



How to Defeat a Ninja

by Alessa

"Is your butt from McDonald's? Because I'm loving it."

Normally I don't greet people quite so strangely, but someone apparently spat in God's coffee this morning because he was not feeling very generous towards me.

My best friend Sofie, who was about the only one who knew about my weakness for the same sex, had blackmailed me into talking to quite possibly the most gorgeous, yet still insanely scary girl at Lilydale High School. Damn, that stupid video Sofie made of me dancing like a lunatic to AKB48. I should never have let her film my excellent, albeit embarrassing, dance routine.

My short-lived dance career aside, I still don't know why I agreed to try to chat up Kaede just so Sofie wouldn't broadcast my wicked dance moves to the entire school. Kaede is half Japanese, and if rumours are true, a secret Ninja assassin in her spare time who could easily kill me on the spot with her lethal glare while at the same time working on her math homework. As if that wasn't enough, it's hard for me to get my point across at the best of times, and when Kaede Nakano is staring at me with those deadly brown eyes of hers, it takes all of my effort and legendary concentration skills not to dribble down the front of my shirt.

"Excuse me?" Kaede asked with a slight raise of one eyebrow.

"McDonald's. Your butt." And just in case she wasn't getting the message, I started humming the McDonald's theme tune. My humming talents are probably why I get stared at all the time—that and my fantastic impersonation of a drunk panda bear.

"Somebody had a bit too much sugar in their milk this morning," Kaede said, and after rolling her gorgeous eyes, she sauntered off to her next class. I gasped in mock-horror and brought my hand to my heart.

"Oh God, that hurt so much, I might never recover," I said dramatically but secretly thankful she didn't use her black-belt skills in half a dozen martial arts to rearrange my internal organs. I felt a hand rest on my shoulder, and I turned around.

"Piper Candice Sawyer, why aren't you and Kaede Nakano all over each other right now? You were supposed to talk to her today," Sofie demanded. My (former) best friend looked exceptionally shiny today, with her glossy mahogany hair curling around her pretty face. The effect was kind of ruined, however, by the way her sparkly blue eyes were narrowed in my direction.

"I did, and I was brutally rebuffed! I told you it wouldn't work. You should be thankful I'm still alive and talking to you; all I've achieved is more embarrassment for myself," I told her irritably. Sofie and I

were pretty much polar opposites; I don't think she understood what it was like for us mere mortals down here on the ground level.

"At least you talked to her. It's unnatural to drool all over a girl you like for two years and not actually speak to her at all," she lectured me with a stern voice and steely eyes.

"Sofie, you know if I could start a conversation with her, I would, but look at her and then look at me," I said and motioned to my gawky thirteen-year-old exterior and my plain brown hair. "It's a lost cause; I might as well commit to a life of spinsterhood and invest in a cat."

Sofie shook her head and pushed me towards our classroom. "Piper, you don't give yourself enough credit. You are the most wonderful person I know. I don't see why you can't just walk up to that Ninja girl and tell her how you feel about her," she said.

"Sofie, this would be the perfect time for you to be a good best friend and tell me not to worry, that this was all just a big joke, and now I can go back to being happily pathetic," I grumbled.

"I'm not here to be a good best friend; I'm here to make you get off your butt and do what you need to do," Sofie rebuked and skipped off to our classroom. I shuffled off after her, cursing whatever God or deity had decided to bless my life with Sofie's constant presence.

However, the fact remained—I was in love with a girl. That alone was a very confusing situation, which became even more perplexing if you considered that Kaede Nakano was cuter than Hello Kitty and deadlier than the tsunami. She was an omnipotent being capable of infinite love and vengeful retribution at the bat of her lovely eyelashes. In short, she was a Japanese Goddess. And I'm not joking, either—every time I managed to sneak a look at her in our math class, it was like she was being bathed in holy light or something. It was little wonder I was totally enamoured by her.

