

Nube's Capture

The little naga's breath heaved in and out rapidly, the wind created by his lungs disturbing the hanging moss overtop of where he was pinned. The blood in his eyes pounded, terror threatening to cloud his peaceful nature.

"P-please don't make me hurt you..." he whined, raising the eyebrows of the explorer who currently had his knees crunched into Nube's serpentine length, a large and dangerous-looking hunting knife held just a foot over the reptilian creature's throat. "I don't want to fight!"

"...What?" The man shifted, uneasy with the presence of the runty Maranaga despite his pleas. The knife hovered.

"Please," Nube's wide purple eyes watered from fear and being fixed open on his attacker's face for so long. "I swear—I wasn't stalking you. If you let me go, I will leave and never show my face to you again."

"...What?" The man was still struck still by puzzlement; he had come to this island knowing full-well that the Maranaga dwelled here, and that they sometimes were man-eaters. Even though this one was quite small, he resembled a venomous snake. For a creature that deadly, the chance to dispatch something the size of a human would have to be tempting. The hunter was not a small guy and his dead body would be able to keep such a runt sated for weeks, maybe months. But the naga's tone seemed genuine. Shocked—and most definitely afraid for his life. The knife lowered, no longer lined up for a lethal stab. "Wait, wait, wait... What d'you mean?"

Nube gulped heavily, flooded with relief and trying to speak with the old stress throbbing through his veins, but remaining quiet out of inability. The human scowled, and stood with a grunt, the top of his wide-brimmed hat scraping the moss growing along the top of the huge hollowed log he had taken shelter in. In the still moment the sound of Caribbean rain shower and whipping wind bled through. He watched the serpentine creature gasp for air, scooting backwards to rest his head against the dry wood walls.

"I... uhh..." Nube shook his head. The excitement of the moment had almost overloaded his body with lactic acid, something which could prove fatal if it was allowed to remain that high in concentration for too long. He had to relax, "...th-thank you... uff..."

"Whoa." The hunter muttered. He knew his fair share of herpetological factoids. And he knew what was likely ailing the small naga. Crouching against the other side of the log, he set the shimmering knife down and reached back for his lantern. It burned solid squares of fuel—surely it would provide a bit of warmth, even if the reptile in question was a ways away. "Easy... no need to keel over, okay?"

The naga's breathing steadied, focusing on funneling life-giving oxygen through his nostrils only. He released the tension in his coils, letting his eyes slip closed. Each shuffle of the man who

had just pounced on him caused his ears to twitch. A moment was needed to understand what had just taken place—outside of the filter that fear of death laid over it. This hunter had released him so quickly, despite seeming so willing to slit his throat minutes ago. And now he seemed concerned for his health. Perhaps this human had been just as terrified as he was. He let out a deep sigh, opening his eyes partly again, “It’s... it’s alright. I just needed a bit of time to...” He sucked in another deep breath, feeling the toxic strain starting to drain out of him, “Anyways, thank you for letting me go. I was afraid you were going to...”

“Kill you?” The low hiss of the lantern’s bright glow coming to life covered over the rain noise, “Yeah, I thought so too. And I thought you were going to kill me.”

“I see.” Nube’s body crinkled up upon itself, slowly easing himself back onto his scaled belly, “I didn’t even know you were here. I came in to get out of the rain.”

“Oh.” The man blinked, suddenly feeling like his aggressive actions had been very much unjustified in the wake of this logic. Of course a nearby Maranaga would enter his shelter—it wasn’t a *manmade* shelter, after all, and no naga would have assumed a human was concealed within this ancient dead hunk of wood.

“I suppose I should introduce myself. I’m called Nube,” the naga settled into a ball, leaning over the lump of their own coils with crossed arms.

“Daen Terrick,” he nodded, rummaging in the backpack laid next to the lantern. “Monster hunter.”

Nube’s eyes opened completely, ears standing straight up. “Monster hunter... as in, hunts monsters?”

“Not in the traditional sense,” Daen assured him, revealing what he had been digging for: From a small vinyl bag equipped with beltloops he pulled a chunky DSLR camera, a short zoom lens already attached. “I hunt strange creatures and then take photographic proof of their existence.”

“Oh!” Nube’s ears swiveled further forward, “So you’re a photographer... You came looking for Maranaga then?”

“Among other things. I’ve heard merfolk are near this area this time of year.” The camera beeped several times as it started up, “If you don’t mind I’d... Well, I’d like *your* photo.”

“Me..?” Nube’s dark blue tongue came fluttering in and out, a natural snake’s response to curiosity, “You want my picture? Why not some other... er, well, some more impressive-looking naga?”

“Not to flatter you, but you’re not exactly bad-looking.” Daen chuckled, “You have a very human-like face also. I’m not fond of my work being used for ill, and it’s hard to get lots of people against something that seems more personable.” He shrugged. “Like you. I mean, you’re ‘cute’

compared to some other naga examples I could find. You're not threateningly large, but still visually impressive. You're actually the sort of naga I was hoping to find."

"I understand..." Nube blinked, mulling over the facts—he'd even used his unimpressive size and naturally gentle face to help console the nearly inconsolable in his daily works. It made perfect sense that he would be a great representative of the species for the snake-squeamish.

He supposed it couldn't hurt. Daen began clicking his camera settings into place, the lens telescoping out with a chipper whirring sound.