

Out of sight, out of mind

Chapter 11

“Great, pickles, my favourite...”

An hour later

Nabiki stirred, her head lolling about before she opened her eyes. *What was that, a dream?* She held her temple to get over the dizzy spell. *The festival? I never used to dream about that...* Her eyes grew hazy. *Oh no, I'm already forgetting it all...*

Just as she was waking up properly, as with all normal people, the images she had in her head vanished in their clarity, becoming more jumbled until nothing was left. Cursing silently, she accepted it, despite having an excellent memory she could not get over the natural barrier of remembering dreams.

The overall effect wasn't forgotten though.

Damn... That was the last time I remember Ranma at least cracking a smile for those last few days...

The distinct image of Ranma, happy and blissful, clutching onto her arm appeared in her mind. Nabiki chuckled to herself again. *That was a fun night...* Two more images appeared, one of Ranma, with a cocky expression, about to smash the coconuts, and a final one of the red-head being beaten down by the numerous women.

Nabiki thinned her lips and lay back into the carriage, as a stitch began to form around her chest. Massaging it lightly, she realised it wasn't going away any time soon.

Could I... Am I missing Ranma?

Shrugging it off, she sat up and watched the landscape pass by.

**10:24pm
Central China**

Nabiki and Lime were sitting opposite one another, a roaring fire between them, keeping them warm against the chilly breeze.

“We're going to be waking up early, I don't need to sleep as much as you normal humans, but Herb told me to consider your needs.” He seemed put off by this.

“Thank you...” Nabiki smirked to herself as she began to sidle up to him. “You're so considerate.” Putting on a sweet face and gazed at him with teasing, loving eyes. “How can I ever repay you?”

Lime burst out into full scarlet, as he mind began to think of the countless possibilities that could come about. His nose started to trickle blood at the more intense hallucinations.

“Alright then!” He scooped up Nabiki and leered at her. “I know just what we should do!”

OH MY GOD! I've driven him mad! She squirmed but couldn't break free from his vice-like grip. He... He's going to violate me!

Panicked, she tried to think of something up quick. “H-Herb will kill you if you try anything.”

The grin he returned with scared her, his fangs notwithstanding. “What he doesn't know won't kill him.” He lifted Nabiki up in the air under her armpits, his muscles easily supporting her weight. “Now...”

Oh God... Please help!

She shut her eyes tightly, hoping that it would block out any of the fear, which it didn't. She felt herself lowered onto a flat rock in a seated position and her hands placed in front of her. She didn't bother hiding her shivering and cold sweat.

Something smooth was placed in her hands, and she didn't dare to look. Sensing movement beside her, she got confused.

“Ahh! I'm so happy!”

What the...?

She peeked one eye open, then snapped them both wide to stare at the object.

“A cup...?” She brought it closer and sniffed it. *It's just tea...* “What's this?”

Lime looked puzzled. “Tea, why?”

“But...” She couldn't understand it.

“Conversing with you has satisfied me only a little.” She waited for him to go on. “Now I wish to try drinking tea with a woman.” Tears streamed down his face from the joy he was experiencing at that moment.

“You mean...” Her fist was shaking in anger, and she grabbed the cup by the handle and threw the hot liquid over the tiger-man.

“AAAAH! That burns!” He rolled about the earth for a few seconds before getting up, his rage apparent. “What did you do that for?!” He yelled.

Nabiki didn't back down. “You can't treat me... No... You can't just treat any woman like that; they'd get scared out of their minds!” Her heart calmed down after a few breaths.

Lime became sombre just a little. “So, you don't just beat them over the head with a club and then drag them by their hair home?”

“WHAT?!” Nabiki snarled. “You had best be joking about that... If you did that to any woman, I'll let it slip to Herb, and he WILL kill you.”

Lime gulped and took a step back. “Umm... It wasn't a joke, I read about once in a book...”

She bit her tongue from the quick retort her mind brought up and analysed his sentence rationally. *He's not stupid enough to admit to me so honestly that he did it. He didn't seem to hold back any information either...* "Okay, if you just saw it in a book, it must have been something childish, and wholly inaccurate for the modern world."

Lime scratched behind his head and looked off, unsure, to one side. This action did not slip Nabiki's by notice, in that it was unerringly similar to Ranma's own mannerism.

"Right... So, how do you treat women?" He asked innocently.

Nabiki sat down, tired of standing up while talking to him. She stared off across the tops of the trees in the valley below them, and as far as she could see in the darkness.

"Don't ask me, women are different, so all are a mystery." Lime seemed to deflate at this. "But, there are two things that most respond nicely to." She paused and he stared at her intently, urging her to continue. "Kindness and friendship." She sighed inwardly.

