

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Chapter 14

“Got anything nice for me, Toma?”

**An hour later
The river edge**

The trickle of the water over the rocks and the gentle mist that accompanied it refreshed Nabiki.

“Ahh, this feels nice.” She looked at the boat in front. “So, we’re okay to take this?”

Monlon nodded. “Yes, I’ve informed the owner to send a message to Lord Kirin that we are borrowing this for the time being.” She looked over the sails. “The merchant said that the ship is fully stocked and ready to go, so we can use it immediately.”

“Great!” Nabiki clapped her hands once. “Let’s get moving then.”

She stepped on the boat.

Fifteen minutes later

The small cargo boat had begun its way down the long river.

“It will take us a day to reach the sea front, we need to navigate carefully as the river bends often here.” Monlon steered the rudder.

Nabiki looked back at her, then looked forwards at the front. “Yeah, I guess you’re right.” She looked around. “Hey, where’s Lime?”

“I think he went inside...” She frowned. “He said something about sitting down for a bit...”

Nabiki returned the confused look. “That’s weird, he’s never tired... I’ll go check up on him.”

Walking to the back and down the small staircase, she went to one of the cabins assigned to them and rapped lightly on the door.

“Hey, Lime, you okay?”

The rustling of cloth accentuated his voice. “Yeah, I’m fine, thanks Nabiki.”

“Okay... I’ll be up on deck, I’ll see you there.”

Leaving the small corridor, she returned to the upper level and sat on a chair, enjoying the midday sun on her skin.

A day later

“We’re here!” Nabiki cried down the private chambers, hoping Lime heard her. *It’s strange,*

he hasn't been out since we started...

Moving beside Monlon, who looked a little tired from piloting the ship all day and night, she looked out at the open sea.

“So... Are you going to rest? I think I can take over from here.”

Monlon smiled sleepily. “I should be fine for a little while longer. If I feel the need to rest, I shall inform you.”

“Good...” Nabiki put a thumbs-up. “I don't want you to tire yourself out for me.”

Footsteps from behind alerted them to the presence of Lime, who looked positively miserable.

“Wow, what happened to you...?” Nabiki wondered out loud.

“Never you mind...” He huffed, snorted air through his nose indignantly.

She shrugged her shoulders. “Suit yourself...” *Man, what a grump...* She looked up and saw a familiar shape. “Ah, here she is, right on time.”

The eagle form of Ranko descended from the sky and floated just above Nabiki, dropping two packages. She then began to peck and claw at Lime.

“H-Hey! Call this damn bird off me!”

Nabiki and Monlon chuckled at the scene, but before Lime really lost his temper, Nabiki whistled. Ranko flew over and landed on her arm, allowing herself to be stroked.

“Thanks for the quick job, you can sleep for now.”

Bowing once, Ranko reformed into her statue, and Nabiki hid her from sight in her backpack.

“Now...” She dusted her hands. “Let's see what we got here...” She picked up the letter first, and promptly ripped it and pulled out the letter.

“Dear Nabiki,

Are you okay? Any injuries? I can't believe that Ryoga. I'll give him a good telling off if I see him.

I hope you're not tormenting this 'Lime' person, he sounds like a nice boy, though a bit silly. Treat him well. The same goes for Monlon. Does she play good? I've always been interested in hearing traditional songs, do you think she can play some for me one day?

I'm glad you got some more information from Kirin, it's always helpful to have friends in high places, especially those who know a lot.

Tell Prince Toma I said 'hello', his people treated me well when they escorted me to his island. If you're coming back to Japan afterwards, let me know.

Akane is a little bit more cheerful with each passing day, but I think she misses you still. It turns out P-chan was Ryoga, another reason to give him a good talking to, and she was quite sad from that.

Father is watching the news for any sign of you, I think he worries for you the most. Mr Saotome is enjoying teaching the advanced dojo classes, but he still gets up in the morning every day, and spars with himself. It's so funny to watch sometimes, especially since he falls in the pond each time. Lucky the koi haven't died as yet.

The others you wanted to know about, Ukyo and Konatsu are well, their business is doing well, the same with Elder Cologne, Shampoo and Mousse. Mrs Saotome comes over often and helps me cook, and enjoys speaking to Akane. Tatewaki is very quiet lately, he sends us large dinners from some good restaurants on some days, and even some flowers for Akane. She asked me what this meant, and I explained a little about courting. She got a bit angry at that, but calmed down when she said he hadn't tried to do anything at school. I think I saw her keep the latest bouquet in her room.

