

Out of sight, out of mind

Chapter 3

“This is worse than I thought...”

**Outside the Kuno estate
2:14pm**

The mansion soared up above her as she gazed upon the classic roof tiles. *Here goes...* Pressing the buzzer, the sound of a weasel-like voice responded.

“Yes? Who is it?”

“Sasuke, let me in, it’s Nabiki.”

“I’m afraid I –”

“I need to speak to Kuno.” Her tone grew deadly. “Now.”

“R-right away!” The gate swung open automatically as she smirked. *I’ve never seen such a wimpy ninja.*

Striding into the entranceway, she removed her shoes and waited for the purple clad man to escort her into the welcoming room.

“I’ll inform Master Kuno that you’re here.” He vanished into the air.

Nabiki sat there for several minutes, the clock ticking by. *I’m sure of my suspicions... I only wonder how Ranma got so clever all of a sudden...*

“This is most unexpected Nabiki Tendo.” Kuno walked in, still wearing his kendo garb. “I pray that I have few minutes to spare with you, as I have other matters to attend to.” He sat down opposite her. “However, as you have provided me with pictures of my chosen for the past year, I grant you this request.”

I thought so... Singular... She began her questioning with a demand. “Kuno...” She left off the ‘baby’ moniker as she wasn’t in the teasing mood. “I’m going to be asking you some odd questions, so I want you to answer them honestly, without ranting on or quoting poetry, and I don’t want you to probe as to why I’m asking them.” She watched his neutral expression. “Agreed?”

“As you wish.” He leaned in, mildly interested. “Go on.”

“How many women have you been chasing this past year?”

“Me, chasing?!” He stood up, outraged. “I, the Blue Thunder of –”

The words died on his lips as he saw the dead cold eyes of Nabiki penetrating his own pair. They seemed to be furious, with determination and a blazing fire from within. Kuno,

for one of the few times in his life, felt fear. The rumours he had heard were true, never cross or anger Nabiki Tendo. He had never seen her like that before, nor did he wish to ever again.

He sat down again, and bowed to her, his hands on his knees. "I apologise, Nabiki." He straightened up and tried to think. "There have been many women I have been seeking, Akane Tendo amongst them."

Nabiki nodded. "You requested pictures from me as well for that same period, tell me who they were of."

He frowned. "Surely you must know? I went to you for pictures of Akane Tendo." He paused, sensing the request from her stare that more was needed. "No one else."

He head bowed low, thinking. *I knew it... Just the last part to figure out.* She stood up. "One last thing before I leave. I would like to see your room to confirm something."

"Confirm?" He repeated.

Mentally slapping herself, she froze him on the spot again with her eyes. "I thought I told you once. Don't question me."

Kuno swallowed once, but his ego and pride still remained. "If you wish, however it is most unseemly that a woman would visit a man's room."

"I'll go in alone, just for one minute, then I'll leave."

"Very well..."

Upstairs, outside Kuno's room

"I shall be counting, Nabiki Tendo. While you may have forced me here, I am not happy about having you enter my room."

"I'll make it worth your while..." She said cryptically.

Kuno said nothing, but slid the door open, moving away to allow her in. Closing the door behind her, Nabiki glanced at the wall.

Sure enough, the poster sized portrait of Akane she sold him was there. Multitudes of frames with her image were adorned around the entire place, walls, shelves, even some on the ceiling.

Yet, there was none of the red-headed Ranma. A large part of the wall where there were smaller pictures of Akane hid a large square, more coloured, part of the wall. Tracing the line she approximated the size. *This is where the portrait went... It's missing... All of Ranma is gone.* Checking her watch, she realised she had half a minute to go, but chose to walk out.

"Done already?" Kuno was surprised.

“Yes.” Nabiki closed the door and leaned against the wall. “One final question, and then I’ll give you some advice.” Kuno stood there, waiting. “Do you know, or remember, the pig-tailed girl, or the tree-borne-kettle girl?”

Kuno held his head oddly. “No, I don’t believe I’ve met either of them. They sound like pure angels though...”

“No.” Nabiki stated. “Don’t even think about it. They don’t exist Kuno, so you can stop dreaming.”

“If you say so.” He folded his arms. “You mentioned something about advice?”

