

## **Out of sight, out of mind**

### **Chapter 6**

#### **“This isn’t over, Saotome!”**

##### **One week later The Tendo home**

Staring at her bowl of rice, with great effort she picked it up and using her chopsticks, she ate a tiny portion before returning it to the table.

Nabiki was like this ever since returning from the graveyard. Her family kept asking what she did and where she went, to make her so oddly quiet and pale. Her poker face returned, but her eyes no longer hid the deep depression and sadness that she felt. Her sisters tried to cheer her up, though Akane gave up after the first day, but Kasumi still tried. Her father just wept to himself, unable to figure out what was wrong nor do anything to cure her.

Kasumi was the first to notice that she has stopped eating. The first dinner Nabiki had at the home was barely touched, and the bentos she made for school were unopened. She was reluctant to ask, as Nabiki was proud of her privacy and ability to keep secrets, for the right price of course, but Kasumi couldn’t just let her starve...

##### **6 days ago 7:52pm**

Kasumi was taking the dishes into the kitchen, and noticed that Nabiki started to get up.

“Nabiki... Could I have a word?”

She was shocked when the girl didn’t object and just dropped to the ground, waiting for her. Quickly leaving the plates by the sink, she sat next to her. Thankfully the men were away, and Akane was doing some homework.

“I’m not stupid, sister...” She smiled, but her eyes moistened. “You saw something terrible on your trip, didn’t you?”

Nabiki turned to her, the mask deteriorating showing a variety of feelings, anger, sadness, betrayal, depression, but most of all, loss. She dived at her sister and clutched her shoulders tightly, scrunching the apron beneath her fingers.

“S-Sis...” She cried, her tears being absorbed in the white material. “He’s gone...”

“Gone?” Kasumi patted the younger girl’s back. She wondered if she meant Tofu, but shrugged that off. “Who’s gone?”

“Dead...” Nabiki wouldn’t elaborate. *How can she understand? Ranma never existed for her... I’m the only one who can mourn for him...*

“Someone you know died?” Kasumi was horrified, and pulled her in closer. “I’m so sorry... Was he a friend?”

“Y-Yes...” She sniffled loudly, her nose running badly, and lifted her face so her chin was on the apron. “We... knew each other for a while...”

“How did you find out?” Kasumi calmly asked, pulling back to retrieve a tissue for the table. “When was the last time you saw him?”

Nabiki accepted the paper and blew her nose. “He was around several days ago. Then I... saw his grave ...”

“Oh my...” She pulled her in for a hug again. “Please don’t cry... Wherever he is, I’m sure he’s in a better place now.”

*Wherever...? Better place...?* Nabiki widened her eyes. *No... That’s too cruel...* She pulled back and smiled at Kasumi.

“Thank you sis, I feel a lot better now...” She stood up. “I’m going to wash my face now and soak in the furo for a bit...”

“Okay... But please eat something...” Kasumi also got up and picked up the leftovers. “I’m always here if you want someone to talk to...”

“I know...” Nabiki embraced her gently. “You’re my sister, I’ve never forgotten that.”

### **The present**

Nabiki reached over and poured some more tea into her cup, and took a sip. Akane watched her carefully, and then blocked one of Genma’s chopsticks strikes at her own plate.

She was angry when Nabiki didn’t turn up for school on Monday, and was still the same on Tuesday, until Wednesday, when she realised the change in her sister...

### **Five days ago**

Nabiki and Akane were walking to school briskly, not wanting to miss the bell. The youngest Tendo wondered why her sister wasn’t at school already, organising the days bets.

“Nabiki, what’s wrong with you?”

“Oh... Nothing you need to worry about...”

Akane could still detect a hint of malice within her voice, which made her worry, seeing as she didn't know what she did to upset her. Regardless, she strode on with her pride keeping her from probing further. She flexed her muscles as they neared the school, even letting her red ki leak from her body.

*What's wrong with her? That is the question...*

"Hey sis, can you hold my bag?" Akane asked.

"Um... sure, why?" *This is strange...*

She merely jerked her head in the direction of the gate, where a dozen boys wearing outfits from various martial arts, sport, and society clubs were waiting, most were bandaged, but no less eager.

*What the...?!*

Akane charged in screaming, along with the old chorus of the boys chanting 'I love you!' constantly.

