She sees the religious aspect of this rather than anything else and believes that only Brimir has ever used the Void. Foolishness. A Void mage is simply a mage by any other name. The Founder was powerful yes, but it wasn't because of his magical power that Brimir was revered. No, it was his deeds! And if this time of strife is coming up on my daughter...

Looking at her daughter now, the frown on her face, the faraway look, Karin wished she had more words to offer. But all she had been able to tell her daughter was sent what her Louise already knew.

"I will not make you this choice for you daughter, it is your own conscience that and religious believes that you are warring. As you well know, I do not have much of any such

beliefs.” Karin had snorted, shaking her head, being somewhat more emotive since it was just Louise and her at the moment. “I very much doubt there is a God, I have seen too many things to think it that some all-powerful deity is out there guiding us. But I will not at and never have told you what to do with your own powers and life. And will not start now. Make your own choice on this matter, but know...”

Karin had pulled her daughter into a hug, which had startled the younger girl. Karin was not a huggy person. She had left that aspect of her daughters rearing to their father. “Just know that I am proud of you whichever choice you make.”

“Really? You would, that is, if, if I continue to be...”

“Child, it takes great perseverance to follow what you think your faith dictates, even if that belief will drag you through the mud. That is a kind of courage too.”

That is not what I want for her Karin thought now, but if Louise decides to follow her faith and never use her Void magic then I will support her. Although I may push Wardes to make a date for their marriage sooner than I would otherwise. That would be somewhat amusing, having my youngest daughter marry earliest. Her thoughts became somewhat more amused than serious at that point, with just a hint of sadness. Cattleya is too weak to put through the rigors of pregnancy, although thankfully she’s never shown any interest in men either. As for Elisabeth... the less said about that debacle the better.

Karin looked away from her daughters up as the doors opened and princess, soon to be Queen, Henrietta stepped forward, followed by her musketeers, Ranma and the other Earthers.

As they moved, Karin watched the Earthers, wondering which would, if Louise went that route, become a good companion and guardian for her youngest daughter. The young man with the orange hair done up in such an outrageous style, she understood at a glance. He was vainglorious, a tough guy, the kind of soldier she’d dealt with hundreds of times before. There seemed to be some’s true metal there in the hardness of his eyes, but it was not a tested strength. He also seemed to have some interest in the maid who had entered with them, although Karin couldn’t fault him for that. The girl was extremely attractive, after all.

The monster-sized one called Chad, Karin had more trouble getting a read on. He was confident for certain and oozed solidity, yet that was all she could tell about him. *I wonder what his powers are? Kazuma had that sword he showed off during the melee after they arrived, but he seemingly only has immense strength, as far as I know. And I really don’t want Louise to develop even more of a complex about her size than she already has.*

In terms of personality, Makoto was a more open book than Chad, and a much more normal one too. Again Karin wondered what kind of powers the girl had, although from the smile on her face and the kind air about her, Karin wondered if perhaps the girl would make a good friend for Louise, if she chose to embrace her Void Mage powers or not.

And then we come to Ranma, the first one who Louise summoned, although it is very doubtful that Ranma will become my daughter's guardian. Ranma was dangerous. From what little Karin had seen him do personally and from how he acted and observed the world, everything about this young man made a portion of Karin stand up and take notice. I wonder, if after I take over as Lord Marshall of the Armies, chief if we will have time for a spar...

However, her eyes narrowed slightly, as he moved ahead of Henrietta, and made a point of pulling out her seat for her. There was something in the princess's face just then as Ranma turned to look at her, some little bit of further warmth in her smile. *Is there something more going on here than just a friendship? What are Ranma's intentions toward our princess?*

As the group sat down, Karin instantly leaned forward, fixing Ranma with a stare that had turned strong men's legs into water on numerous occasions. "Sir Ranma, you are the most senior of this group, might I ask what you are intending to do going forward? I have heard that young Chad and Kazuma wish to be sent back to your world, and that Makoto wishes to stay to see if she can learn magic. But your future has never entered the conversations I've heard since arriving here."

Ranma shrugged and didn't even glance at the princess as he replied. "I didn't really have a lot to live for back home, judging from what I remember anyway. And since coming here and helping out her highness, I figure that I can do a lot more good here."

"That is interesting but is not what I truly meant. What do you see yourself doing here? Just defending the princess? Surely a young man such as yourself would want more than that? What do you intend to do with your life?" Karin pressed.