Hearing a strange scratching sound, she realised that he was writing it down on a piece of paper, muttering the same phrase to himself. Folding it away into his outfit, he looked at the kettle, still steaming from the recent boiling. He closed his eyes really tightly, trying to remember some of the etiquette that Herb displayed in the past.

Opening them again, he cleared his throat, getting Nabiki's attention, and held out an open hand in a non-threatening manner. "Would you like to drink some tea with me please?"

Genuinely surprised by his conduct she grinned. "Sure thing."

He poured another cup for her and held it out, and Nabiki accepted it this time, sipping the hot drink slowly.

"Later, I would like to try touching a woman."

Nabiki groaned. *This might take a while...*

Two days later

Nabiki was reading one of her small books she brought with her, when a screech was heard. The carriage stopped suddenly. "What's that?"

She saw Lime getting annoyed at a bird, which continued to dodge him. Upon seeing Nabiki, it went straight for her. Holding her arm up to protect herself, she was surprised to feel the wings flapping and stopping, and two gentle feelings on the arm. Gazing at the bird, she realised what had happened, as it was now the size of a sparrow.

Lime was about to ask before Nabiki answered the unspoken. "A gift from Herb... It's okay."

Shrugging it off, he picked up the handles of the carriage and pulled it along the path again. The sparrow dropped a letter in her hand and chirruped gaily.

“Thanks for that. Was Kasumi scared?”

The bird shook its head.

“Did anyone notice you?”

The chirps were now more upset, and she looked off away from Nabiki.

“Heh, sorry about that... I shouldn’t have doubted you.” Nabiki patted the head, liking the feathers contact against her skin. “You can go back to sleep for now, Ranko. I’ll wake you when I need you again.”

Nodding at the order, it looked up at her and slowly the feathers became more brittle looking, changing to a grey-brown colour, spreading to the rest of the body. Soon, it was a statue and unmoving. Delicately placing it beside her, Nabiki opened out the letter.

“Dear Nabiki,

I don’t know where you got this bird from, but I must say it surprised me. I fed the pigeon before she turned into wood. I think she liked that.

Anyways, I’m glad you’re well; father was most upset you left. I had to empty the mop bucket several times that day and hang the tatami mats near the heater again. He’s okay for now, but I think he worries for you.

Your sister was very angry today, I think it had something to do with that nice Ryoga boy. She was even angrier when Tatewaki escorted her home. He was bruised badly, it looks like he fought with someone tough. Akane’s really confused now, she cried when she saw me. P-chan’s gone, I think he died recently, which would explain her mood.

When I told her about you, she became even sadder. You should have seen her, Nabiki, without you she feels a little lonelier.

Mr Saotome is good, he’s teaching in the dojo everyday, and plays the usual shougi matches against father. He looks a bit pensive at times though, looking at the pond oddly.

Now that I remember, the koi are still alive, and some of the eggs decided to hatch early, so there are lots of little ones. The snow doesn’t affect them thankfully. It’s still settled everywhere, but the wind is starting to pick up now. I told Akane to wear her overcoat to school now.

The money you entrusted to me is untouched, the dojo is bringing enough, and father’s job at the council also adds to that. I fear the heating bill might break the budget, so I may have to dip in there to help out.

I hope you’re doing well in your search, write to me if you have anything new to report. I look forward to your little friend, Ranko.

- Kasumi”

Nabiki bit her lip at the news. *Hmm... That’s strange... I wonder what will happen if more*

time passes... She knew what was worrying her, but chose to ignore it for now, moving on to something else. *Akane misses me? I didn't think I meant much to her... I suppose the Ryoga betrayal hurt her more than I imagined.* She chuckled. *I can't believe Kuno did that though; he must be a glutton for punishment.*

She sighed out loud. "I wonder when I'll return home..."

Five days later
4:51pm

"Are we there yet?"

Lime clenched his jaw in annoyance before replying. "NO!" He looked on down the path. "Just another a little further..."

Nabiki giggled. *Heh, nothing like riling him up...* She lay back and grumbled. *A whole week... I'm just glad that Herb left some stuff to do laundry...* She smirked and looked at her makeshift horse. *Nothing like humbling someone as stupid as Lime though... I'm sure he'll hate women after this.* Flashes of how she made him cook, pitch the tent, clean her clothes and more or less act as her slave made her smile more.

"There, just ahead..." He stopped the carriage, and Nabiki sat up to look past his extended arm. He showed his teeth. "The home of the Seven Lucky Gods..."

"Wow..." Nabiki was impressed at the sight. Inside an extinct volcano, standing out from the middle of a lake, was a tall structure. She couldn't see how many floors high as an old wooden scaffolding covered it completely. "Looks like Ranma really messed it up last time he was here."

"Good!" Lime spat.