However, half were felled from the side, out of view to Nabiki, who walked inside. Akane stared at the perpetrator, knowing exactly who it was. The others were scared, and those who failed to run off were knocked out as well.

"Well, I'll be..." Nabiki mused out loud.

The tall figure of Tatewaki Kuno stood out there, his bokken finishing its final swing against one of the boys, who woke up, and returned it to his sash.

"Akane Tendo..." He looked to her sister. "And Nabiki..."

"Kuno..." Akane growled. "What is it today?"

"My fair maiden... I have vanquished your foes; they will know not to strike again..." He was shaking, as if holding back a laugh. "I can now date with you!"

His traditional pose of arms outstretched was met by an uppercut to his chin. "Get out of here!"

Akane grabbed her bag from Nabiki and ran inside. The other girl, walking over to the body, sighed. *Never mind... At least he's trying to hold it in...* Dragging him by his arm to the nurses office, she thought on. *Why is the horde back? Should be easy to find out...*

### **Lunchtime Beneath the playground tree**

*So that's it... I guess it was obvious after Friday without Ranma, and my crew asking pointed questions...*

The information she gathered from her employees was complete, as they were all there on Monday.

*So, the whole horde is there, waiting for Akane, she starts beating some of them up, like before, but now, Kuno stopped the others. He then spoke to her normally, but broke and tried to hug her...*

*Looks like he's trying to get on her good side, like a normal man...*

Indeed, as she spoke, while sitting with Akane, Ukyo and the rest, Kuno walked by with a bento eating on his own. He noticed Akane and took one step towards her, but shook his head and turned away.

*If I didn't see it for myself...* She could tell that Akane was oblivious to all this, chatting happily with Ukyo over unimportant matters.

She sighed and leaned back against the bark, her wrapped lunchbox lying in her lap. Closing her eyes, she took a mild nap, the smells of the wood, leaves, and grass mingling with the fresh sizzling of the nearby okonomiyaki. She ignored her stomach arguing with her.

"Nabiki?" She opened one eye to see her sister staring at her with concern. "Why aren't you eating?"

"Diet..." She stated simply.

"This isn't like you..." She looked down and turned red. "... I know I was angry with you, but please eat something..."

*This is new... She actually notices me this time?* She sighed. "Fine..." She opened the bento, which had a smiley face over the rice. *Kasumi really wants me to eat too...* Taking a measured step, she scooped some rice and placed it in her mouth, chewing slowly.

Akane cheered up after seeing that and turned back to her friends. Nabiki however, stopped immediately, swallowing that miniscule amount. *This will do for now... I helped drive Ranma into his grave... This is my punishment...*

### **The present**

Genma was a bit put out, lately it seemed that he wasn't able to get much food onto his plate, despite trying to get everyone else's. He was sitting next to Nabiki, but had noticed that since she came back, her bowls were barely touched. Out of honour, and partial fear of what financial consequences she may inflict on him, he chose not to steal from her plate.

He was glad that she kept his promise more or less.

She'd been back for a few days, and finally at the end of the school week, he had enough and confronted her. She insisted that she was on a strict diet.

The odd thing was, she needed his help on something, and he grudgingly did...

**Three days ago  
7:20am**

“Okay, enough already, child.”

“Huh?” Nabiki turned around as she walked from the staircase to the dining room, to see the rotund non-panda standing there, firm.

“Why are you not eating?” He moved her away from prying ears at the table, to the entranceway.

“I’m on a diet Mr Saotome...”

“No, even when my master starved us in the mountains, he gave us more food than what you are eating.” He moved in closer. “As a martial artist, I cannot stand by and watch you kill yourself, no matter how miserable you may be.”

“Then, maybe you can help me...” Nabiki cased the area over before continuing. “I need you to take something from Happosai.”

“Wh-wh-what?!” He cowered away predictably. “M-master? He’ll kill me!”

“This way, I’ll eat more, I promise.” She gave one of her confident grins, and held out her hand.

Genma gulped loudly. “O-okay...” He shook her hand.