Everything else is fine, Nerima is still snowing, but it isn't letting up, even at night. We're using the heaters full time now just to keep the cold away.

Take care, little sister.

- Kasumi"

Nabiki folded the letter and placed it with her other one. "Damn..." She cursed out loud. *Genma is remembering, he looked at the pond last time, and now he 'spars' alone? While falling into the pond, time after time? She tapped her chin. Perhaps it was so natural to him that he feels he has to continue it, even though he won't know why... She sighed. Well, nothing to get worked up over, if Cologne isn't acting any different, then I shouldn't be worried about this. She smirked. And, it finally looks like Kuno-baby is breaking through Akane's stubbornness. Maybe they'll be a couple by the time I get back...*

She turned to the next item on her list. The package was merely signed 'Nabiki'. Tearing its open, she was surprised to find a box inside it, and pulling out the wooden container, she raised an eyebrow. "What's this... An hourglass?"

Peering closer, she realised immediately that it wasn't. It was in the form of two wooden blocks, separated by four wooden columns. In the middle lay a glass ball with one moving metal strip inside it, hanging from the inside of the glass with a wire. The strip had one side red, the other black. Checking quickly, she found a note inside the box.

'Follow the red pointer.'

On the top of the wooden container, she read out the words. "Eternal Post?" At the bottom, again carved into the old dark material, was the word 'Togenkyo'.

She held it out for the others to see. "You guys ever see anything like this?"

Monlon checked it out and shook her head. Lime took a quick glance at it and also made a negative movement. Nabiki raised an eyebrow at the odd compass, but trusted that Toma would not send her anything that would put her in danger.

"Okay, we'll use this as our compass. Monlon, if you could help us to navigate, we're going to follow this until we reach Togenkyo." She stared at Lime. "You'll be helping too, yes?"

He continued to look inside, as if wanting to return to his room. Nabiki smirked, finally figuring out what was wrong with him. "You're afraid of water, huh? I bet you get seasick too..."

At the simple words she spoke, Lime turned a shade of green and held his mouth as the breakfast threatened to rise up in his mouth. "It... It's not like that..." He managed to choke out.

Nabiki moved closer. "Probably the tiger genes, cats hate water. You seem to handle rain okay, but I guess the sea is too much for you, eh?"

Lime nodded and his hair stood on end. Nabiki sighed. "Fine, go inside, but I'll be expecting you to get over this soon and help us out somehow."

Sending a grateful look at his charge, he jogged down the steps and disappeared into his room. Nabiki held her hands up in surrender, as Monlon turned the ship in the direction of the red marker.

One week later
11:32am

Lime was scrubbing the deck, after missing the side of the boat from his latest bout of sickness. Nabiki watched him carefully.

"I don't get it, you're all super strong and everything, but why such a simple weakness like the sea?"

Lime frowned. "We live in a mountain range, there's no sea near us, and even if there were, we'd have no need to cross it. The only exception was to find the Open Water Kettle for Prince Herb."

"So you never really gained any tolerance to it..." Nabiki assumed. "What about Mint?"

Lime growled. "He's fine with it, dogs love to jump into anything with water, you know that."

"Heh, that's right..." Nabiki giggled. "I take it he pushes you in now and then..." The increased hissing from Lime confirmed it. "Can you swim?"

Lime exploded. "YES! OF COURSE I CAN!" He panted from his outburst and calmed his voice. "Yes... How could I be Prince Herb's trusted guardian if I couldn't swim?"

Nabiki was unfazed by his reaction. "So you don't like getting drenched, that's all, huh?" She shrugged. "It's no big deal, not many people like that either, I sure as hell wouldn't enjoy it either."

Lime turned away, a little embarrassed from losing his control in front of her again. Monlon raised her voice from the wheel. "There's something ahead of us, in the fog."

The two looked forward and squinted their eyes at the swirling cloud, and could see the outline of a giant tree. "That looks like it..." She grinned. "I wonder what kind of welcome we'll get."

Lime mumbled. "Glad to be off this damn ship..."

Nabiki laughed out loud for several seconds.

Togenkyo Island 30 minutes later

Lime expertly looped the rope over the tree stump, tying it up in less than ten seconds.

"Wow Lime..." Nabiki commented amusedly. "It's almost as if you 'wanted' to get off the boat..."

Lime gave his trademark fanged grin. "Of course, that thing is a floating deathtrap!" He looked up at the ancient tree. "At least this island is sturdier than that."