The only problem with my infatuation was that whenever I tried speaking to her, my brain would completely shut down, and I would just stare dumbly at her like a mentally challenged child. She probably thought I was totally nuts, and sadly, she wouldn't be far from the truth.

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Saturdays were always a drag for me. Sofie was either playing basketball or going out on dates, so I was mostly left to entertain myself. This weekend I decided to go and see a movie, but it turned out to be a total bore and a waste of time. I left the theatre early and quietly shuffled off to the food court while trying to figure out what else I could do to prevent an early death from boredom.

I had just taken the first spoonful of my divine chocolate sundae when somebody's hand touched my shoulder. I looked up in surprise, and there was Kaede in all her Oriental-eyed, raven-haired glory. I choked on my sundae.

"You're that girl with the pick-up lines," she said matter-of-factly.

"You—you have a lot of bracelets," I stuttered, and for some reason I started tugging on the thin strands of rainbow-coloured strings around her wrist. "You wear more bracelets than I do."

"Good to know. Why did you try to pick me up yesterday?" she asked, sitting down next to me.

"I... I drank a whole bottle of cough medicine that morning. I was feeling a little loopy."

"Yeah, sure. You're also the girl who stares at me in math class."

I felt my heart beating so fast, I thought it would jump out of my chest with declarations of freedom and *Viva la Revolution!*

"I guess I like your epicanthic eye folds," I said before I could stop myself. '*Prepare to be embarrassed, sucker. That's what you get for not listening to me*', my brain chimed in. I hate it when I forget to think before I speak. That brain of mine is a smug creature.

For the first time, Kaede smiled at me, and I could feel my organs start to dance inside me. I guess all this excitement was too much for my body, because it decided to abort the mission and slide off the stool I was perched on.

"Hey, are you alright?" Kaede asked when she crouched down to help me up.

"Oh, yes," I said, batting away her hand, "Me and gravity are not the best of friends."

"For someone completely insane, you have surprisingly low self-esteem," she said after rolling her eyes. Ignoring my protests, she wrapped her slender hand around my wrist and helped me off the floor. "Come on, you can help me pick out a new bracelet then, seeing how you're so fond of them."

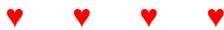
I guess that's how Kaede Nakano became my friend. Trust me, I'm having as hard a time believing it as you probably are. I guess whatever deity got me stuck with Sofie decided I needed a consolation prize.

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A few weeks into our friendship and it felt like Kaede had always been a part of my life. She treated my quirks as if they were amusing little things I did on purpose to brighten everyone's day. They weren't.

It felt strange to be able to smile at her when we passed each other in the school hallways. Whenever she spoke to me, I had to pinch myself to make sure I wasn't inside some dream world where good things actually happen to dorky kids like me. We started sitting together at lunchtime and going to the beach on the weekends. We even went to the movies with Sofie once, and Kaede and I got a stern lecture for giggling in the 'romantic' scenes.

I had almost forgotten what a normal, functioning friendship was like until I started hanging out with Kaede. She made me feel like my life wasn't so completely dysfunctional. I could even manage a proper conversation with her—no dribbling or embarrassing antics at all. Well, most of the time.



"Kaede, my friend, you are sorely mistaken. Candy canes are the most delicious holiday treat ever, and I am not biased because of my middle name," I harrumphed and crossed my arms.

"Piper, mochi is the press conference; candy canes are gossip. End of discussion," Kaede smirked. I died a little inside, but somehow I managed to stop all of my brains from leaking out through my nostrils.

"If you think I even know what mochi is, let alone how it tastes, you are sorely mistaken, my grouchy friend. This isn't over," I chimed, narrowing my eyes. Kaede had the nerve to chuckle as I backed away menacingly.

I was so busy glaring at her that I didn't notice a fifth grader standing behind me. The kid bumped into me, or maybe it was me who bumped into him, and it all led to an impromptu wrestling match with the insolent little squirt.

