

Out of sight, out of mind

Chapter 2

"I need more details..."

**Next day
Tendo dining room
8:55am**

Saturday was usually a day of madness, with each of the fiancées or potential lovers appearing, to force themselves upon someone, feed them, or just generally cause a mess.

But today, nothing happened, as yet.

Nabiki walked into the room, where Kasumi had just finished breakfast.

"Oh my, Nabiki are you okay?" Her worry was evident.

Nabiki looked up, her puffy cheeks giving away what had transpired last night. She wiped her face and spoke. "No, nothing, just some hay fever allergies again..."

"Oh well, don't forget to take your pills then." She smiled good-naturedly.

Sitting down, she began to pile up some rice and some light sauce, her stomach wasn't reacting well to the stress she was experiencing.

Akane walked in, still in her pyjamas, but again having a happy expression. *I haven't seen her like this for such a long time...* She started using her chopsticks to eat. *Was Ranma really a bad influence on her? Yeah, he could be rude, but he cared for her...* She sighed inwardly thinking about what Ranma told her about Saffron and Jusendo. *I thought that Akane would treat him differently... But after the wedding...* She paused and looked out the open door to the koi pond. *Nothing changed... She was still mean to him...*

Nabiki gasped but managed to cover it up as a choking sound. *My God... That was two weeks ago... He stopped fighting everyday, even as far as not speaking to anyone more than necessary...*

Polishing off her bowl, she thanked Kasumi and placed it in the sink again, withdrawing to her room.

I know I'm not mad... Ranma did... does exist. Everyone at school knew him.

Looking around her room, she found her collection of one yen coins. Opening it up, she rummaged about inside, and pulled out the photos. She frantically realised that there were none of Ranma, either in male or female form.

Wha... Did he take them too?! Searching inside her desk, she saw that her reels of film were all gone, including any loose negatives. *Crap, everything... Wait...* She stared at her

bed and smirked. Ducking to the floor, she reached underneath and dragged out a sturdy bag, and removed a laptop from there.

I may not have scanned everything on here, but there should be one photo at least... Flipping it open, she booted it up, drumming her fingers impatiently as she waited, the hard drive clicking away noisily in the quiet room. *Ranma wouldn't just randomly break anyone's personal things, and he probably couldn't guess my password...* As the login screen appeared, her eyes glazed over for a second as the keys were typed quickly. *Mother...*

She was in, giving it another minute until all the security programs loaded up. *I thought so...* She saw failed login attempts at around two in the morning. *Let's see... 'money, moneymoneymoney, yen, Kuno.'* She grimaced at that one, and saw more references to coinage and wealth. *Is that how he saw me?* Closing the keylogger, she loaded up her photo folder.

"Yes!" She cried out. There, in all his glory, was Ranma performing a kata in the garden, and also a picture of his female form, emerging from the koi pond. A few more ordinary pictures of him (and her) were there, but nothing explicit or dubious about them.

Opening her Excel spreadsheet, she looked at her personal accounts. Kuno was top of the list, lots of credit from photo and information purchases. Some other people were there, but very low down was Gosunkugi. *I may need to claim that debt back soon...* The bottom three were Ranma, Genma and Soun. *The latter two don't work, and just spend it on food and drink.* Ranma's personal debt was high, but that amount he involuntarily contributed was a lot. *I made a lot of profit from his pictures and stories... He never really spends money anyway...*

Remembering how he was the last time she really spoke to him, her eyes grew sad. Without any hesitation, she selected the box with how much he owed her, and simply deleted it. *I won't ask anything more from him, unless he offers...* Sighing, she shut down the laptop and got to thinking again about his disappearance. *I need to plot this out...*

Taking a piece of paper, she wrote in the centre 'memory loss', then spidered out spokes, each with the following labels, 'friends', 'fiancées', 'family', 'enemies', and 'Nabiki'. She wrote down the names of all the people who forgot him to the list, under the appropriate heading. *What am I to him? Friend, fiancée, or...* She swallowed once. *Enemy?* Shrugging it off, she wrote the date she woke up, the day everyone forgot him.