"Well, wait till you meet the ruler, you'll love him..." Nabiki smirked devilishly, making Lime worry about what was to follow.

The flapping of wings brought their attention to a man in a two tone mask. "Welcome to Togenkyo, I'm here to escort you to Prince Toma."

Nabiki strode forwards, making her the self-appointed figurehead of the group. "Lead the way."

Ten minutes later The throne room

"Prince Toma is through these doors." He eyed the two Chinese residents warily. "I assume that no one is going to try any foolish moves, lest there be pain incurred upon yourselves."

Lime and Monlon both grit their teeth, but stood their ground, saying nothing. Nabiki filled in for them. "That's right, these two are my trustworthy companions, and they'll listen to me when I ask them to. I promise you that no harm will come to Toma."

"That's good." The winged man bowed, his feathers spreading out majestically. "You may enter."

Walking through the large double doors, Nabiki rolled her eyes. *Gees, talk about ego problems, why do all rulers need to have such lavish entrances to their personal rooms and such?* Paying it no heed, she continued in.

Inside were two guards, flanking the diminutive body of the young prince. He stood up.

Lime angled a thumb at him. "Who's this kid, and why's he sitting on his dad's throne?"

Toma glared at Lime, and Monlon leaned into Lime to correct him. "That's Prince Toma, the ruler."

Lime was exasperated. "What? A scrawny thing like that a ruler of an island?!" He yells were muffled by Monlon, who wrapped some wire around his throat, tight enough to prevent him from shouting any louder.

"Nabiki Tendo. Long time no see." Toma gave a cheeky smirk. "I hope you're not here as a potential bride, as I have chosen a different method of selecting someone."

Nabiki rolled her eyes at Lime's remarks and sidled up to Toma, making her body move suggestively. "Well, I'm not sure, maybe you do have what it takes..."

Toma laughed harshly. "Yes, I suppose the huge sums of money make me very appealing to you..." He grinned and peered closer at her, hands on his hips. "Perhaps you have come here to pay me back the debt you owe me."

Oops... I forgot about that little snag. Nabiki laughed it off. "Nonsense! Why would I do such a thing?"

Toma laughed out loud, a sincere one with real emotion behind it. "I thought as much." Toma walked to Nabiki and stood tall, even though he was around a head shorter than her. "Sarutoru, Wantan, Toristan, make our guests from the Musk and Nekonron comfortable. Nabiki and I have much to talk about."

"With pleasure, Prince Toma." The smooth talking monkey man answered, and proceeded to take the warriors to another room to feed them. Wantan followed them out when Torisutan held up a bone to tempt him. When the door closed, Nabiki and Toma were alone.

"So... This is about Ranma Saotome, am I correct?"

"Yes..." Nabiki walked to a small desk tucked away in a corner of the room, Toma sat opposite her. "Do I want to ask?"

He shook his head. "You have no need. I can already figure out as much..." He tilted his head backwards to where the group left the room. "Your adventures must've been quite interesting for you to pick up those two from the rival factions, not to mention the Messenger you sent to me."

"You don't know the start of it..."

Nabiki began to recount the story, from the beginning, and Toma was a captive audience, absorbing everything intently.

"And you're still searching for him?!" Toma was incredulous. "Most would have given up by now."

Nabiki blew it off. "Well, I've gotten this far, how much longer can I go?"

Toma looked down, his face grave. "It won't be that easy, with what I know, you may have one more place to visit before analysing all the clues..."

Nabiki moved in for the kill, knowing that this was the big clue she was waiting for. "So..."

What do you know...? Did Ranma speak to you?"

Toma nodded. "Yes, he used a bird similar to yours..." He trailed off, feeling guilty.

"What is it you're not telling me?" Her tone was deadly.

Delaying the inevitable, Toma spoke more. "Ranma wanted to know more about plants, those that affect memory. Like with how Kirin was an expert of food in general, I as the Prince of Togenkyo have a vast library of ancient, legendary and common plants, most of which stemmed from our Great Tree."

"Yees... And?" Nabiki knew what he was up to, and didn't want the truth to be hidden any more.

Toma sighed and relaxed into his chair, closing his eyes. "There was only one that came to mind. It is legendary in its own right, but only grows in one place, which is dangerous to humans..." Toma leaned over and whispered the details to her, and could see the shock passing through the girl's face. He retreated back slowly. "I had a feeling you would react that way..."