"Piper, why are you wrestling a ten-year-old?" Sofie asked worriedly. I stood up briskly and started to smile like nothing was wrong, pausing only to elbow the kid in the head.

"What ten-year-old?" I asked innocently while subtly stepping over the boy who was writhing around on the floor.

"That one," Kaede said simply, pointing at the little punk. I jumped at his sudden appearance and tried to pretend I'd only just seen the boy on the ground.

"What are you doing down there? Let me help you up, you poor thing," I blurted while cackling good-naturedly and trying to impress Kaede by showing her what a Good Samaritan I was.

What I hadn't counted on was the teacher on duty telling the principal about our little incident. I shuffled into the principal's office and had to choke back laughter at his expression upon seeing me. I guess he had expected some kind of hardened thug with tattoos, but what he got was a short, thirteen-year-old, hazel-eyed eccentric. I got lunchtime detention for a week, along with the kid who had "participated" in the "wrestling game".



I left the principal's office blushing, and my face got even redder when I saw Kaede smirking at me from just outside the front office.

"Go on then, say what you will," I mumbled, and saw Kaede smile back at me.

"That was certainly an interesting day," she mused, and I found myself smiling too.

"People always say their lives are more interesting when I'm around," I proclaimed with pride, and when she laughed, something changed. My heart wasn't beating rapidly in her presence anymore; it was just a slow and steady thump.

With a newfound confidence, I stepped towards her and placed my hand on her shoulder. When she didn't protest, I leaned in and gently pressed my lips to the corner of her mouth. I stepped closer to her, and her hands went around my waist. "Piper..." she murmured as I shyly brought my lips to hers.

It was the most wonderful thing I have experienced in my whole life when her lips sealed to mine. I sighed into the kiss and wrapped my arms around her neck, feeling her tighten her grip around my waist. I parted my lips and our kiss deepened, and just when I thought I would black out from happiness, she pulled back and started planting feather-light kisses along my jaw line.

"You're the cutest dork I've ever known," she whispered, and I shivered when her lips pressed against my neck. This was by far the best kiss I had ever had, not that any of my other experiences really counted as kisses. Having my face sucked on by Jimmy Harris when I was ten didn't really count as a romantic experience.

Just when I was starting to think that maybe I wasn't going to end up as a cat-loving spinster after all, I heard someone clear their throat behind us.

"Miss Sawyer, I suggest you stop your little tryst with Miss Nakano at once, unless you wish to have detentions for the rest of the term," the principal growled with a disapproving glare.

I almost wept when Kaede untangled her gentle hands from my hair and stepped away from me sheepishly, a red blush painting her cheeks. After the principal finally cleared off, we were left with an awkward silence. I hadn't felt this nervous since I had read the instructions wrong on a hair dye packet and had to break it to Sofie that her hair was a mouldy green colour instead of the platinum blonde we'd been aiming for.

"So..." I began, wringing my hands together to keep the nerves down. "That was... well, I don't really know what that was," I finished, trying not to hyperventilate.

"Piper, this whole thing is crazy!" Kaede spluttered, and my heart felt like it was being put through a washing machine. "I can't... I mean... I don't know, I don't..."

"Don't worry, Kaede. I know exactly what you mean," I cut her off. This was not how I had seen my day going. Usually I leave the real dramatics to Sofie and the jokes to me. I wasn't good at having my heart stomped on and then doused in gasoline and set on fire. "You're not this way, right? I'm sorry I made you feel uncomfortable."

I was trying to keep calm, but Kaede must have seen the hurt in my eyes. I don't know why she didn't try to stop me as I walked away, and I don't know why my body decided to start shaking with sobs as I tried to make my exit. I guess it just wanted to remind me how pathetic I was. I didn't need reminding.



Detention was something I was pretty familiar with. Having a natural talent for falling over and awful luck, I was always late or in the wrong place at the wrong time. Usually, I just sat in the classroom belonging to the teacher I'd ticked off and thought about what I'd done, but obviously, my little altercation deserved a harsher punishment.