“Good...” She cupped her hand to whisper into his ear. “I need you to get...” The whispering went on, as he eyes bugged out only slightly. “Get them to me during school, I have to run tests...” She saw his body had turned to stone at the thought of stealing from his harsh master. “If it helps, he’s at school by ten, so the home will be safer then.” She winked, and walked to the breakfast table, eating a full bowl of rice.

**Lunchtime**

Nabiki was walking through the quiet corridors, passing by empty classes. She looked out the window to see the same old group sitting under the old tree. *Ranma... Without you, everyone is happier. Did you hate us that much that you had to hide your own death?*

The area to her left became completely silent, and the breeze had also stopped. She arched an eyebrow and gave a glance to that region.

“Who’s there?”

The light shimmered and Genma faded into view. He had a few bruises on his face and was a bit worse for wear.

*That Umi-senken can be useful...* She thought idly. “He catch you then?”

Genma grimaced, and clutched at his back painfully. "Master was out, but it took a while to find everything you wanted... He came back near the end..." He pulled out a bag. "Here it is... Now, do you promise me that you'll eat normally?"

"I don't know about normally..." She admitted. "But I'll try to keep healthy."

Genma sighed, knowing that he'd been fooled again. "Fine... But I'll be watching you, girl."

He returned to the forbidden technique and fled the school. She held the bag up. *Now I can figure it out...*

### **School science labs 30 minutes later**

*I can't ask any of those who were too close to Ranma...* She had already asked her girls who the science brains were, and she held the list in her hands. *Lucky that they were all in the Science society...*

She paced in front of the small group.

"Okay... You're all here to help me out. Your teachers have given you the rest of the day off if you are good enough to identify what this is." She held up the vial with the material she picked up in the house. "I have what might be the base components on the counter." She gestured to the beakers and sticks in front of her. "I warn you, don't attempt to breath in any of these substances, and the same applies if you have to burn the sticks." She gazed over them. "Any questions?"

"Yes." A geek spoke up, pushing his glasses up onto the bridge of his nose. "Does this have to do with Saotome going missing?"

"Perhaps..." She replied offhandedly.

He spoke up again. "What if we can't figure out what that compound is?"

She smirked evilly, showing her fangs. "Then... I'll be angry, and you'll have me to answer to..."

They stared at each other nervously, loosening their collars. "Okay, for the honour of the science society!" One cried, and the others cheered and joined in, setting up tests and obtaining the necessary flasks.

### **4pm**

Nabiki walked into the laboratory to see the group all looking exhausted, multiple counters filled up with beakers, airing cupboards, and various other equipment which she didn't recognise.

"So, what's the result?"

The leader sat up, pushing forwards the remainder of the powder. "You were right about your assumptions. After breaking down the ash you gave us, the black powder in the beaker was present, as were the chemical formulae in the sticks."

Nabiki remained passive. *So... Paralysis powder and the suggestion incense sticks were ingredients...* "Anything else interesting?"

"Yes, a few things." He pulled out a list. "We detected a large amount of organic material, cellular forms resembling a plant of some sort. We couldn't figure out what type though due to the degradation."

*A plant? That's weird...*

"We also found a large quantity of selenium sulphide. In fact, this took up over fifty percent of the total..." He looked at her. "This is a specific chemical that is found in shampoo, oddly enough."

*The memory erasing shampoo! That must be formula 411 that... Shampoo... used...* Nabiki sweatdropped at the irony of the situation.

"There are some herbs and unidentifiable solids in the ash that we couldn't properly figure out, but the one thing they had in common was the Chinese origins."

*I see, the Amazon supplies were raided...*

"Finally, the concentration of each constituent is at the maximum possible level. The black powder and the incense are roughly ten times weaker than the substance you provided." He turned dark. "This is a dangerous product. Whatever created this ash, probably burned like any normal incense, must have incapacitated anyone who took in more than five seconds during breathing, allowing anyone to do anything to them."

*As I thought... It had two purposes. The full body paralysis, and probably some sleep inducer, would have made it easy to implant thoughts in the person's mind using the airborne chemicals from the suggestion incense...*

She staggered back, realising the impact it had. *Ranma... How in the world did you make this? Why go so far to make yourself forgotten?*

"Thank you... You have my gratitude... Do not speak to anyone of what went on here today, you were working on a project for a teacher."

She picked up the list he produced, along with all the items she provided, and walked out of the class, out of the school.