Nabiki was having trouble processing it. *God... It was so obvious! How could I miss that clue? It's been staring me in the face for months!*

She got up and gave a light bow. "Thank you, you're right, it's helped me a lot... Without you, it would never have crossed my mind."

Toma chuckled. "I seriously doubt that, you would've figured it out, I just gave you a nudge in the right direction..." He waved his hand over the room. "Would you like to stay for lunch before you leave? I assume you would like to proceed with your search in 'that' place."

Nabiki was about to protest when her stomach answered for her. "Umm... Okay, we'll stay for lunch... Thanks again..."

Toma smiled. "My pleasure."

An hour later

Three full guests got up out of their seats and bowed lightly to the prince. "Thank you for the meal." They chorused.

Toma got up and waved a hand over them. "I hope you leave with good tidings, and luck in your journey."

Lime had enough, the uppity talk by the boy annoyed him. "Can I 'please' beat the snot out of the brat?"

"Lime!" Nabiki and Monlon shouted, but it was too late.

"So, you can't respect those who are stronger than you, eh?" Toma pulled out his illusionary sword and the reflections in the blade began to dance.

"Strength is earned, not inherited..." He growled, recognising the sword from the past.

Toma was enjoying this. "Perhaps I shall earn it then..." He jumped aside from the table at the side time as Lime, to avoid hitting the non-combatants. Twirling the blade one direction and pointing it upwards he shouted.

"Yogenran Rigidan!" A liquid stream of fire projected from the sword and hit Lime full on, explosion from beneath him also didn't help.

His yells were a combination of fury and pain, but he bit into his arm with his sharp teeth, drawing blood, and a new focus on his self harm. Ignoring the flames, he leaped forwards.

"Heh, Ranma may have beaten me like that, but I've learned since then!" Doing another pose, and spinning the sword the other direction, Toma stuck the sword in the ground. "Yogenran Rigidan!"

Pillars of ice started bursting through the ground, and eventually capturing Lime, who couldn't jump away in time. Toma smirked, then lost it as Lime did the same from inside the ice. Screaming something that was muffled completely by the mass around him, the ice shattered into its component particles, and he lunged at the small boy.

"Kage Otoshu!" Lime widened his eyes as, from the side, Sarutoru had extended his shadow to cover the tiger-man, leading to a lull in the fighter's aura, and a prompt collapse. "Works every time... Almost..." He added as an aside.

Nabiki and Monlon ran over to Lime, who uncharacteristically had tears in his glazed over eyes. "What did you do to him?!" Nabiki grabbed the attacker by his collar.

"I was protecting Prince Toma, as was my duty since my birth."

"So?" Nabiki snarled. "There was no need to kill him."

Sarutoru shook his head. "My power can reduce the positive emotions and boost the negative to completely destroy the will of any person, making them incapable of fighting. It brings the person's worst possible fears to the front and makes them believe it was real." He looked to both Lime and Toma. "I thought it should be used in this case to prevent both the injury to my Prince, and the stupidity of your friend."

Monlon was already playing the healing charm, but it didn't seem to cheer up Lime, whose bite marks in his arm vanished. Nabiki let go of Sarutoru, satisfied that he didn't kill him or attack for no good reason, but angry because Lime got hurt in a much different way than he was expecting.

Nabiki crouched over his figure and sat him up. "Yo, Lime, are you with us?" She waved a hand in front of his face, and then pulled at both his cheeks hard to make his face wider. "Hello?"

Lime's eyes regained some of their clarity and colour, and he stared at Nabiki. "Wh-what are you doing?" He asked, still groggy and puzzled.

"Bringing you back to us, you are important to our team, you know?"

The tears filled up again in his eyes. *Hmm, what have I said to -urk!*

The interruption in her thoughts came from the tree crushing hug Lime was now administering to her. "Oh! Thank God you don't hate me Nabiki! I swear I'll never look at another woman again! Oww!"

This time, Lime was stopped by and chair breaking over his head, by Monlon. "Ease up or you'll kill her, O Great Bodyguard."

Lime noticed the blue tinge to Nabiki's features, and instantly released her, catching her before she hit the ground. "Umm... Whoops...?"

After taking in a few breaths Nabiki looked up at him. "You'd better have a good explanation for that, or you're going to be paying me off for the next ten years of your life..."

Lime blushed after he helped her back on her feet. "I... I'd rather not talk about it..."

Nabiki poked him in the chest. "I'm not accepting that answer. Spit it out."