But again, Ranma just shrugged. "Whatever I can to help my friend, the princess. Whatever I can do to help her people."

Karin allowed a hint of incredulity to enter her voice, watching both princess and Ranma closely as she let fly with her next probe. "You would devote your life to that task for simple friendship? I cannot believe that."

"And I'm supposed to care what ya think?" Ranma quipped back, his 'best behavior' attitude slipping noticeably. "Besides, ya don't know what my life was like before coming here. Friendship is anything but simple with me since I can't remember ever having one."

While her two oldest daughters quailed at that, Karin simply nodded, taking no umbrage from the young man's tone. However, before she could continue her gentile interrogation, Makoto interrupted them. Siesta hadn't yet translated any of their conversation, so Makoto had only heard Ranma's reply, but that was enough for the socially-savvy Makoto to know where the older woman was going. Makoto also knew that this wasn't the moment to have such a discussion. So, with a wave to Siesta to translate for her, she asked Karin, "I understand miss that you are called the Heavy Wind. Why is that?"

Whether or not this bit of prevarication would have worked was debatable, but a second after Makoto stopped speaking, her attempt to interrupt things got a leg up from Kazuma.

“She’s called what!?” Kazuma guffawed. “Heavy Wind? Sounds almost like Passing Wind!”

Karin’s eyes narrowed, and her eyes flicked from Makoto to Kazuma, then to Siesta, her eyes demanding. She had no idea what the youth had said, but his tone had been far too derogatory for her to ignore. “What did he say?”

Turning around, Ranma shook his head quickly at Siesta, indicating she shouldn’t translate Kazuma’s words.

Siesta looked at him, her face deadpan as she replied in Japanese . “I might be a peasant, but I’m not an idiot, thank you!” with that, she turned back to Karin, curtsying. “Er, it was nothing her grace. Your name is apparently unknown in their language, so it came out as a few different words instead, and Kazuma didn’t understand that.”

Karin thought about taking umbrage anyway, since it was very clear to her that Siesta was lying, and she had even seen Ranma frantic head shaking. But she decided to let the young girl off the hook for now. The boy though. She looked at him, holding his gaze, letting her own cold, almost draconian look do its work, and he quailed. “I see. Translation issues are so troublesome aren’t they? I pray you translate my response very well, please.”

She looked back at Makoto, a thin smile flashing across her face. “And as for how I got my sobriquet child, I was a soldier, a captain of the Gryphon Guards and I received that title when I destroyed an entire regiment with a single spell by dropping a tornado into their midst and keeping it there until there was nothing left but bloody, ruined ground.”

“Damn...” Ranma muttered, while Kazuma gulped and looked away from the very scary woman. And the look in Siesta’s eyes which told him she was disappointed or annoyed with him, he couldn’t tell which.

With Makoto engaging Karin, and Henrietta, who was sitting across from him, beginning to quietly roast Osmond about what had almost happened to Siesta and what she had told them, Ranma found himself with no one to talk to for a moment. Chad was sitting on the other side of the trio of Valliere daughters, next to the one called Cattleya, while Kazuma, on Ranma’s other side, looked to be making himself as small as possible. This left Ranma to either make conversation with two total strangers, the older two daughters, or Louise, who was sitting to his other side.

Sighing, Ranma bit the bullet, and asked. “So, have you come to any decision?”

“No I haven’t you damn commoner!” Louise growled out, looking around at the others at the table, and then beyond them to the rest of the very busy, and quite loud, cafeteria.

“Now, that’s one thing I’ve never been called, common!” Ranma laughed, smirking at her.

Surprisingly, Louise smirked back, conceding the point with a nod of her head, and Ranma again noted that for all her bluster, and her tsun nature, there was some steel in the girl. The foundation of her religious views had been shattered earlier that day, but here she was, still able to joke with him.

“My mother told me that she thinks I should embrace it, but...”

“She’s not as religious as you or something?”