Creating a new spoke, she wrote 'black powder'. Recalling the smell, she wrote down 'overpowering, dizzy spell after sniffing' under it. *Wait a sec...* She looked to her spoke and saw the date. *I woke up, but had those in my ears...* Turning to her side table, the two plugs gleamed back at her. *Only I wore those!* Writing that down, she made another assumption under the powder label. *May require sound as well to work fully?*

She switched to odd things people said. *Daddy said there was no engagement either, My Saotome said so too... Even Ukyo and Shampoo forgot that.* Thinking this was important, she wrote it under a new line with 'new facts'. *Ah yeah, of course, I shouldn't forget about the missing photos either...* She noted that down too.

"Right, all the information I have is here..."

She realised that the data written down was quite barren, some people were still missing, and would have to be tracked down. *Ryoga could be anywhere... I'll first find the person I know is around here...*

She checked the time and was surprised to see that it was almost midday. *Have I been thinking about this for that long?* She got dressed into some warm clothing, the winds had been picking up lately, and catching a cold at this time would be bad for her.

Folding the paper up, she placed it in her back pocket, along with a few more things and walked down the stairs, after quickly freshening up her face and teeth in the bathroom. Wrapping up her scarf around her neck, she slid the door open, but called back.

"Kasumi, I'm going out for a bit, so I won't be here for lunch. Please let daddy know!"

"Are you sure you'll be okay, Nabiki?" She shouted from the kitchen.

"I'll be fine, thanks sis!"

"Okay Nabiki, take care!"

Leaving the home, she exhaled, seeing her breath leave her mouth, twisting and vanishing in the wind. *So cold...* She walked out onto the street. *Like all the life in Nerima has gone...* She could still see her breaths. *Heh, it's similar to Ranma...* She powered out a burst of air and watched it. *You know it's a part of you, and you just accept it as normal. The next second, it's in front and so close to you, and just as quickly, it disappears without a trace... Even though it's still out there...*

Checking the road signs, though she knew the way, she walked on, for once feeling woefully unlucky for remembering the dark-haired pig-tailed martial artist. *Everyone else is living their lives as normal, I'm cursed with the knowledge that Ranma was a big part of my... our lives...* She had already walked several blocks, which helped to warm her up a bit. *The worst part about all this...* She bit her lip. *I... I miss him... I don't know why...* She looked around at everyone walking by. *All the people around me are strangers, even our friends... I have no one to talk to, because no one knows who I'm talking about...* She stopped, and looked up at the building she knew would shed some light on everything.

Maybe... after all that talk of fiancées and weddings... Maybe he won the tiny portion of my heart that wasn't closed away and frozen over... She rang the bell. *The only problem with that is... I hold no such place in his...*

"Hello?"

"Hi, it's Nabiki, can I come in?"

"What a pleasant surprise, please, do." The buzzer rang and the gate unlocked, allowing her into the garden area, then to the doorway, where it slid open.

"Hello Auntie Saotome."

**A few minutes later
Inside Mrs Saotome's home**

“Nabiki, it’s been a while.” The elder woman smiled at her and noticed her girl’s arms shaking. “Would you like me to brew some coffee?”

“I’ve already had my c-caffeine boost for the d-day...” She stuttered back. “Do you have any hot chocolate?”

“Why, certainly!” She passed a blanket over from the sofa. “Please, cover yourself in this, the weatherman said the temperature was going to drop rapidly over the next week.”

Accepting it, she nodded her thanks as Nodoka walked off into the kitchen to heat up some milk. Wrapping it around her, she took in her surroundings. Not much was different about the home from when she last remembered it, everything was in the same place, bar things she knew weren’t there any more. The few pictures she had of Ranma on shelves and even the walls were gone, replaced either with ornaments or photos of her and Genma.

Again, time seemed to fly by as the milk was warmed up quick, and Nodoka returned with a delicious mug of warm cocoa. “Here you go, Nabiki.”

“Thanks Auntie.”

Gripping it with both hands, the blanket coming away from her arms, she blew lightly over the surface, seeing the steam rising off it, and took a light sip. Flinching slightly as it burned her top lip, she tried again and found that it had already adjusted to the heat, and poured a little down her throat. Her body instantly melted inside as the welcome liquid spread and soothed her aching bones.

“What can I do for you Nabiki? Not that I’m busy or anything, but it’s unlike you to pay me a special visit.”

