

Out of sight, out of mind

Chapter 5

“No... A dead end...”

7:32pm
A nearby hotel

Just my luck it was Sunday, the place wasn't open... Looking over the room quickly, she was glad to see that it wasn't too shabby for the one night she'd have to spend there. Checking the headboard and ceiling closely, she saw no cameras there, and also made some subtle approaches to the picture, again looking. *Nothing, can't be too careful really...*

Pick up the phone, the hotel switchboard picked up, and Nabiki asked to be connected to an external line. Upon hearing the usual dial tone, she started punching in numbers.

Waiting a few seconds, the phone on the other end picked up.

“Hello?”

“Hi Kasumi, it's me, Nabiki.”

“Hello sister.” You could hear her smiling down the phone. “How is your trip going?”

“Good thanks...” Nabiki wasn't sure how much the hotel was charging for the call, so got straight to the point. “Listen, I'm going to be staying the night here but then I should be back soon, though I'll miss school tomorrow.”

“Now, you know you shouldn't do that...” The scolding was a tad light. “Thank you for letting me sleep this morning...”

“It was the least I could do, you took care of me all night...” She checked her watch. “Okay, I have to go now, please let daddy and Akane know that I'm not coming home tonight.”

“I will, you take care now.”

They said their goodbyes and hung up, Nabiki flopping onto the comfy bed. Shifting so her whole body was on the mattress, she placed her hands behind her head and thought.

I can just feel it... I'm so close, but he's still one step ahead of me... She pulled out the diagram she created. *It seems perfect...* She traced her fingers across the lines and connections. *I mean, I still don't understand, he's planned this so far, everyone who had some sort of claim on him no longer remembers it. No more fiancées, no more rivals, no more arguments...* This brought back memories of the first day of school since he left, and Kuno's usual appearance. *Well, maybe not all the time...*

The startling changes in memories were also something she could not explain. *No way was this a coincidence... Ranma must've done something to the Kuno's, to daddy and Mr Saotome... I can understand people not remembering him, but to do something so drastic...* She gasped and sat up. *Wait a minute... it can't be that simple, can it?*

Sighing, she lay back down. *Well, I can't check it out over here, when I get back...* Her father puzzled her again. *Daddy never wanted to reopen the dojo after mum died... So why did he - I mean Ranma – make him?* She hummed to herself. *Even Mr Saotome was 'forced' to agree... I still don't understand why...*

Positioning herself against the headboard, she picked up the remote control and turned the TV on, hoping for some light entertainment. She was about to change channels before a name caught her attention. She put the volume up. *A news report...*

"... shows no sign of stopping. Meteorologists are baffled by the sudden snowy conditions in Nerima, centred around a small city. Despite the normal, seasonal weather throughout the country, the cold remains here. No explanation has been given, some people believe the government are at fault, whilst others think of anomalies within the city itself could be to blame. However, everyone is working as normal, and road and rail services are functioning. No one seems to mind the snow; no blizzards have been reported yet, so it may be our little corner of winter for some time. Back to the studio..."

Turning it over to a game show, she began to think without paying much attention to the antics playing out in front of her.

Now what... You're trying to tell me that even the weather has changed?! She started scratching her head as if a thousand bugs were biting away at it. This is driving me insane! Placing her hands down, she breathed out loudly.

"Okay, calm down..."

Taking another soothing breath, she watched the presenters vaguely. *I'm not a cynic, I know magic exists. Hell, I see it every day with Ranma and the others around. Jusenkya can't be explained by science, not rationally at least. How would they describe Herb, descended from dragons, and Saffron, a demi-god from what Ranma said... Even the martial arts that everyone practises aren't something normal humans could do... She looked down at her hand and clenched into a fist. There's no way I could be that strong. Out of all of us, Akane is the most normal, though she can be a bit of a brute...*

So, is it really any wonder that it may affect the weather... All the curses concentrated in one place might change the weather patterns. There was a lot of rain when Ranma arrived. She wondered idly why he brought about some much mayhem to her part of Nerima. He is a water magnet, none of the others were as bad as him. Maybe nature is adapting to him being away...