“Not at all,” Louise shook her head, looking down at her placemat. “It’s hard to decide what’s right in this case. Heck, what I could even do if, if **that** is right.” *Good grief trying to talk about something while not doing so specifically is kind of tough.*

“I don’t see where you really have a choice,” Ranma answered with some sympathy, reaching to pat her hand. Louise looked up at that, scowling, but looking away at the compassion in Ranma’s eyes. Henrietta had explained things to him during their cuddle time before she had entered political planning mode, and Ranma felt he understood how much of a wrench this was. It would be like someone back home claiming to be Buddha reborn, or Confucius reborn maybe. Ranma wasn’t certain. “You either go back to your family as a, well, a... slow learner, or embrace this new opportunity and move forward.”

“Louise has always been a bit of a slow learner!” Eleanor said snidely.

Eleanor Valliere was rather annoyed with how this trip had gone. On the one hand, she had hoped to see her sister either succeed, or at the very least, not completely humiliate the family. Then, that precise thing had happened. Of all things, Louise had summoned not one, but **three** commoners! That on top of already having summoned one. Then she had asked around, and discovered that since Louise’s arrival, not once had the little brat been able to learn even a single cantrip! That was more than humiliating, that was **disgusting!**

For some reason their mother seemed willing to believe that it wasn’t something to do with Louise herself. But while she worked at another Academy, Eleanor knew this academy had a very good reputation, and she knew that her school had attempted to headhunt several of the teachers here only to fail. Eleanor refused to think that it could be a problem with the educational system. No, it was simply Louise being a failure. And the faster she realized it and came home, where the very least they could marry her off, the better for the family’s honor.

Narrowing her eyes, Louise turned to her older sister, a thin little smile on her face. “Loser I may be, but at least my fiancé, hasn’t told me he would sooner marry a shrew than me. If one lives in glass houses Eleanor, perhaps one should not throw stones?”

“Where do you hear that story you little brat!?” Eleanor shouted, reaching to grab at Louise’s cheeks.

But her questing hand was stopped halfway across the table by Ranma, who grabbed it in a gentle grip. "Let's not have any trouble here, okay?"

"Why you..." Eleanora tried to rip her hand out, then tried to grab her wand with her offhand, but the moment it cleared the edge of the table, Ranma stood up, leaned across and grabbed it, then was back sitting down so fast that even Karin had trouble tracking. "I think I'll confiscate this for now, until you are trustworthy enough to have it back."

Eleanora stared, but then Ranma handed it over to Henrietta, who took it without turning her eyes from Osmond, one eyebrow rising as she continued her own conversation. "I will have those names Osmond, each and every made or servants who have been ordered whose services have been sold off to other nobles. Or will I need to look for another head of this point is Academy?!" the princess hissed.

Ranma smirked a little at that, then it turned to look back at the sisters. Ranma was surprised to see Louise smiling very faintly, but not rubbing it into her older sister's face. Instead, she simply began to eat her soup, which had just been delivered, and turned to Henrietta. "Princess, that um, job you told me about? I'll do it." Evidently her sister's scorn had been enough to push her to embrace her Void mage powers.

Turning quickly from her discussion with "Thank you Louise. I am certain that you will be perfect for that role, though we will need to work out the details later. Perhaps you should come back with the rest of us to the palace? We can discuss it more there."

"As Your Highness wishes," Louise murmured, before deliberately turning to Cattleya, chatting with her better sister as if she hadn't just taken a plunge into something that would change her life forever.

As he began to eat, Ranma let his own eyes strain to the other half of that conversation. Cattleya was... well, Ranma thought that Henrietta was easily the prettiest girl in the rooms with Makoto a second place simply because of how lively and outgoing she was, but this girl was a beauty too. She was also quiet, demure, and gave off this feeling of kindness and warmth. But looking at her, Ranma felt there was something wrong, something to do with his ki sense was telling Ranma that she was sick in some manner, and he wondered what it was. *Something to ask about later, I suppose.*

Karin had frowned at her daughter's interactions, shaking her head at Eleanora, although she had to smile at Louise's decision. *Still, I knew that the whole fiancé fiasco was a sore point for Eleanor, but acting out like that in public, in the presence of the Princess? That is egregiously foolish.* But that wasn't all Karin had noticed. Now as Osmond turned away to speak to a servant, Karin leaned over, whispering in the queen-to-Be's ear. "That is a most dangerous young man Your Highness."

"I know," Henrietta breathed, taking a sip of the soup from her spoon before going on, her voice still so low that even Karin had trouble listening. "**My** man."

Karin's eyes widened slightly at the sudden admission. "So it's like that is it," she murmured, amused.