Lime pointed frantically at Sarutoru. "It was him!" The Togenkyo cursed monkey raised his ki in response. "His attack was weird." Lime slowed down his heart and spoke calmer. "I was here, but not exactly. You slapped me hard and said I'd betrayed you, and slept with too many women... You said you couldn't trust me any more, and that you were leaving..."

Nabiki scratched her chin. *It does tie in to what Sarutoru said his attack did...* "Wait a minute, you're telling me that me saying I hated you what the most devastating thing you ever heard?! That's ridiculous!"

The flinch of hurt Lime experienced cut him worse than most sword wounds he received. Turning away, he walked off, back to the boat. "I'll meet you at the port, I have to stock us up on supplies."

Nabiki watched him go off and wrinkled her brow. *What's with him?* Shrugging it off, she turned back to Toma. "Well, we're going to leave now. Any idea which way Japan is?"

Toma pointed at her backpack. "The Eternal Post I gave to you shows the way, just follow the black marker." Seeing the question about to be asked he went on. "Togenkyo circles Japan perfectly, using the centre of the islands. Just hold it and think of Japan, and the marker will home in on the closest part of the land for you to go to."

"Sounds cool..." Now with a new respect for the device, she looked at it like such.

"Keep it, we have plenty of them, if you ever feel like popping in." He smiled, with the bare hint of a threat. "If you try to use it in any inappropriate way, sell it to military for instance, then we can send a Terminate signal to it, so it can't be reproduced."

"Thanks for the trust you placed in me." Nabiki wryly spoke. *There goes my plan of having Japan 'discover' a new independent island state.* "I'll be taking my leave now."

"Before you go..." Toma held up a hand. "I believe you should get some more help to reach that place." He turned to his side. "Sarutoru, you're to go with them. Make sure that Nabiki reaches this location, and then to her home town safely."

Monlon looked at Sarutoru, and turned up her nose. "So, we're supposed to bring a trained monkey as well as a circus animal... What are we, a travelling zoo?"

"Who're you calling a monkey?!" Sarutoru yelled, stretching his arms menacingly.

Nabiki stepped in. "Shut it Monlon, you'll have to accept that not everyone we meet is the same as you." She looked at Wantan and shuddered, recalling her previous experience with the large oaf. *There's no way I'm bringing someone as stupid as that with me...* "Sarutoru, help Lime with the supplies, I think we may need more food for the journey back... Monlon, you go help him."

As they both went off to help, one more reluctant than the other, Nabiki sighed, eliciting a laugh from Toma. "Sounds like you're going to have a lot of fun. I wish I could be there to see it."

"So? Why don't you come?" Nabiki asked, already knowing the answer.

"I can't, I have to wait for my invitations to return." Seeing her questioning look he elaborated. "Instead of abducting women, I now invite them for omiai. My loyal guards help with the selection."

"Marriage interviews..." Nabiki nodded. "Sounds like the best way to go, you can't leave your land to go dating... Well, you have a lot of time, there's no need to rush into something just yet."

He chuckled mirthfully. "Maybe, I've grown tired of them anyway, perhaps it is time to relax."

"Oh yeah, Kasumi says 'hello', send her a nice gift from here, maybe one of your fancy dresses, she'd love that." Nabiki waved and strode off. "See you another time, Toma." He waved back lightly, also going back to his chambers.

Five minutes later The port

Lime and Sarutoru were carrying some boxes of food, and Monlon used her lute strings to drag some bags of rice onto the boat. Nabiki walked in as they began to finish up.

Monlon took her head at the helm, the Eternal Post ahead of her ready to be used, Sarutoru was looking at the sky and sea for any signs of a storm coming. A depressed Lime sauntered in for a moment, looking at everyone, spending a few seconds longer on Nabiki, before retiring to his quarters. Nabiki noticed this but chose not to say anything as yet.

As the ship pulled away from Togenkyo, the island began to mist up, the black magnet in the Eternal post lined up dead ahead, and the clouds parted to make for a sunny, peaceful journey.

Author's Notes

Next time I'll try and go on holiday more often, my writings seems to grow in number and quality!

This is a very long chapter, though short with the conversation with Toma, it still gave some insight into him. The character building has been done, and now the final few chapters are starting their downward toll to the big finale.

Although the next chapter has been mostly written, I'm going to hold on to it for a bit longer (not a month, so don't worry about that) to see if I can work on chapter 16, to keep the series fresh.

Hope you liked the events here, and later ones in coming chapters.

- J