Detention might have been familiar to me, but being surrounded by the school's delinquents and bullies was not my usual scene. I tried to quietly slide into a seat next to the little fifth grade punk, also known as Tim, but I didn't manage to escape a few of the disdainful looks shot my way.

Tim and I tried to amuse ourselves by passing notes, but we were interrupted when a dirty blonde-haired girl plonked herself onto my desk. I tried not to goggle at all her piercings, but she was like a piece of human aluminium foil. Not joking.

"What're you in for then?" she asked while fixing her stony grey eyes on me. Nyx Hunter was easily the scariest girl at my school, with her talon-like fake nails and fearsome reputation. Not the kind of girl you'd want to have over for a cup of tea with your Granny.

"I guess I beat him up," I said and pointed to Tim, who rolled his eyes and huffed, obviously a bit put off that he had been beaten up by a girl.

"She was only doing it to impress her dyke girlfriend," Tim grumbled, and then proceeded to tell the entire room the story that I had explicitly warned him never to tell.

"So, you really like this Ninja girl, then?" Jeff Evans asked earnestly.

I had somehow caught the attention of every bully and thug at Lilydale High with my story of love and mortification. Even Nyx Hunter looked intrigued. Who would have thought that the scariest bunch of people in my school were all closet romantics?

"I—I guess I do," I whispered under my breath, trying hard to suppress blushing. "She's just... she's beautiful. I don't want to like anyone else in my life," I mused honestly with a raised eyebrow. I admit I looked slightly perplexed, even to myself.

"I think you should tell her how you feel; just walk up to her and lay out exactly what you want and see what she says," Kelly Lin said. She was a total genius on computers and generally used her talent to hack the school system and get answers to tests. I think she was in detention this time for spreading a virus to all the teachers' computers that made ads constantly pop up offering cheap penis enlargements. They still hadn't figured out how to get rid of it.

"That's easy enough for sane, functional people to do. If my life were normal and I were prettier and blonder, I'm sure I'd be able to walk right up to Kaede and tell her to use her deadly Ninja skills on me, but it just doesn't work like that," I huffed. I heard Tim roll his eyes (that's right, I *heard* him).

My life has apparently reached new lows. I am now taking romance advice from delinquents, troublemakers, and misfits. Oh, is my life going to be like this forever?



"I think she looked good in the purple one. It really brings out her eyes," Jeff gushed.

"Purple is definitely her colour. I think she needs more eyeliner, though, and that lip gloss colour doesn't look right. Have you got anything redder?" Kelly asked, scrutinising my appearance with her dark brown eyes.

"Yeah, red would look pretty. And earrings! She needs earrings!" Tim, my new fun-sized friend, said.

I am honestly at a loss as to how I can explain this situation. Somehow, my detention "pals" and Sofie had become my hair, make-up, and clothing stylists. It was slightly unnerving how well Sofie seemed to get along with all of them.

"You need silver eye shadow, I think. It will look good with the dress, and I think I have some silver earrings around here somewhere." Nyx started searching through her bottomless makeup bag and handed me some dangly silver earrings. Sofie nodded her approval.

"What exactly is the point of this?" I asked while Jeff tried to fix my hair. Who knew the school bully was so fabulous at hairstyling? "I mean, I'm not going to talk to her; that would make me seem—"

"Sad?" Sofie asked.

"Desperate?" Kelly queried.

"Miserable?" Nyx supplied.

"Pathetic," Tim chimed in. Oh, how amusing my comrades are.

"Good to know you guys have such a high opinion of me," I grumbled, ruffling Jeff's scruffy black hair. At least one of my new friends isn't a complete traitor.

"Well, Piper, you can come on a little strong," Jeff mumbled.

I take no responsibility for his charred earlobe.



I felt like a life-sized Barbie doll. My brown hair looked all glossy and straight, and my hazel eyes were framed by long black lashes. It was too bad I was about to puke all over my pretty purple top.