Nabiki had already thought out a plan of attack, analysing her own questions and predicting possible answers, this time, assuming the worst case scenario. Given the lack of hints otherwise, she’d assume that Ranma did not exist in his mother’s mind.

“Not much... I just wanted to get to know you better...”

“Me...?!” Nodoka sounded almost scandalised, but she calmed herself before replying. “But I’m just a wife, nothing else.”

“I know... But you know so much about us, our lives, I don’t know anything about you. For instance...” She paused as she readied her loaded question. “... do you have any children, a son or a daughter?”

Nodoka had this faraway look in her eyes, as if reliving a flashback. “Well... Genma has been training for many years... He left over eleven years ago as you know, and, well...” She appeared flustered and tried to cover up her blush. “... we didn’t have a chance to have any children.” She sighed, her smile returned, but with a hint of pain. “It would have been nice for the family name to live on. I imagine if I did have a son, then Genma would have made him a man among men...”

“You were right about that...” Nabiki muttered.

“What was that dear?” Her preoccupation meant she truly didn’t hear.

“Oh nothing...” Nabiki changed the subject quick. “So, while Genma trained, what did you do?”

“Nothing much...” She put a finger to her head, trying to remember. “Just living normally I guess. I didn’t work much, you see, I’m not a martial artist like my husband, nor a swordsman like my father...” Nabiki mentally took a note of that part while drinking. “However, I did do some yoga classes for the local women, as well as cooking courses and tea ceremonies.” She tried to play down her achievements. “Oh, nothing fancy, you know, just the basics, to get them started on their path to womanhood and the perfect Japanese wife...”

Nabiki felt an ache in her chest, and realised it was her heart. *Poor Ranma... Is this part of what drove you away? Jusenkyo meant that you had both these wishes forced on you by your own mother... And here I was telling you to get close to her...*

Nabiki had most of the information she needed, and started the next part of her subtle tactics. She began to massage her temples theatrically, leading to the expected response from the woman opposite.

“Is something the matter Nabiki? You don’t seem too well...”

“Mmm...” She hummed, her eyelids clenched tight. “Not really...” She had a pleading look about her. “Would you mind terribly if I lay down on your bed for a bit?”

“No, of course, let me help you up.”

The concern was evident in her voice, and the Ice Queen felt a pang of guilt at lying to this woman, who was the same as a few days ago, but mellower and more accepting of people. Leading her to the western-style bed, Nabiki lay down with two pillows under her head.

“Are you hungry at all? I can make something for the both of us to eat.”

The stomach rumbling before a reply could be made answered clearly. “Wait right here and relax then Nabiki, I’ll be around fifteen minutes, maybe longer...”

“Thank you, Auntie.” Nabiki faked a pained smile as she left and shut the door, padding softly down the stairs.

Eyes wide awake, she scoured the room in the dull light. *I see... I had to be sure...* Pulling out her diagram, she added the following notes under the ‘new facts’ section.

“No son (or daughter) in past... No mention of seppuku... Saotome Honour Blade missing...”

She got up and moved slowly about the room. Peering closely at the floor, she kept an eye on the carpet until she found it.

“Got you...”

The black powder was present, at the foot of the bed, hidden by some clean folded clothes. *The wardrobe was open, so maybe she was going to do this later...* Testing the powder and rubbing it between her fingers, she realised that perhaps her first suggestion was wrong. *This isn't powder...* Deciding not to sniff it, she withdrew her hand and pulled out two things from her coat pocket. Scooping the tiny pile with a sterilised spatula, she dropped the substance into a small glass vial, sealing it with a cork and elastic band to prevent it pooping open.

Now I can finally figure out if this is what I think it is... Replacing the items back in her coat, wiping the spatula clean first, she began to gently rummage around the woman's dresser. She was careful not to disturb anything, being a master of extortion, blackmail and general information gathering, she knew that any person could easily tell if someone had been through their personal space and belongings. Opening the first drawer, she found some hair accessories and clips. Moving lower, she found some underwear, and blushed at the sheerness of them. Getting down to the final one, she found some boxes, and other strange items. Her first pay check was here, as well as an old passport of hers, dated 1975. *Wow, she's only 16 here...Looks just like the girl Ranma... It's scary...*