Nabiki cleared her throat. “Stop obsessing over Akane Tendo. She will never love you, as you are...” This gave him a moment to think. “I will not sell you any more photos of her, as your room is an unhealthy reminder to me that she is, after all, my baby sister.” Her features softened. “If you really love her, and want to be with her, then stop with the stupid challenges, and trying to grab her each time you see her. She’s paranoid that every boy is out to get her, thanks to you...” She felt better seeing him flinch. *Maybe he’ll understand this time...* “She’s not a trophy to be won by challenging her. If you get rid of your photos, soon you’ll realise that she’s an ordinary girl, and has to be treated like one.” She stood back. “I’m not going to dictate your life, Kuno, but it has to change now, or you’ll be alone forever, and Akane will never let anyone into her heart again...”

“Again?” Kuno asked.

Gees, I slipped up. Why’s he being so sharp? “Do you understand me Kuno?”

“I think so...” He rubbed his head in an almost sheepish manner. “Lately I’ve begun to realise that my manner of love is too forward, and that maybe I should change. You reminded me of that.”

That’s odd... Kuno knows that it’s wrong before I even said anything? “Good, then I’ll go now.”

Going down the stairs, she whispered. “Sasuke.”

The diminutive ninja faded into view on the banister. “Yes, Miss Tendo?”

“Ever heard of Ranma?”

“No... I don’t believe so, should I?” He enquired.

“No, you shouldn’t. Go away.” She waved him off as he jumped backwards.

Ahh, damn. Turning quick, she walked back up the stairs to where Kuno still stood, his brain audibly clicking gears into place. *Guess it’s taking him some time...* “Kuno-baby, is Kodachi in?”

“My evil sister, yes, I believe so.” He pointed his thumb behind him. “Hers is the last door on the left.”

“Thanks...”

She walked by him to the door, and knocked loudly.

“Who is it?”

“Nabiki Tendo...”

Maybe I should have brought some backup... She tensed up, knowing how insane the gymnast could be.

“Oh ho ho ho ho!” Nabiki winced. “So you dare come challenge me at home?”

The door opened rapidly and a ribbon wrapped around her instantly, then she was dragged in. Kodachi was wearing some comfortable jogging bottoms and a warm jumper, given the weather. Nabiki was now on the floor cursing to herself.

“Dammit Kodachi, let me go, I’m not here to fight you!”

“Come on, it was just a joke!” The ribbon unfurled slowly and returned to her side as Kodachi helped her up. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to pull you so hard...”

Nabiki sat down in the large beanbag, again her brain going into overdrive. *This is getting freakier by the minute... Kodachi, joking and apologising?! Having learned a bit about human nature and reading emotions, she started analysing the girl in front of her. She looked over to the smile on the girl’s face, and realised another thing. She’s... different. I’ve never seen her like this... Her whole behaviour... It’s as if I’m a... friend?! Her eyes are smiling too... No agenda behind them...*

“While it is a nice surprise to see you Nabiki, I have homework to do...”

“It... It’ll only take a moment...” Still startled by the drastic changes in the gymnast, she pulled out the small vial. “Do you know what this smell is?” Kodachi raised an eyebrow and took the vial. “Be careful, it’s quite strong...”

Taking a small whiff, she closed the lid and passed it back. “It’s familiar...” she stood up and opened a cupboard, where beakers and test tubes were in racks. “The hint of cinnamon and vanilla is my strongest paralysis powder...” She pulled out a rack and frowned. “That’s odd... I only have two beakers left... The other three are missing...”

What else is new...? Nabiki sighed. “Would you mind if I take one to do some tests on it?”

“If you want...” She passed a sealed beaker over. “That isn’t mine though.” She pointed at the vial that Nabiki had. “I’ve been around enough poisons to have immunity to most of them, but that one is especially powerful.” She closed the doors and seemed a bit down. “Even I felt dizzy from that one...”

Great... Just what I need... Nabiki thought sarcastically. “Thank you, Kodachi, I’ll return this as soon as I can.”

“No need, keep it, I was thinking of getting rid of them all anyway.”

Nabiki couldn't help herself. "Why?"

"Recently, I felt guilty for using them on anyone..." She looked over to Nabiki. "I couldn't do that to my friends any more..."

Getting another headache from all the new information, she excused herself. *I have to get out of here...* She thought as she walked out.

"Come back soon!" Kodachi cried cheerfully.

One minute later The streets of Nerima

Oh man... Things have gone way too messed up now... Kodachi is sane, Kuno is less mad... What else is new?

The snow had covered most surfaces, it seemed to be sticking around for now. As her feet crunched on the snow, her thoughts drifted again.

A lot to add... No male Ranma pictures in Kodachi's room meant that she too lost memory... There was also no pig-tailed girl for Kuno... She sneezed once, wiping her wet and cold nose before sticking her hands back in her pockets. On top of that, their memories changed 'recently'... Why? It doesn't make sense...

