

# Nara's Escape

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# The Escape of the Bonded

Within the broiling acidic waters of the belly and current cage of Nips and Kildren the two stomped about as another wash of sea water cascaded to fill the belly further. Nips clamored upon the slippery back of Kildren, the dragon grumbling at the thought of having a rider of all things, and Nips took a moment to stare down at her scarred and hairless legs, the broken leather armor, her melted sword, torn clothes, and the bone carved flute stuffed within her belt. She let out a groan of exhaustion before she found her grip on the dragon as the grumbling of Kildren filled the room.

“Remember stupid child, hit fast and hit hard. Its either the front end or the back and I’d prefer to not get sick.” The dragons head turned to stare piercingly at the small tabaxi, and its eye spoke words where his nonchalant gait did not. He shifted about to face the front of the belly before continuing his directions, “When we jettisoned out its going to be rough so hold on tight and mind my wings, I can’t control them as well as I might hope so no apologies if you get smacked in your empty skull.”

Another wave of sea water washed its way in splashing to sear at what was left of Nips legs. A roar from Kildren left vibrations in the surrounding walls and from within the young bronze dragons throat heavy burst a lightning that spidered out against the entrance to the kraken’s stomach charring the fragile skin surrounding it. With another roar Kildren brandished all his weight against his claws as he pushed forward tearing further into the skin taking large chunks of flesh with each pull.

There was a visible shake as the innards of the Kraken wavered under the onslaught and Nips watched shocked for a moment, her hand reaching to grasp at the necklace around her neck, and with a soft warmth from within she shook herself to focus. A burst of Blue energy shimmered out from around her as Kildren’s claws that continued to rip at the flesh flashed with and were joined by lightning and thunder that torn and reverberated the flesh even further. Another burst of darker and stronger energy nearly blinded her as she closed her eyes tight.

From within the watered floors and the various sea life that grew within, spectral vines and leaf covered wood barks grew to push the throat open further. The divine energy channeled to strong arm an opening for the two.

For a moment the two felt weak as they waited, Kildren’s last clawed effort resounding with a boom of thunder before he stood back to stare at their work. Nips opened her eyes watching as the spectral vines continued to pull harder and harder. “I do not know if it worked Tomsfellow...”

A sadness filled her lungs with cold breath, that thought of ‘ No this cant fail!’ filled her head and with a grunt she squeezed her eyes tight and her fist tightened against her necklace; ‘Please I need help!’ . A deeper and unimaginable flash of energy pierced the walls as the vines gave way to grow not spectral, but of moss and real white wood bark tearing and piercing the creatures flesh uninhibited by its strength. There was a shake and convulsion in the Kraken’s innards as a rush of air pulled the contents of its belly towards its throat.

Kildren reared his head with a roar, "Yes! Stupid child do not stop! Hold on tight and for whatever purpose do not pull out any of my scales!" The air pulled hard as the vines twisted and turned, Kildren and Nips were given a glance behind them as the air turned them about. Kildren was surprised to watch as from the bellies floor a tree grew; one of white pine bark and crimson leaves.

"Well let me concentrate you Stupid Dragon and maybe I can!" came the holler as Nips lowered her head close to Kildren's neck, her hand clutching her holy symbol tight, and the other digging her claw into what ever flesh she could find along Kildren's back. A deep voice rattled her skull with each pulse of energy, 'Keep calm, you'll find your way. I will watch on; find your friends as they may need your help sooner than later.'

Any thoughts were interrupted as the dragon was picked up by the force of the contents pushing him out and through the Kraken's throat. With the last glimpse of the tree's roots growing into the monstrosity's inner walls, the duo was thrown forth into the dark and cold depths of the surrounding ocean.

Nips was in shock as she blinked her head tumbling as it took a moment to come to focus on the surrounding waters. Kildren nearby was quicker to grab at the small form nudging her back into to place, 'No time to lay around stupid child!' were the only warning and words that slammed into Nip's head. She turned about to see the colossal form of the Kraken they once were trapped in writhe in pain as tree roots pierced out from its form to tighten and wrap around it. Its deep crimson eyes glared but remained still as the tree's growth finally began to still.

Nips only got another glance as Kildren pushed off into the waters beginning to propel himself further through the waters. She watched as hundreds of yellow eyes turned to stare after the two before making chase.

The water pushed back against the two as Kildren tipped himself upwards swimming to the surface of the waters. The pressure of the waters rippled and pressed against his scales causing grunts of pain to fill his throat and a fear of failure filled his mind. But with each meter up that he swam it became easier and easier. What was fearful was the distance being gained by the spawn behind him. An obvious advantage to their underwater nativity.