Opening the dusty box, it was like opening a time capsule. There were some old newspaper clippings, photos again, and some personal objects. Nabiki checked the date of the articles. *Hmm... Eleven and a half years ago...* She counted up the time in her head. *This must be when Ranma went off on his training journey... Which means...* She checked the lid found that the dust was gone in some places. *Bingo...* Hovering her fingers over the gaps, she found that they matched perfectly. *So, Ranma took out some stuff from here... Probably photos, and...* She gently looked it over again and nodded to herself. *Yep... No seppuku contract...*

Finally getting everything she needed, she slowly replaced the things one by one, trying not to upset the order. Once everything was back in the place they were, she walked back to the bed and wrote in the lack of contract on her diagram.

“Nabiki! Lunch is ready!”

Refolding it back in her pocket, she shouted back. “Coming Auntie!”

Running a hand through her hair, she sighed. *I'm beginning to understand now...* Leaving the room, she made a quick diversion to the bathroom to clean her hands, and went downstairs.

After lunch

“Thank you Auntie, it was delicious.” She bowed slightly as she helped carry the plates back to the kitchen.

“Think nothing of it, Nabiki.” They both started to wash the dishes in the sink. “I had fun today, speaking and eating with you.” She smiled happily. “It was like having a daughter for one day...”

Nabiki held the plate she was drying tightly, her nails scraping it slightly. Her eyes watered suddenly. "Yes..." She sniffed. "I suppose it was..."

"Nabiki!" Nodoka put down the plate, quickly wiping her hands on the towel and held her shoulders. "What's wrong, did I say something bad?"

"N... No..." She wiped the tears away. "It's nothing..." *Ranma... Your mum is a good person, you know that?* "I just..." *Maybe...* "I miss my own mum sometimes..."

"Oh, my dear girl..." Nodoka pulled her in to a hug. "I know it must have been hard on you... While Soun was teaching, I used to spend a lot of time with her..."

"R... Really?" Nabiki was surprised and pulled back to stare into her eyes. *I had no idea they knew each other before...* "What did you talk about?"

"Oh, this or that..." She smiled. "But she mostly about you and your sisters." Nodoka grew sadder, looking out into the distance. "I miss her too sometimes, she was my only friend back then, when Genma first introduced me to Soun." She gave Nabiki an appraising gaze. "She said you inherited her intelligence and maths skills." Chuckling slightly she continued. "You'd already started learning algebra, money management and even, a little bit of blackmail."

"But I was only seven!" Nabiki countered.

"You told your sister Akane to give you her blanket if you kept quiet about the broken table leg..."

Nabiki restarted the drying. "Wasn't my fault she kicked up a fuss about a stupid toy..." She mumbled, while the elder woman giggled.

1:37pm

"Thank you for coming, Nabiki." They were stood at the entrance as the Tendo girl put on her outdoor shoes. "I enjoyed having you over."

"My pleasure, and thank you Auntie." She emphasised the 'you' part, an indication of how important the meeting was.

"If your head hurts again, take some painkillers, I had a bad dizzy spell yesterday morning after getting up, so it might be a bug going round town."

Stunned, Nabiki, bowed quickly and turned to leave.

"I hope we can meet up again soon..." Nodoka called out into the wind.

Nabiki glanced back, as a light snowfall began, leading to the illusion of sakura blossom in Spring. "Me too..." She said doubtfully. Exiting the gate, she turned towards home, then decided against it, heading to another destination.

I hope so too... Auntie...

Author's Notes

So, I didn't explicitly say when the previous chapter occurred, hopefully the opening lines regarding Saffron cleared that up. Ranma was in Nerima about a year after the manga ended, hence the times.

I was surprised at the number of responses from this story, didn't realise I'd garnered such interest. Maybe there aren't enough mysteries in the Ranma section? Still I hope you enjoy this chapter a little.

In case you're thinking that some people are OOC, well, there's a reason for that. I hope I got Nabiki down pat though, she's probably the most intelligent out of all the cast (apart from Cologne, who is also wiser with age), and I feel that she can be like this when she needs to be.

Again, I have grand plans for this fic, not healthy for me, but I hope to keep to these fairly short (for me at least) chapters, in order to bleed the secrets and plot line out slowly. Makes for a great cliffhanger though...

- Jason