She sneezed again. *First things first, a hot soak in the furo...*

5:53pm Nabiki's room

The warm water had been a treat for her chilled skin, but all good things had to come to an end at some point, so Nabiki left after only half an hour there.

Okay, all done... The chart had been appended with the new information, but still things didn't make sense. What the hell is going on? I thought it was just to do with Ranma going missing and everyone forgetting about him... Reading over the details again, she grimaced. But, now it's deeper than that. Some severe changes have happened. The Kuno's are the prime example... She tapped her pen on the diagram. There has to be a connection somehow...

There was a knock at the door. Hiding the piece of paper in her desk, Nabiki turned and responded. "Come in!"

"Hello sister." Kasumi walked in, her beaming face resulting in even Nabiki's mood to lighten. She was dressed very formally.

"Hi Kasumi..." She leaned back a bit, to try to ignore the growing confusion in her mind. "What's up? Is dinner ready?"

“Not quite.” She chuckled to herself. “The dojo is open now and guests have been invited around for dinner, as father has an announcement to make. We need to be dressed up for it...”

“An announcement?” *That’s a first...* “Okay, I’ll be down in a minute...”

Kasumi nodded and left for her room.

“Damn, these house clothes aren’t good enough if there’s people coming over...” She mumbled at her baggy trousers and top. “Better smarter up...”

Fumbling inside her cupboard, she found a kimono that she wore on occasions, the last time being at a festival. *This... was the same one I wore when Ranma first arrived...* Pushing away the flood of memories, she put it on slowly, swearing lightly when she couldn’t tie the obi properly.

Looking at herself in the mirror, she picked up her hairbrush. *Need to get rid of the knots...* *Hey what’s this?* Long red hairs were sticking out from it. *Ra... Ranma’s hair?* She pulled them out. “But how?”

She focused and tried to recall the past. *That’s right... We all went out as girls on Wednesday... I said he – well, she really – should comb her hair...* She pulled the hairs out and placed them in another vial in her desk. *I might need this later...*

Continuing to make herself more stunning, she shuffled out of the room and made her way to the dojo. *Wow, sounds busy in there...* She placed her hand on the door and firmed herself. *Might as well get on with it...*

She opened the door, and upon seeing the sight ahead of her, she froze. Seconds later, she did the only thing she could do after processing all the new information since Ranma’s disappearance.

She fainted.

One week ago

Walking in the garden, she watched as a pig-tailed martial artist jumped away from a flailing Genma, who then became a wet and angry panda.

“Serves you right pop, don’t try to hit me from behind again...”

“Ungrateful brat, eat your fiancée’s cooking!” He signposted.

“No way! That stuff can eat toxic waste and still be more deadly...” He stopped as a rage filled ki powered towards him.

“RANMAAAA!” Akane bellowed, her eyes narrowing as she cracked her knuckles.

“Come on Akane... That was just a –”

A ‘ding ding’ could be heard.

“Oh boy...” Ranma muttered. “Gaaah!” He fell to the ground as a bike planted into his back.

“Airen! You want fresh ramen Shampoo cook for you?”

“Ah... no thanks...” He got up and started backing away to the exit.

“Ranma honey...” Ukyo was walking by the entrance and saw his back. “I have some okonomiyaki, like some?”

“Uuhhh...”

“Woohoo, morning panties!” Happosai flipped the girls skirts up.

“Damn you, old man...” He was about to kick before sensing danger. He jumped quick, avoiding chains, claws, daggers and a large metal ball.

“After I beat you, Shampoo is mine!” Mousse cried out.

“In your dreams buddy...” He posed in a ready stance, then ducked some bokken strikes.

“Foul sorcerer, where have you hidden the pig-tailed girl?”

“Shut up Kuno...” He booted him into the wall, which spider cracked outwards, only to implode as another person ran in.

“Ranma, prepare to die!”

Blocking Ryoga’s punch, he swept kicked him and dodged more chains, only to be hit by ink. Glinting in the sunlight in the sky was the monstrous figure of Pantyhose Taro, swooping down to pulverise Ranma. Unfortunately, the distraction was enough to let Mousse get a chain on his foot, and then Ryoga punched him in the stomach. Akane ran in and gave him a kick in the groin. Shampoo and Ukyo fought Akane, but accidentally kept hitting Ranma as he tried to protect her from their powerful hits.

Cologne pogoed up onto the Tendo wall, behind Nabiki who stared at the whole farce with a morbid fascination. Her hands were on the camera, but she had yet to take a single shot, ambivalence preventing her from doing so.