Before she could question the princess further, there was a sudden squeak from below the table. Sensing movement below the table, Ranma had moved his foot faster than lightning, and suddenly, was pressing down lightly, but inexorably on a mouse. "That's odd, I thought this place was kind of clean, why the heck am I stepping on a mouse all of a sudden?"

"Oh no, that must be my familiar. Please let Chocho go! I'll rush him back to our..."

Osmond stumbled to a halt, at the glare on Henrietta's face, and she looked over at Louise. "Louise my dear, is he still in the tendency of..."

"Yes Your Highness," Louise replied firmly.

Henrietta's smile had little in the way of humor in it as she glared at Osmond. "In that case, your familiar can remain under Ranma's foot for the moment. And depending on how well our conversation goes, he may survive the experience."

Ranma grinned and internally whistled. *Henrietta on full-bore righteous wrath is fucking hot!*

By the time Henrietta's 'conversation' with Osmond ended, the man had basically folded to all her demands and the main course had arrived. Honestly though, his reluctance was only because he was very worried about what would happen to the academy's funding. The academy was only partially funded by the state, the rest came in the form of donations and student payments. Donations which would disappear once it was discovered he had turned over the names of those nobles who had been buying out the contracts of particularly pretty servants. Osmond however, while a leech, was not an abuser, and had long chafed under the practice. With the soon-to-be Queen's backing, he could now say no, and hopefully the crown would make good the difference in funding.

The main course was a kind of tagliatelle pasta, with a hearty sauce and as was proper Henrietta was served first by several widely grinning maids. She thanked them but it was evident from their beaming smiles that the maids had already heard what had happened with Siesta, and maybe what Henrietta had thought about it.

As soon as the food arrived, Ranma dug in, on his best manners so he didn't perform any of the martial arts training that his father had taught him to practice during their training journey. Henrietta too turned her attention to the meal, and Ranma chanced to look up from his meal to catch Henrietta as she opened her mouth and flicked out a tongue to wipe away some sauce.

The sight of that tongue for some reason grabbed his attention, and then Henrietta made it worse as she began to eat the pasta, slurping one noodle at a time rather daintily. *Okay, I don't understand why, but that is just really sexy! Gah...* Suddenly Ranma's body bean

to revolt, and it wasn't his arm this time, unwilling to stop touching Henrietta. No, this problem was further down, and he hunched forward a little, hoping that no one, including the servants moving in and around the tables, wouldn't look down at his lap. *Damn it, I am in control of my body, not my, my hormones! You will go down, damn it!*

Busy with their own conversations or the food, the only one at the table who noticed Ranma's sudden discomfort was Makoto, who had been about to engage him in a conversation about martial arts, and how she might be able to integrate her new magic into it if she could figure out how to use her magic like the locals did. She giggled, leaning forward just a bit over the table to whisper, "See something you like~?"

Ranma blushed but could only slowly pull his eyes away from staring at Henrietta's mouth as she licked her lips once more. "I, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh really?" Makoto giggled again, shaking her head, and then when Ranma looked her way very deliberately licked up her own pasta, letting her tongue out and flicking it out to get the last of the sauce off her mouth just like Henrietta had. This was made worse by the fact that she was still leaning forward a bit, and that nearly forced Ranma to notice her cleavage. "Reaalllly~~?"

Again, Ranma blushed and looked away, and with a final laugh Makoto let him off the hook, for now. *Ooh I can have some fun with this!"*

Again and again during the meal, Ranma's eyes strayed to where Henrietta somehow made eating pasta a sensual object, and she wasn't even doing it on purpose like Makoto continued to do during the meal. Thankfully for Ranma's blood pressure and self-control, Makoto more often than not engaged engaged him in a conversation martial arts, a subject that was certain to divert his attention..

Alas, Henrietta barely had any attention to give Ranma, hip deep in what sounded like some kind of logistics scheme or something with Karin, they were exchanging names of places and people, as well as what sounded like a list of trade goods faster than Ranma could follow, even if he had the background to do so. Which he didn't.

Thankfully for Ranma self-control, the meal eventually, ended, although not without a final hurdle of a desert of strawberries and cream, which Ranma knew would haunt his dreams that night.

As the desert bowls were taken away, Henrietta told him to release the mouse, before she turned to the others. "I think now, is the time for Louise to try her translation spell."