He craned his neck to search and as they pierced over an underwater cliff his eyes caught the sight of buildings all strewn across the sea floor. A city that seemed to stretch as far as his eyes could see and he felt Nips nudge him her voice filling his mind, 'We can lose them in there!' fear filled his lungs as he remember the words 'a dragon did not fear', his mother's words before she would attempt to crush him under her weight. From the dark of his mind Nips voice pushed forward, 'Trust me! I can guide you!'

Kildren did not hesitate as he twisted his form following the words of his rider with the ever-growing mass of krakens that followed behind and the ever-growing fear that filled his head. 'You

need to tuck your wings as close to you as possible! Use the buildings to pull your self through the water and make quick turns! Maybe we can find a place to hide that they can't reach!' Kildren had to admit that he was impressed with the little ones bravery, that is if he hadn't heard the shake in her voice as she spoke, but with a nod and another heavy flap of his wings against the water he pulled his form closed and propelled into the tight streets of the drowned city.

The quick chase was a lot for the dragon's eyes to keep focus as buildings passed by as blurs. Every opportunity to grab at the ocean floor was another propulsion forward as he waited for the feeling of his rider's intent. He could feel the relief as Nips watched a large portion of the chasers break off to wait in the distance above the city leaving a few to try and follow alone. The sound of stone breaking was heard as one went headfirst into a building nearby was signaled by the feeling of cheer from Nips.

'Break!', the stupid child's scream filled both their heads as Kildren dipped down pushing all his weight against the sand. They slid as he ground himself against the ocean floor and his eyes turned wide as the intersection before them came to an end in the form of a stone building. He felt her intent and with that he let go of the ground aiming for the corner of the building that turned right into the intersection. He twisted onto his side and with a surprising quickness, even for himself, used the corner to pull himself forward. Another deft turn and with a whip of his tail he braced himself as what was left of his momentum pressed against the stone of the far building before twisting once again to turn once more before slipping into a long stretch of a street. The pain overwhelmed him for only a moment when with a flash of blue light, he felt the pain subside, his rider's healing powers were joined by a whisper in their minds by her, 'We lost them for now! Be quick but slow down!'

Kildren knew his form was bulky and heavy. He wouldn't last long in these tight corners but with the chasers forced to follow above instead of behind he was at advantage in some ways. Knowing that just twisting and turning throughout these streets wouldn't get them anywhere he rose up from the ocean floor to fly for a moment just above the buildings rise. The moment gave their chasers a glimpse of them, but off in the distance he was able to pinpoint a larger building that rose above the rest. With his task done he dipped low to the ground and quickly slowed to turn into an even tighter street as they began shifting and turning through the maze.

'We need to move quiet; I think I have lost them again' Kildren thought and waited for a response as he prowled through the oceans floor, ducking under a shadow as a set of krakens swam above them.

Nips took a moment to breathe and release the tense muscles that threatened to spasm. 'Where do we go?' She thought into their connection as she looked about at the black hewn stone of the buildings intent on figuring out where they may be upon the ocean floor. She couldn't believe they had made it that far but knew that Kildren was growing exhausted and to push him further would not be good.

Kildren came to a stop just before they would exit out into a larger street and taking care to try and press his form against the buildings shadow. His eyes would capture the sight of their predators every so often as the mass of them moved in patterns above the city. He thought back to his rider 'I saw a cathedral of some sort far off in the distance. It will hold me better then any of

these buildings would, but we can't stay for long we have to escape this city, or we are trading one cage for another.' He caught a momentary thought of Nip's in which she wished her could be smaller and with a chuckle he answered her unasked question. 'I can be smaller but for not long an hour at most; it was at least the best I could do for my mother to excel at one aspect of being a dragon.'

Nips was visibly surprised before she took a calculating look, 'We need something small if not tiny, something that can fit in my pocket if not arms. Can you do that?' Kildren gave her a look as if to ask if she was questioning his abilities. He tensed under her as a shadow past above them. She only had a moment to react her head turning to look into the maw of the kraken that stared down with its yellow eyes.

Kildren's form fell out from under her as she floundered for only a moment as she felt the paws of something grab at her. The Krakens pseudopods and tentacles all reached to grasp at her only for them to meet ground as with the help of the small otter they both swam quickly towards the other end of the alley; the Kraken soon followed to give chase.

Nips and the otter, its metallic blue eyes and the bonded connection solidifying the form as Kildren, rushed to twist into a window cut out of a building only moments as the kraken tried to fit itself after them. Each taking a quick glance as the stone around the sill began to crack under the onslaught, they took off into the city through another cut out.