She smirked. *Sounds like a harbinger of chaos, whenever he goes, trouble follows...*

Checking the clock again, she blinked. *What? That late already?* She got up. *Better sleep now, tomorrow will be a big day, I can feel it...*

Monday morning

Public Records Office (Sendai branch)

Sweat beaded on her forehead. She was seated in the waiting room, amongst some light reading, which she flicked through casually.

“Miss...” The speaker paused, reading over the name again. “Nabiki Tendo? Please come this way.”

Following the steward, she walked into an unremarkable room with a view, plain cream walls, and a desk with computer terminal with a clerk sitting and facing her. She went to the empty chair and made herself comfortable.

“My name is Hiro Yamato, I understand you wish to look up a birth certificate on someone...”

“That’s correct, a Ranma Saotome, my fiancée... He’s been missing for several days and no one has seen any sign of him since his disappearance.” She kept with her cover story in case they checked out the school.

“Unfortunately, we require some form of identification, as we simply can’t conduct a search of any person, do you have any items of his?”

Nabiki grimaced, knowing full well that nearly all proof of his existence had vanished. “All I have are some photos that he left behind...” She pulled out the copies of the scanned male pictures on her laptop. “I went to the local school where he attended when he was ten years old, but I have nothing more...”

“I see...” He seemed disappointed. “This is troubling, we would need more proof that you are related somewhat to this Saotome... Is there any other family member who can vouch for you?”

No... There isn't anyone...

“My family haven’t spoken to me in a long time... They never met Ranma in their lives...” Her eyes grew desperate, pleading. “Please... I just want to find him!” She reached into her pocket. “I have the necessary fee for searching, I’ll pay extra if that’s what you want...”

Hiro held his hands up in a friendly manner. “Money isn’t what’s important here. I just need to prove that there is a connection between you and him.” He smiled. “Tell you what, I can see that you’re in distress, how about I help you out? Do you have any ID on you? I’ll try and conduct a search to see if there were any such links in the past.”

“Here...” She passed over her student pass and passport, as being with Ryoga meant leaving the country if he took a wrong turn with her.

“Okay...” He started typing away and showed her the screen a few times to confirm if that was her. She saw her own birth certificate and smiled. Several minutes later he turned the screen again. “It seems that there was a marriage certificate, between Soun Tendo and –” Nabiki sneezed loudly, covering his words. “- and from what I can gather, the witnesses were a Genma and Nodoka Saotome.”

Nabiki was hopeful. “Does that mean...?”

“Yes. I can help you search for your fiancée. May I have the date of birth?”

She passed him the information and he began looking. Minutes of typing and frowns from Hiro made things tense for Nabiki, as she began to sweat again. *This is it... I can feel it...* More time passed, and he sighed.

“Unfortunately, no one by that name was born on that day...” He gave her a secretive look. “Can you think of any other name he’d be under...?”

Only one came to mind. “Ranko Saotome...”

Raising an eyebrow at the female name, he nonetheless carried on searching, and after a similar period of time, he shook his head. “Sorry, nothing by that name...”

Nabiki was at her wits end. *I can’t just leave it like this...* “Is there any way you could search for him through all your databases?”

“All of them?” He tapped the table with his pen. “That would take a lot of time, and power... It’ll cost you since these searches cost money...”

“I don’t care...” She opened her wallet to emphasise her point. “I’ll pay whatever it takes...”

“Okay... I’ll conduct a general search for ‘Ranma Saotome’ in our National databank. This may take an hour or two...” He pressed the ‘Enter’ key and stood up. “Would you like to join me for coffee and some snacks?”

His stomach growled in response. “I’d like that.” She smiled back weakly.

An hour and a half later

Hiro escorted Nabiki back to the room and let her sit first before moving over to his side. He double clicked.

“There seem to be only two references with the exact name in the databases...” He paled slightly. “This is unheard of though... I can’t imagine how without a -”

“What?” She grew angry. “What is it?”

He gave her a look of pity and angled the screen over to her. The first document was open already, and the top two words clearly readable from her chair.

