

Blaze

Von Billabong

Three

'I left the shower on, just in case...' Akane went over that sentence again and again, not making any sense of it at all.

She hadn't given a single thought to her dream from last night... (which was probably due to this very distracting morning).

Until now.

Akane sighed and slid even deeper into the hot damp water.

She refused to take the offered warm shower and drew herself a bath instead, intending to loosen her tension just a little bit.

'Weird', she thought with a crinkle across her forehead, 'What a coincidence.'

At day her dreams usually didn't bother her much, though she could always recall them quite vividly.

"It must be full moon then", Akane whispered.

She thought about past dreams, which always came at that particular time of night.

'I rarely remember any of my dreams', she wondered, 'or at least they fade away rather quickly the next morning'.

Except those at full moon.

Those, in which she could hardly separate dream from reality.

'They always feel so awkwardly real, so authentic...'

Replaying last night, she felt goosebumps crawling up her arms, albeit she was impassively watching the steam of the hot bath clouding her bathroom windows.

Akane immediately snapped out of her thoughts when she heard Kasumi calling for breakfast from downstairs.

For one last time she dove underwater to retrieve the soothing heat that felt so much more pleasant on her skin than this uncomfortable chill.

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When Akane sat down at the breakfast table, Ranma could tell at once that something was troubling her.

'Maybe she's coming down with a cold', he pondered, when he noticed the ever so pale skin beneath her rosy cheeks.

Instinctively he wanted to place both his hands on their foreheads, comparing their temperature, like his dad always used to do, when he fell sick as a child.

He slightly shook his head in amusement, foreseeing Akanes reactions, when he dared to touch her so.....so quite gently...and in front of everyone too!

Still, he was tempted, but only wondered out loud, if she was feeling unwell, instead.

"Huh?" Akane glanced up and took a look around. Everyone was already there!

She hadn't even noticed that she came last. Maybe because everything was as usual...Nabiki counting her today's income on her fingers, Kasumi refilling Genmas rice bowl once again and her father hiding behind the local newspaper.

"Yes, Akane-chan", intervened her oldest sister, "you do look like you could use a strong chicken bouillon, I'll fix you one in a minute!"

"No, really Kasumi, thank you, but that ain't necessary, it's just the morning sickness."

Everyone, including Mr Tendo, gasped and gawked at Akane in shock.

"WHAT??"

Akane clapped her hand against her forehead. "Gosh! No! Not that way. Oh my...you know when you wake up in the morning and your throat is sore and all, but by noon it's already gone?"

Everyone nodded in unison.

"Well, I've been sort of having that lately, but it's nothing serious, really!"
Everyone stared at her vigilantly.

"REALLY!"

"Akane, you really shouldn't go practicing then!", Kasumi finally spoke again, though

having to clear her throat first.

"Well, I wouldn't have, if..."her younger sister mumbled.

"If what?" Ranma now interfered, "Really, Akane, you should have taken a nice hot bath instead!" he smirked.

Akane had to swallow yet another snappy comment.

"Real funny, baka", she choked under her breath.

"Anyway, you can't afford to get sick.", Nabiki's voice suddenly came up, "You two are representing our Dojo at this year's school treat, remember?"

"Is it this weekend already?"

"Yap!"

Oh damn, Akane had totally forgotten about that. And Ranma seemed to feel likewise.

"Crap!" he called out, "and I even got myself a date this Saturday!"

"You got *what?*"

"A date."

Akane eyed him with suspicion.

"Ah, you know, where you meet people and stuff..."

Akane still eyed him with suspicion.

"Duh! Like a date, Akane. D-A-T-E." And after a short pause "Gotta go Tomboy, we're already late" .

He started to get up, but stopped half way to look her straight in the eye "By the way...you jealous?"

"Oh, *Puh-lease!* Don't be ridiculous!"

And they both rushed out the door.

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"You wanna talk about it?" Ranma asked, glancing up to her sideways.

But Akane only shook her head.

They were both on their usual way to school and just started running when they heard the school-bell ringing for the second time. Ranma jumped off the wobbly fence to increase his speed, because he didn't want to be late. Again.

'How are we gonna talk about it in a situation like this?!' Akane angrily thought.

'I mean it's not like I'm gonna tell him anything anyway....although...if he'd ask again properly...' but Ranma didn't let her finish her thoughts, because he suddenly yanked her out of the way.

She quickly turned her head towards Ranma's face and shot him a startled glance.

"Figured you didn't want to get run over by a herd of excited kindergarten kids going on a field trip..." he said and Akane watched the corners of his mouth slightly curl skywards.

He kept on running, his focus bound forward on the finish, when Akane realized that her feet weren't touching the ground anymore. He was carrying her! With a tight grip around her waist he held her close to him and they were flying down the street and past lots of familiar houses of Nerima, recognizing Dr. Tofu's office in one second and already losing it in the next. She felt that it was going to be another fine day and Akane enjoyed the warm breeze of fresh morning air, blowing lightly against her smiling face. She decided to close her eyes and just let the rush excite her for the moment. While she inhaled deeply the early summer air, she also sensed another very stimulating fragrance.....'Wait a second...is that *Ranma's* fragrance??' Her smile dropped and she opened her eyes again to check, making her eyelids flutter. She tried to move her head even closer to him (which was not too easy at that breakneck speed) and leaned her face just a bit further into the curve of his neck when she felt Ranma stiffen. He came to an abrupt halt and let go of her immediately.

"What on earth are you trying to do, Akane?", he asked, confusion in his eyes and his brows almost touching his nose.

'Damn', Akane grumbled, 'he caught me.'

"Well", she stuttered, "since when are you wearing perfume?"

"What??" he gasped.

'Why does he look so surprised? Isn't it too obvious?'

"Perfume! On your throat! I didn't even know you knew where to buy some!"

Slowly it dawned on him and he sighed.

"That's not perfume" he just said and turned away quickly, continuing his way to school.

Akane caught up with him swiftly, grabbed his arm and turned him around again.

"Then what is that smell?" She guessed that it couldn't be Shampoo's or Ukyo's fragrance since it definitively had a very ... manly edge to it.

But Ranma only loosened her strong grip finger by finger and mumbled something like "That's none of your concern".

He started to turn around once again when Akane suddenly started to burst out laughing. Annoyed and well aware that she probably figured out the truth he stopped half way.

"AHAHAHA!! You're not..." She slung her arms around her waist, holding herself from falling over with laughter.

"AHAHAHA...you mean....you really...ahahaha!! Oh, RANMA!!" And she felt herself being dangerously close to getting down on the ground and starting to roll around, shaking with laughter.

But Ranma's patience was about to run out. He just wanted to get it over with and acquitted himself out of his persistent rigidity.

As soon as Akane realized this she tried to straighten herself again and put her hand on his arm once again.

"Oh Ranma, please forgive me", she said, still chuckling.

She took a deep breath and tried again, now with a pretended stern voice: "But you really mean to tell me that you finally spotted your first hair of beard on your soft babyface?? And you're using aftershave now? Heavens!", Akane couldn't hide another giggle, "When did that all happen??"

And just in that specific second, Akane and Ranma heard the echo of the third stroke of the school gong and they both instantly knew what this meant:

TARDY PENALTY!