Well, no love lost then since that war of theirs... Nabiki scowled at him. "What are you waiting for? Let's go!"

"Yeah, yeah..." Lime trundled off down the path to the base.

Meanwhile
Top floor of the palace

A shadowy figure sat in a solitary throne, staring at some pieces of paper in the few rays of light. Cursing bad luck, he crushed the letter in his hand.

"Still no sign..."

A loud knocking on the doors in front interrupted his frustration. "Enter!" He cried out, picking up his rice bowl and pickle, with the battle chopsticks in the left hand.

An extremely short and big eared man entered, carrying a long rod with a strong wire like

rope attached to the top. He bowed low.

Kirin stood up. "What is it Ebiten?"

"My Lord..." Ebiten got up from his position and looked at his master. "I have some disturbing news from our border guards."

"Really?" Rarely reports were received from the nearby patrols. For one such report to reach his ears meant something serious. "Of what sort?"

"Bad, Lord Kirin, very bad." His eyes narrowed. "A man was seen running on the old Northern Pass possessed specific traits that frightened the group. He is more than likely from the Musk Dynasty."

Kirin's eyes flashed severely. "The Musk...?" His voice grew sterner. "But only one person? This is most peculiar."

"I think so too." Ebiten grinned. "What shall we do?"

"If he is alone, allow him past the gates, and I shall meet with him personally. With the remaining Gods obviously." He added at seeing Ebiten's abject refusal of the terms. "Is that all?"

"No. A scout on the neighbouring border has detected another individual passing by the boundaries." Ebiten paused after reading the rest of the message. "The ki of the person marks him or her as one of those responsible for the destruction of your palace."

"What?!" Kirin was outraged, the more recent conflict present in his mind for longer. "Who?!"

"He cannot say. Whoever it was managed to evade further detection completely."

"Increase our patrols of the area." He turned quickly, his cape creating a gust of wind. "I will prepare for the arrival of the Musk, inform the rest of the Lucky Gods to get ready too."

"As you wish my Lord." Ebiten bowed and walked backwards out of the room, the door closing loudly.

Kirin gripped his chopsticks, and sent hundreds of small stabs at an invisible opponent, his ultimate technique. He stopped went to one corner where some items needed on the scaffolding were left. Using the chopsticks, he picked up some of the building materials, held at the tips of the two thin sticks. Without a moments notice, his fingers moved and closed the gap, pulverised the wood and concrete, leaving the chopsticks in pristine condition.

"Ranma Saotome, you will pay for destroying my home... I shall see to annihilating you personally..."

**Meanwhile
10 miles away**

“AACHOO!”

Mumbling to himself, the figure, hidden in the darkness beneath the trees, grabbed a tissue from his backpack, and wiped the now runny nose.

“Someone must be talking about me again...”

Looking around the person spotted a gap in the trees ahead, and saw a tower in the distance.

“There...”

Grinning evilly, the distance between the two began to shrink slowly.

Meanwhile Elsewhere in the forest

Lime began to speed up, and the increasing frequency of bumps and potholes alerted Nabiki.

“What’s wrong?”

Lime grinned as sweat began to form on his brow. “We’ve been detected. I smelt a patrol about three miles ago, now I’m getting more new humans closing in on our position.”

Nabiki returned his savage smile with one of her own. “You know what to do then.”

Lime accelerated to full speed, blasting towards the growing palace.

Ten minutes later Kirin’s Palace

“Sir, the intruder has sped up, and will be here in a few minutes. Our patrol guards can’t keep up with him.” Ebiten paused for breath. “He’s dragging some carriage with him, and there appears to be a person inside.”

“Hmm...” Kirin mused over the details. “Tell the patrols to fall back. If there is a person there sitting, then it means it’s not some form of bomb, and that he’s merely a form of transport. We mustn’t antagonise him any further. Let us descend to greet our guests.”

“Y-yes my Lord!” Ebiten bowed before leaving, making sure to search for the others.

15 minutes later

“We’re passing the last gate.” Lime stated. “They’re just letting us in; I could tell that they

left us alone.”

“They’re expecting us.” Nabiki correctly assumed, as Lime nodded his agreement. “Try not to go mad and kill any of them, okay?”

“Heh...” Lime said no more, and even Nabiki was unsure as to what he was thinking.

A few minutes later

“We’re here.” Lime state evenly, slowing to a standstill.

Nabiki hopped out of the carriage, leaving her bags inside for the time being, and walked up to the group that stood several metres away, the steam from the large hot spring clouding their figures. Lime walked close behind her.

The heat dissipated and all were seen, and from the descriptions given by those who came here, she recognised them as the Seven Lucky Gods, though it seemed that three were missing. Those present were on alert, ready to react to any moves. The sound of a deep growling emanated from Lime, and Nabiki held an arm out to her side, to try to calm him.