“My... son-in-law has bad luck today...” The ancient elder mused aloud.

Nabiki’s secretive ‘this-will-make-a-good-profit’ smirk died as she saw Ranma’s face, concentrating on defending Akane from Shampoo and Ukyo, but still getting hit by her while trying to dodge Genma, Mousse, Ryoga, Happosai, Pantyhose and even a newly conscious Kuno. Floored by a lucky punch from Akane, he lay there and was pounded upon, his eyes making their way to Nabiki’s own. The sadness of the situation reflected in both of them, as she stepped forwards, but couldn’t go any further as she couldn’t defend herself, nor stop the others.

Suddenly, his eyes changed, the intense power and directness burrowing deep inside Nabiki. Smirking with understanding, his confident blue aura surrounded him as he stared at the ground.

“ENOUGH!” He screamed.

Everyone was blown backwards, several new craters and dents in the walls were made from their bodies, around a large hollow created by Ranma himself. He was standing up, clenching his shaking fist tightly as the blue aura grew, then dissipated.

“Enough...” He whispered, so only Nabiki could hear him.

Looking to the wall, he jumped up onto it then began roof hopping, away from the dojo, as he gave a glance back to Nabiki, who stared at the retreating figure.

“Ranma...” She whispered, taking a step towards the direction he went off. “What’s wrong...? Ranma...”

The present Five minutes later

“...biki... Nabiki!”

Opening her eyes, the light forcing them closed again, she tried slower and adapted to the ceiling, and sat up.

“Kasumi!” Soun cried, his waterfall tears back. “Is Nabiki okay?”

“Yes father, she just has a slight bump from her fall.”

“Wh-what happened?” Nabiki mumbled.

“You fainted, child, we brought you into the warm to take care of you.” Cologne spoke.

“Fainted? I never fainted before in my –” She stopped abruptly.

So, it was true... She realised she was in the dojo, the cause of her loss of consciousness lay in front of her.

A large table from one end of the dojo to the other was there, and kneeling at each available space was everyone they knew in Nerima. The Kuno’s, including the mad principal and Sasuke, all the Tendo’s and the two adult Saotome’s, were on one side. The other had the Amazons, Gosunkugi, Hinako (in girl form), Haposai, Ukyo, Konatsu, Yuka, Hitoshi, Sayuri and Daisuke.

Only Ryoga was missing.

Near the dojo, the sound of earth crumbling and blasting outwards echoed, followed by shuffling. The door parted as the lost boy spoke out. “Where am I now?” He passed out on the floor, Kasumi quickly rushing to him.

Well, he's not missing any more...

Ten minutes later

Time passed while Ryoga was fed, he'd been lost for a day without food, and was seated at the head of the table. Nabiki couldn't stomach anything. *No one is... fighting each other...* She tried her emotion reading skill, but found the same aura of happiness was the same.

Only two were different. Kuno stared at Akane and was struggling to resist pulling out his bokken, while Happosai was attempting to sneak a peak at Ukyo's unmentionables, though she was enough to stop him going any further.

The meal was lavish, expensive sushi and bentos from the takeout stores, but not the usual cheap stuff they buy when Akane was cooking and destroying the kitchen. *What's the occasion?*

Sure enough, Soun coughed loudly and stood up. *Guess I'll find out now...*

"Thank you all for attending, it has been over a year since my friend and fellow trainee Genma Saotome joined us in the Tendo home, and we have made many friends since then, including our reunion with our master." Happosai grumbled something about 'no panties'.

Soun raised his sake dish to the sky. "Let us toast to the future." Everyone else except Nabiki raised theirs. "From this day forth, the Tendo and Saotome Schools of Anything Goes Martial Arts will be joined forever, by the reopening of the dojo."

A chorus of cheers and 'Campai' could be heard as they downed their measures of sake.

Nabiki whitened as her eyes glazed over. *This can't be happening... It's impossible...* The world grew darker around the edges. *Im... Impossible...*

For only the second time in her life, Nabiki fainted again.

Author's Notes

Well... The mystery deepens doesn't it? Naturally, I have accounted for everyone's 'odd' behaviour since the beginning. It's not just as simple as Ranma leaving, that's for sure.

I thought it was about time to escalate things further, even Nabiki can only take so much before the stress got to her. Fainting seemed like the most logical point for her to reach by now.

Hope you enjoyed the flashback scene, which was unexpected for me to even include it at all. Then I realised that this was another important plot item, and that it wouldn't hurt to put it in now. I wonder if any of you can figure it out...

- Jason