Nips had to admit to herself as she skulked through the drowned city that it had been long since she had played this game of hide and go seek. Normally they would be guards or drunkards after her and sometimes whole taverns, but this had to top those games. Shadows passed over the two as they swam their way through building to building rushing off into the distance where Kildren had seen the cathedral in the distance.

It was eerie quiet and tense, each moment was mere meters to their deaths. With each meter came a warming to Nips chest. Her hand coming to press against the clawed necklace that Barnaby had given her in Clarence's stead to feel it warm to the touch. It was as if each meter closer to this building they came the stronger the warmth filled her and the safer she felt.

Each wasn't sure how long they were building hopping, yet it was in their already chilled bodies that the waters grew colder and a massive shadow overcame the city. Above them moved the colossal form of the crimson eyed Kraken as it took its turn to prowl the city. They stilled to watch it form a window that overlooked the courtyard. It was the last stretch of waters before the cathedral doors that lay slightly cracked open to their safety.

It was almost unimaginative for her to see the tree that grew from the kraken's center and it left Kildren to wonder at what power could cause such an ability. His eyes turning to his young rider calculating and he wondered if he had misread her abilities. Meanwhile her face turned to look out into the courtyard only to cause her to gasp.

The once dark city was a glow by soft fluttering lights that drifted among the water leaving a dull glow in their wake. Off in the distance she could see as these lights filled the streets beyond only to float into the waters above. A singular word filled her mind, 'Go!', that sent her scrambling out of

the window and Kildren pushed after her before the building they once stood within was demolished under the heavy weight of the Kraken's siege.

She wasn't sure what to think or what to do but to push onwards forcing her feline dexterity to help her further. Kildren swam behind her as fast as he could, his more nature form dashing through the waters to pass through the cathedral doors only to turn and wait.

Nips pushed onwards with each kick of her feet and the shadow that towered over her coming ever closer. She clutched at her necklace as her breath caught in her throat. She heard deep in the back of her mind a familiar voice that made her stop still.

"Well, I suppose little one. You've made it all by yourself didntchya? I knew you could do it; I always had faith. But Its best ye look up and keep still, Okay? Well I suppose a little help once in a while might help won' it? I want you to remember that when you find yourself stuck on the golden shores that the talking waters are not far from your flippers or your ears. You will find your light, little one. I know I wasn't the best in life, but I hope I did the best by you and I will be here if you really need me... now swim quick my little turtle, captain and the first mate may need you, the crew too."

Nara felt the tears well up in her eyes and the warmth that filled her chest... with another kick she closed her eyes the mass of tentacles wrapped around her to hold and crush. A roar pierced the waters followed by the light of Kildren's breath filling the ocean's floor. And then her eyes tightened as a familiar burst of blue energy flooded around her and her consciousness slipped away into exhaustion and sleep.

Kildren watched as the spectral vines solidified as they burst from the center of the courtyard. This time he watched as the tree pierced from the stone floors and grew to wrap and ensnare the Kraken, a few pulling the tentacles from around the slow drifting form of Nips. He rushed forward grabbing her in his now dragon wings and paddled towards the cathedral doors. He wasn't even sure he would fit, but that was solved as a lone figure swam out from within the building her eyes filled with panic and the merfolk pushed the door open, her free hand beckoning him forward and so he swam with the last energy he held a small burst of cat like energy pushed him passed the threshold. The sounds of the door closing behind him followed by the siege of the kraken outside.

He lay unmoving upon the floor, the stupid child's form curled under his claw as he watched wearily as the merfolk stepped forward. They both listened as the cathedral stood strong against the bombardment, finally with the softest of voices the mermaid spoke to him; "Hello, I'm Lorelei, what's your name?" He was surprised for only a moment before speaking in broken common ; "Kildren and Nara, can you heal?" and the mermaid nodded in response as Kildren fell into darkness.

# Caged in the Belly of Malign Truth

'I am cold and alone' is Nara's response as the shifting of the inner gut jostles its contents to and fro. A gush of water filling its floor to her knees in stomach acid, eaten sea life, and inevitable death of those that could not escape. A not so new concept to Nara is the grunting and complaining of a beast much more annoying than the kraken she resides in.

"Stupid Child, what exactly was your plan? Now we are both locked in this beast" is Kildren's annoying growl that meets deaf ears. Nara's fingers holding the white bone, a femur, of a lost friend. The sharp knife cutting and shaving pieces from its length. Every so often she hisses in pain as the dagger pierces her hand staining the fur, that matted with saltwater and gunk form the floor, with blood. Kildren grunts once more, before shifting to stare out past the guts wobbling sphincter that connects to the creature's intestines further in.