## **Present day**

*Still, that had got me nowhere. So I know what the ash was, big deal!*

She frowned and ate half of her bowl, wary of the subtle glances sent her way by Genma and her sisters.

*It doesn't get me any closer to Ranma...*

She patted her stomach, realising that her appetite had been reduced, and that she became fuller sooner. Pushing the bowl away, she stood up.

"I'm finishing, thanks for the meal Kasumi."

"Daughter, are you okay?" As ever Soun was the last to notice that Nabiki wasn't acting right.

"I'm fine daddy, just going upstairs to lie down for a bit..."

### **Ten minutes later**

*I don't know what else I can do... I mean, he's covered every base, there's nothing else I can check...*

She turned the photo over in her hands. After losing all hope in Matsushima, she made one picture before the light retreated completely. Having developed it overnight, she now kept it hidden, but pulled it out only twice since leaving there.

*Trust him to come up with some epitaph to do with honour... She furrowed her brow. Mind you, he never talks like that... It sounds a little too old-fashioned...*

She sat up and went to her chair, loading up her laptop. *I'll check up on it quickly... It's a long shot...*

After the usual login procedure, she dialled up to the web and ran a search for the words in that order. *Heh, what luck...* She grinned, the semblance of hope returning to her face.

There were several links with that exact quote. She clicked on one of them. *Hmm, William Shakespeare... Reading down the page a bit, she stopped. From one of his plays... Richard II...*

Not knowing anything about it, she read a summary from one of the many studies she found, and gradually began to understand the plot. *It does have 'some' parallels to Ranma's life... But not enough...*

The character who spoke the quote she noted was banished from England. *Banished... Not executed...* She poised her fingers. *Could it mean... that Ranma is alive, somewhere?* She stole another look at the photo and re-read the line out loud.

"Mine honour is my life; both grow in one;" She paused here. *So, they're linked to one another, that's blatant from the way it's written. As he grows older, so does his honour... "Take honour from me and my life is done." Again, another clear message, once his honour is tarnished, his reputation, and thus, his life, is over...*

*But...*

She stood up and began circling, putting her ideas together.

*What if... what if, the life is taken away first...? Does he retain his honour? "No, that can't be..." The first half contradicts that possibility... "How can he keep his honour then?" If he's dead, then the honour has been satisfied, no one remembers him and as his life is over, so is his honour...*

She halted jarringly.

*Wait... Her expression grew more manic by the second. Then, somewhere in the world, is he alive? Ranma Saotome, as we know it, is dead. The death certificate, coroner's report and grave prove that without a doubt. She wringed her hands together, feeling chills pass over her body. But, he could be living as someone else now... Though... She felt some uncertainty creep in again. Ranma without honour is far too out of character for him... His father maybe...*

She made a victory fist and punched the air. *I don't care!* "He must... he must be alive!" She kept from screaming out in joy, though why she felt elation eluded her at this moment. She just revelled in it, enjoying how invigorated she became afterwards.

*Now I know I can solve this mystery...*

She returned to her old confident self and pulled up a profile of Ranma on her laptop, with all the information she gathered on him after a year of knowing him. She scanned down to the main parts which highlighted his strengths and weaknesses, the two main items in which he could be manipulated for money, or worse.

It only took her five minutes of thinking, scrutinising every option and what his own personal concerns were. She knew the first, most likely destination to begin the search, to pick up on his trail once more.

*Jusenkyo...*

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### **Author's Notes**

Looks like I confused some people with my sense of humour, the story has not ended, we are but half way through (possibly only a third if my creativity spurs on more chapters). The sneeze by Nabiki was to cover up one of the mysteries of the series in general, the name of Soun's wife, which we never learnt. There was no ulterior motive to that scene.

I'm glad that people are making assumptions, and creating some form of debate. Only one person so far has managed to get the gist of it, which has surprised me slightly... I plucked the quote out of midair, again something I was amazed that no one picked up on, and was lucky that Richard II had a vaguely similar plotline (read about it on Wikipedia for more info).

Anyway, this story is not dead, we've just scratched the surface. Apologies for the introspective (and depressed) Nabiki in this chapter, but it seemed the natural course before moving onto to the second part of the mystery, the real search.

Hope you enjoy this addition!