Louise gulped, nearly choking on a glass of wine. "W, what! Right here, now?"

"Yes Louise, I believe so. Unless you would rather we do it in private?"

"I, I still don't know how to do the spell without explosions Your Highness," Louise stuttered, but she didn't back down. Not with Eleonor's eyes on her. No way.

"Better here in a wide open area then, don't you think?" Ranma asked, shrugging his shoulders. Most of the students had been chivvied off by this point back to studying or further training, so there weren't that many people in the cafeteria any longer.

Chad suddenly spoke up as he got to his feet, moving to an open area away from the teacher's table. He had been mostly silent throughout the meal, answering questions put to him, mostly from Cattleya, but mainly watching, taking in everything around him, and asking Cattleya some questions via Siesta whenever she wasn't translating for the others. Indeed, it seemed as if the two quietest people at the table had hit it off. "Try it on me."

"Are you sure?" Henrietta asked, looking between Chad and Ranma while Cattleya frowned.

Ranma looked at the big guy, then shrugged his shoulders. "It wasn't all that big an explosion. I bet I could survive it even before this last training techniques took hold pretty well. So yeah, I bet Chad here could do the same. Just keep in mind what you were trying to do the last time, then do it again," he added, looking back at Louise.

"I still say that she is doing something wrong! There's no way that Louise the failure should have been able to create a spell that allows someone to translate so easily. Nor so well," Eleanora grumbled, although she pushed her glasses up her nose, and stared at her little sister, with an almost assessing rather than dismissive gaze, as she activated a wind spell on the glasses.

Stepping away from the table, Chad moved into an open area, away from the other tables in the dining hall, who had also begun to empty out at this point, before Louise raised her wand.

"Don't blame me if this hurts," she muttered, and then visualized the effect that she had wanted to achieve the last time. *I want to silence this fellow, I want to silence this fellow...* for a moment, the desire didn't come, and Louise understood why. For all his scary size, Chad was easily the quietest of the group from Earth, and she just wasn't annoyed with him enough. And there was the audience of not only her family but the students who had remained in the cafeteria making her more nervous.

As Eleanor began to mutter under her breath that Louise really was a Zero, Kazuma barked, "Get on with it Midget! I want my turn!"

Ranma 'helpfully' translated this, adding, "He's right you know Tiny, we don't have all night. Just imagine you're trying, emphasis on trying, to hurt me again, maybe that will help your teeny tiny mind."

This actually did work, and now furious, Louise began to imagine the two other boys in Chad's place, which instantly made it easier to visualize silencing him. "Ostego!" she shouted.

The spell flashed out from her wand, with her focused Will and intent powering it. There was an explosion, as Louise had feared, but Chad barely rocked in place.

As the smoke dissipated he reached down, and wiped at his shirt a bit, shrugging his shoulders. "That stung, like being hit by an iron T-bar, but nothing major."

"And have you actually been hit by one of those big guy," Makoto asked, while everyone else stared at the giant with Cattleya and Henrietta moving forward to make certain he was alright..

"Yes," Chad nodded both to Makoto's question and to the concern on the princess and pink-haired girl's faces. "It fell and I caught it on my shoulders. It stung," he added, shrugging her shoulders.

Laughing, Ranma nodded. That happened to me to at one point, my old man told me well it was cut some kind of training to be up in this construction area, you know balancing and moving around without the scene.

"My, we can understand him!" Cattleya said, clapping her hands in delight, and turning around she pulled an un-protesting Louise into a hug." Oh that was all a magnificent! A little dramatic perhaps, but it certainly worked."

"Indeed child," Karin said, bestowing another proud smile on her daughter and watching the youngster she knew Louise had made the proper choice. "Indeed it is wondrous. However, I don't think Makoto and Kazuma are not nearly as durable as Chad."

"Probably not," Chad answered, sending a slight smirk Kazuma's way as Siesta translated Karin's words. Kazuma snarled back, but there was an uptick on his lips too.

"And now, I believe it is Kazuma's turn," Henrietta began, causing Louise to grin viciously, flicking her wand like a switch through the air.

"Wait a minute, how much power did that spell take Louise?" Ranma asked, inadvertently interrupting Louise's fun.

Louise frowned for second, then shrugged. "Not much, way less than the explosions I sent your way earlier."