"Fine then, what is it you carve with your fingers and blade?" is the bronze dragon's next attempt at conversation. This does not end on deaf ears as Nara turns her head and shifts her body to draw herself closer to the warmth of the dragon.

"It's a flute. My other one was lost in the fight. I figured it might shut your negative nattering up, but I don't know if you even know what that means... Stupid Dragon" is Nara's response, dripping with the poison of sarcasm. There is quiet that follows as the chamber fills with another gush of water. A hiss breaks the silence as Nara and the Dragon stare down at her legs. The fur is matted in acid burning away slightly at her skin and drying it to a peel. 'It doesn't hurt anymore...' is her thoughts before she turns her head to stare at the snout of the dragon who peers down upon her. Kildren looks concerned as he turns to stare back into her eyes.

"I know how it hurts little kitten so do not lie to me, it is honorable I suppose to take such suffering for me and the others. If you hadn't went with your gods awful, dare I say it, friends you would be safe right now and we wouldn't be in this situation." Nara's eyes dart to glare into the dragon's amber ones her mouth opened in a hiss. Kildren wavers his head with a sigh, "I didn't mean it as an insult clearly... What am I to do with such fragility?" The duo grows quiet as they both turn to their own tasks of emotions.

'I don't know what to do, why can't I figure this out, papa what am I supposed to do? I feel so alone now; everyone has left me...' Nara's thoughts still as tears join the saltwater below. Her eyes pressed closed, the tight strain of muscles causing her to twist her fingers into fists.

"Do I need to remind you that I am here, Tomsfellow. Let alone that your friends didn't leave you. You got a message from one of them, right? The changeling?" Nara stills, Kildren's words shocked her, and her fists uncurl. "Your father watches I am sure, both of them, your mothers too. But you

have a point we need to figure out what we are gunna do with you... how am I to trust you on your own with those vagabonds if you can't protect yourself."

"I can be stronger, I know I can" Nara stands as she speaks, turning her head to look about the creature's belly for the weak points. Her eyes darting back and forth with a deep, fear driven, determination

"We have been over this; we must wait till we have healed some before we start tearing holes in this creature. We will..." the dragon's words are muted by the sound a thunder that booms within the chamber as Nara's clawless fingers begin digging into the belly's flesh. It wobbles and stretches against the force, but no damage is done. A few more booms fill the chamber each time as Kildren watches before lashing his tail out to grab at Nara pulling her from the walls.

"I want out, I want out, I hate being in here, it feels like everything is shrinking like a cage! Like a burning room..." Her voice beginning as a struggle against Kildren that ends in a whisper of shock as she gives up shrinking into herself as she is pressed against the draconic form.

"Little Nara, we will find a way out and we must be prepared for the battle to come as this creature will not let us go easily; its master wont like that. Which means we need our resources when the time comes, so stop wasting your breath on a wall that wont move." Nara does not shift and remains quiet against the dragon her arms wrapping around its tail. "I have seen your dreams, they may not understand your pain, but they will appreciate your determination stupid child. But its clear now that we must stick together, and we must make you strong against the elements that try to tear you asunder. And the others that come to take you away for their own plans. To do that I need help, are you ready to throw aside foolishness now?"

Again, there is quiet as another gush passes by, Kildren's claw reaching for a bone white shape in the waters and plucking the carved flute from the floor. "First, we need to rest and get out of here, how about you finish this, what was it?"

Nara raises her head before shaking it to fall tired against the dragon's belly as he turns onto his side. "It's a flute, you stupid dragon."

"Well whatever you call it, make music and sing me to sleep or something as payment for protecting you" Kildren closes his eyes as Nara's light fades away again, before flaring back to life. "And when the time comes, we will escape this cage and I will turn you into a survivor; a warrior. Like the riders my mother used to tell me about, well that's before she tried to kill me."

The quiet belly is contested by the sound of Nara's carving of bone as she continues on her flute. Her face set in a stare at her hands as she is trying to keep the thought of a burning room and the sight of the heavy beam falling against her mother's body from her mind; trying to rupture the bubbling fear that grips hard to clutch at her heart.

"Oh Kay... I can do this" falls from her lips only this time they are met with a different set of deaf ears. The soft purring and snoring of Kildren creating a white noise. ' I will do this papa, like you and mama asked me to... I will be strong... I will get back to my friends, to help them... to save them...' Each word interrupted as her eyes lull closed, Kildren's claw coming to pull her further into

his embrace of warmth. 'I'm alone again...'