"Guys, I can't do this. I'm green; don't I look green, Tim?" I asked desperately. Confessions have never been my strong point, mainly because I am such a stuttering loon. Most of my warm, fuzzy feelings were squashed by chocolate sundaes and sugary J-Pop songs.

"You look nice, Piper, really different from your usual crazy self." Tim patted my arm comfortingly, and Sofie glared at me. That bright blue glare could send a fully grown man stark raving mad.

"Stop being such a baby, Piper. You either tell your little Ninja about your feelings for her right now, or I'm gonna get Nyx here to rough you up," Sofie threatened with menace in her voice. I've been friends with Sofie long enough to know that she was telling the truth.

Jeff, wincing slightly from his bandaid-clad earlobe, gave my shoulder a little push. "Go get her, tiger!"

"Thanks for the encouragement, Jeff." I got out of the car on shaky legs and walked towards Kaede's front door. I don't want to know how Kelly found out her address.

I knocked softly on the door and stood back, trying not to pass out. I could feel my heart jumping up and down as if it were shouting '*abort mission, abort mission!*' Cool, calm, and collected were certainly not the right words to describe me right now.

The door opened, and my eyes widened in surprise when Kaede answered the door wearing only a pair of shorts and a bikini top. It took all my self-restraint (which I don't have very much of, let me tell you) not to run my hands all over the lovely patches of her bare skin.

Kaede looked confused, and I couldn't bring myself to say anything, so we just stood there staring at each other until she cleared her throat.

"Piper, I-"

"I LOVE YOU!" I yelled like a lunatic, "I love you so much I can hardly stand it. You drive me crazy... Well, crazier than usual, and I don't think I can pretend I just like you as a friend anymore. I also don't think I can pretend that kiss wasn't the most... the most... the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me. Like... EVER!"

Her eyes were slightly narrowed, and she was studying me in that cool and smouldering Ninja way of hers. Chocolate brown eyes that were usually warm had become intensely dark, almost as dark as her raven hair.

"I know you don't see me that way, but... but if you just give me a chance, I think I could really brighten your life and..." I trailed off. The truth was, I couldn't really offer Kaede much except a good laugh every once in a while.

Kaede sighed and ran her hand through her silky hair. "Piper, I see you that way," she said, and my mouth dropped open in awe at her revelation. "The only reason I freaked out when we kissed is that I didn't know what to say. You're just so funny and beautiful, and you were so cute when you kissed me," she said, lowering her head as if she were embarrassed. Imagine that, Piper Sawyer making cool and collected Kaede Nakano nervous. Pigs will soon roam the skies like butterflies.

"You really should have told me that earlier. I've been attacked with mascara brushes and hair straighteners by my new detention buddies. Did you know Tim is actually quite good with an eyeliner pencil?" I said.

Kaede laughed that wonderful laugh of hers and cupped my cheeks with her hands. "You are the strangest girl I know," she whispered before leaning down and pressing her lips to mine.

Candy canes be damned, Kaede's lips were the most delicious thing I'd ever tasted. She wrapped her arms tightly around me and tugged slightly on my bottom lip with her teeth. Oh merciful deity, thank you so, so very much.

"Hey, wait to go, Piper!" I heard someone yell. Pulling away from Kaede, I turned around and put my hands on my hips.

"Jeff Evans, you should be ashamed. Spying on me and my girlfriend—the nerve of it!"

Jeff just smirked and went back to laughing with the rest of my outcast, deadbeat friends.

I felt a pair of arms snake around my waist, and Kaede drew closer to whisper in my ear, "I'm your girlfriend now, am I?" she teased. I turned and wrapped my arms around her neck.

"I defeated you with a kiss, so you're stuck with me now. You must follow the Ninja's code of honour," I beamed and showered her face in kisses.

"Piper, you had me all the way back at your terrible pick-up line," she smiled and gave me another taste of those candy cane lips of hers.

The End