While Eleanora heard this, she growled and was about to remonstrate with her little sister but Ranma's eyes had flicked over to her, pinning her in place like a fly to glass. Then he looked over at Chad. "You think we should wear her out a bit?"

While many of the girls there blushed and wondered if the two boys understood how that phrase could be taken, Chad just nodded, gesturing Louise. "Explode us." he said simply.

Still blushing and shaking her head and wondering if perhaps that was some kind of strange foreign kink, Louise was about to demur, when once more, Kazuma showed that while Ranma might be slowly leaving behind the dreaded foot-in-mouth disease, it had found another, far more willing host. "Are we sure those are actual explosions? They just look like well tiny fireworks going off.

Siesta shook her head, and answered the boy in his own language, but Louise was already glaring at him. "Why do I think he just insulted me?"

"Because tone carries over regardless of language?" Ranma asked smirking. "And at this point Louise, he did just literally ask for it. Explode away.

Louise looked up at Ranma, then with a's grin on her face, launched an explosion spell towards Kazuma, who cursed as the spell hit, blasting him off his feet.

"Louise!" Karin, Eleonor, Cattleya and Henrietta all shouted as one.

"Don't blame me, he told me to do it!" Louise shouted pointing up at Ranma.

Ranma shrugged, completely unabashed. "I figure Kazuma needs some training in how to keep his mouth shut."

"freaking midget I wasn't ready!" Kazuma shouted, hopping to his feet. He was way more battered looking than Chad, and his clothing was in tatters, revealing the fact his chest looked like one huge bruise. But he was still glaring angrily at the little girl as if she hadn't just blown him off his feet with the magical equivalent of a wave of the hand.

"Don't call me a midget you lout! And what is with that hair anyway! It looks like it's some kind of alien creature that has just decided to live on your head," Louise shot back.

"Enough," Henrietta commanded, getting between them. That might not have stopped Kazuma if not for Ranma suddenly appearing next to him, clamping a hand down on his shoulder fit to grind bone. "This is not the time for you two to snipe at one another."

Letting go of Kazuma's shoulder, Ranma moved forward, not even looking at the glaring punk for a moment, gesturing at Louise. "Right, let's get you tired out before you try it on Makoto."

"Hey, if Kazuma can take it, I should be able to too!" Makoto grumped, stepping forward.

Louise looked at her, then after Siesta translated, shook her head. Blowing up the boys was one thing. Chad and Ranma were both men, she'd originally thought both of them were commoners, and well, they were men. Makoto wasn't a boy, and she had regaled the table with the events that afternoon, proving that she certainly wasn't a commoner either.

And yet when Louise tried to back out of it, she simply smiled, waved to her hands indicating Louise to try. The others all looked like they wanted to protest, but it was Makoto's choice. So with a shrug, Louise did so, and this time, unlike when she had attempted to use the Familiar Spell on Makoto, the translation spell actually took. Moreover, her lack of desire to really hurt her helped Louise control the power she put into the spell, so the explosion was much smaller.

Makoto shook her head stumbling a bit. She felt like she'd just slammed into a wall after falling off a cliff, but that was okay if the spell had actually taken. "Can you all understand me?"

The tall brunette grinned happily as Henrietta and the rest of the table nodded in confirmation and...

1. A loud beeping noise from the computer Samantha is holding grabs their attention. And did Tabitha just teleport? (world building, more from Makoto, revelations and Sailor Moon stuff, Henrietta acting extremely quickly)
2. Explosions in the distance and not from Louise reach their ears. Someone is trying to break the nobles out of prison. (action, Earthers showing off, slight bit from the original)
3. the early dinner eventually ended with no new crisis arriving. (character interaction, romance, travel back to the capital, Louise and Kazuma being very tsun and chunni respectively)
4. Karin decided to interrogate Ranma some more about his intentions towards the princess, only to be interrupted. (Karin attempting to intimidate, Longueville having very bad timing)

The choices this time are kind of easy to explain. Number 1 introduces a prime bit of world building and plot from my own mind and might allow me to bring in Kirche and Tabby as main characters while also bringing to the fore a FOZ major plot point. Number 2 cuts off a FOZ minor plot point, and allows for Kazuma, Chad and Makoto to show some growth. Number 3 pushes forward the crowning plotline and gets us away from the academy, while continuing Louise's growth, and bringing in Kazuma's side of things. 4 is more comedy, but it will also end a minor FOZ plot point.