Ten minutes later

“Thank you for your time, you’ve been very helpful.” Nabiki’s fringe covered the top part of her face. She placed the printed out documents into a folder.

"I'll keep this quiet, as you have your reasons... Good luck..." Hiro smiled kindly, as he unwillingly accepted the bribe money from her.

"Thank you, and goodbye..." Nabiki walked out of the building into the sunlight.

What... What do I do now? She stared down at the folder and opened it, the sheets of paper teasing her. *I wasn't expecting this...* The second document only enforced the first. *But... There's a big clue here...* She rubbed a finger over the name. *Tofu Ono...* The location also was important. *Matsushima... That's nearby...*

She closed the folder and strode on. *This isn't over...*

Matsushima
1 hour later
3:34pm

Tofu was no help... Just like the others. He did recall writing that form though... So again, something was up with his mind...

Nabiki had checked a directory of the local businesses, singling out the area of expertise that she needed. *Good, only a few companies...* She went to the nearest one and went in, asking for any information. They had none.

Not giving up just yet, she went further to another, again with a negative response. This continued for the next five places she went to, and her confidence was draining with each one.

Finally, she reached one which did hear of the name Ranma Saotome.

They explained that the order was received less than a week ago, and had been fulfilled according to the letter, in full, three days ago. She asked for the location and they supplied it to her upon explaining her reasons.

Leaving the firm, her posture steeled itself as she walked onwards.

Half an hour later

Nabiki was tiring. Her feet began to ache as she walked through the foggy pathways. The sun had left the traditionally pleasant resort, renowned for its views of the nearby islands. Passing by another stone monument, she pondered over the events since arriving there.

This is too much... How...? She grit her teeth. *I won't believe it...*

She stared down at the paper with the scribbled marks of the whereabouts of her objective.

Hmm, the eagle... Turn left here then...

She walked on, passing a group of subdued people walking the other way. They bowed to each other solemnly before walking on.

Damn... The nearby trees confused her. *It's too vague... Where do I go from here?* She spied a man tending to some flowers, watering them lightly.

"Excuse me..."

She spoke to him for a minute, and he gladly helped her out. It wasn't uncommon for people to get lost, and working there, he already knew the landmarks and where they were. He quickly pointed out the right direction, and Nabiki thanked him, bowing once before walking off.

Almost there...

She picked up the pace, her feet kicking up dirt and pebbles, though she kept to a respectful speed. Passing by another statue, she remembered that the parlour told her that is she saw that, then she went too far.

Whirling around, she spotted what she came for. Almost tiptoeing her way there, she froze above it.

The final ounce of self-control over her emotional side shattered. Tear flowed freely over her cheeks as her body trembled. Crumpling to the ground, her knees scraped against the harsh surface beneath her trousers. She shakily wiped the leaves off the smooth surface ahead of her, feeling the chiselled engravings beneath her fingertips.

In doing so, the folder fell from her side onto the path, opening up. As the wind rustled the paper, the medical certificate was seen. Doctor Tofu Ono had overseen authentication of proof for the first document, which the slate corroborated.

Nabiki covered her face, the tears pouring through them and spattering onto the stone, the etchings in the tablet highlighted by the wetness.

Here lies Ranma Saotome

4th May 1980 - 10th December 1997

"Mine honour is my life; both grow in one; take honour from me and my life is done."

The sun chose this moment to slip beneath the horizon, casting long shadows over the remnants of the day.

Author's Notes

THE END.

Well, if I said that, I'm sure that some of you would flame me to hell and back (meeting Ryoga on the way). Of course it's not going to end on this bit, but, you must admit, things are going to change from this point on.

All the hints have been placed, now all that is left is for Nabiki to figure them out one by one, to unravel the mystery, and to reach the inevitable conclusion...

I enjoy re-reading my cliffhangers though, makes things fun. Hope you enjoyed this chapter, critiques and reviews are welcome, as well as speculation over the entire plot (who/how/why?).

PS – The two documents are, a Death Certificate and a Medical Examiners Certificate (confirming cause of death). Just to clarify what were found in the records.

- Jason