“Wait here.” She commanded, piercing him with her eyes.

Striding up confidently to Kirin, she ignored the rest of the Gods, as they all lowered their weapons seeing that she was unarmed and possessed no ki whatsoever. Standing opposite her, she had to look up to him as he was tall, she bowed deeply.

“It is an honour to finally meet you, Lord Kirin.” Inside she smirked; negotiations and alliances were forged by acts of apparent humility, at least at first.

Surprised by this turn of events, Kirin didn’t return the bow, but gestured with his chopsticks. “Stand up, please.” She did so. “May I have your name, and what is your... business...” He paused as he glanced at Lime in the distance. “... with the head of the Seven Lucky Gods.”

“My name is Nabiki Tendo.” Kirin’s chopsticks twitched at the surname. “I’m gathering information on the disappearance of someone I know, and I think you can help.”

“Me?” Kirin was puzzled. “Why should I know?”

Nabiki simpered. “Because that person is Ranma Saotome.”

“Ranma?!” The chopsticks clicked closed, and threatened to snap.

“Yes, Ranma.” Nabiki remained cool. “I would appreciate it if you could help me.”

He looked at Lime suspiciously. “Why is he here?”

“Never you mind!” Lime burst out, his aura growing from anger. The Gods raised their weapons in defence.

“Lime! You’re not here to fight!” Nabiki shouted, breaking through his rage. He lowered his fists and stepped back. She turned back to Kirin. “He was my escort, I visited the Musk Prince a week ago, and he provided me with some details. He’ll leave as soon as possible.” Again she noticed him regard her more carefully. “I know about your little spat in the past, but that has nothing to do with me, I’m no spy and neither am I a fighter.”

Kirin waited, analysing his options, but eventually realised that there would be little harm in letting her inside. He held his left arm behind him and at the entrance. “Please come in, I’m sure we can discuss this issue inside.”

“Thank you, Lord Kirin.” She bowed at the lighter angle this time.

As he and the Lucky Gods walked in, she walked back to the carriage and raised an eyebrow when Lime, without asking, brought down her suitcase and backpack (which had the bird statue safely inside). He handed them to her carefully, still remaining quiet.

Now that I think about it, I’d never have made it here without Herb suggesting an escort, and Lime did put up with me for all this time. I bet he even kept the wild animals away, just by being around me... She smiled at him, which resulted in a blush from the tiger-man. Going up on her tiptoes she planted a kiss on his cheek.

“Thank you, Lime. You kept me safe and took care of me all this time. Maybe we’ll see each other another day...” She dragged her suitcase towards the palace. She waved back at him. “Goodbye, and have a good journey back!”

Lime just stood there for a full ten minutes, rubbing his face where her lips touched his skin, his blush still there. Slapping himself with both hands, he went back to the carriage and dismantled it quickly, so that it now fit inside a backpack with the two large wheels tied on the back. Setting his sights north, he ran off back to the Musk.

Nabiki watched this from the first floor and laughed to herself. *I think I’ve really confused him now... Perhaps now he’ll know that women can’t be predicted easily. After all my verbal abuse I did something really nice to him...* She smiled. *Still, he did help me out a lot; I’ll give him that...* Veering off to another staircase, she muttered about why lifts weren’t installed in older buildings.

Outside the volcano 5 minutes later

Lime came to a stop, his nose picking up something. Sniffing at the air, he could detect a familiar smell, one which he remembered.

“What the... Why’s he here?!”

Lime grew darker and broke his word to Herb and Nabiki, running to where it was coming from, deeper in the forest. His animal growls could be heard as they grew louder, alerting some of the patrols, all of whom were too weak to be worth his notice.

Passing by a group of five, the leader spoke up. “We have got to inform the Gods about

this development, this could be bad...”

Lime grinned, bloodlust now evident on his face as he roared.

Author's Notes

Kirin is hard to figure out, but I'm not leaving him like this. He has a better side to him, which you will see in the next chapter; this was just to build up some tension.

About the kiss by Nabiki, yes, a tad OOC, though if she was doing it to mess with someone's head (especially someone like Lime) then I felt she would do it. Mind you, he did more or less live with her for a whole week... And no, she's not attracted to him. Well, if you don't like it, then so be it, don't put down the whole story for that reason (I've seen it happen for less).

I'm looking forward to writing certain events in the story; next chapter especially will be one to look out for. All I can say is, things are going to get more explosive. Stick with me on this one, mysteries are all well and good, but without some form of action, it gets a bit boring.

So, what do you think? Any new clues? Figured it out yet? Reviews are loved, critiques appreciated (as long as they make some sense, and no plain flames), and also discussion over the plot.

- J