

Kaide & Claire



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Chapter 1

The thief and the noble



Kaide had been standing off to the side of the market for a solid forty minutes now. Her arms crossed, leaning against a stone wall near the entrance of a narrow alleyway as she watched the crowd. The market square was bustling, which made it hard to oversee. Not that Kaide required the overview; she knew exactly where the guards were positioned. Two were standing across the street while three others that were patrolling would disappear around the corner of the building to her right. The tiefling was very aware of her surroundings. This would be the moment to strike. She was pretty certain she could outrun the guards across from her if she were to get caught, but she figured she had best make it count.

Soon, she spotted a suitable target; a young elf with plenty of coins on hand. On top of that, one that looked rather noble. Her hair was an ashy blonde that reached down to her lower back. She wore a dark brown corset with tarnished golden accents that accentuated her waist, cinched with a belt that held her pouch. This would be an easy target. Judging from the elf's appearance, the contents of that pouch could feed her for at least two weeks. It sounded like an opportunity too good to pass up. Without further hesitation, Kaide pushed off of the wall and blended into the crowd. She pulled up her hood to cover her long black locks and horns, slowly but steadily approaching her victim who was unsuspectingly checking out a leatherworking stall.

The blonde elf was inspecting a small decorated leather pouch when she felt a gentle nudge against her back. The thief smoothly passed her, slightly bumping into her before quickly apologising. "Oh, Pardon me, Miss," the thief casually let out, faking a polite smile as she made brief eye contact. The tiefling only needed a split second and a quick slip of her fingers to snatch the elf's money pouch before blending back in with the crowd. It didn't take long for the young noble to realise what was going on. The market would attract those with coins and those with none. Claire had dealt with her fair share of thieves in the past. Lowlifes with little to no respect for others' belongings. The young noble quickly glanced in the direction of her mentor, who was only a few metres away. She had been robbed and there were no words necessary. "You will be sorry," the blonde muttered as she watched the long, red, devilish tail disappear into the crowd. "Wretched demon," she cursed as she gently bit her bottom lip in frustration. She turned, apologising to the salesman at the stall before quietly following in the direction of the thief that took her gold.

Kaide smiled to herself as she made her way through the crowd. She knew it would be a hard task for any victim or guard to follow her through the mass of people that moved from stall to stall. This had been the easiest catch she had scored in weeks. She had to admit it, it was adorable how most of the young and rich were incredibly naive. Plus, it sure was a good sport. The tiefling felt little remorse, as the young elf definitely looked like she could spare some coin. Kaide didn't see the issue in sharing. Not to mention that Kaide knew every gold piece would be well spent.

The tiefling soon left the crowd and took the first alleyway that would lead her away from all the excitement. She weighed the leather pouch, gently tossing it in her hand as she walked down the pavement tiles. The ringing of the metal coins filled her with satisfaction and pride. Damn, she could really treat herself with this amount. Intoxicated with joy, she left the more respectable part of town and headed to the tavern she frequented.

Despite the guests not always being the most principled, it was a cosy place. Candles were lit on the tables due to the meagre amount of light that came in through the small windows. The barkeep saw the tiefling regular walk in and overheard her excited outcry to her friend seated at one of the tables in the back. This girl truly never learned. "Hey Raven, look what I caught!" Kaide exclaimed with a chuckle as she approached her friend. When she came close enough, she tossed the small leather coin pouch onto the table. Raven was quick to respond to the new catch. Her uncaring expression quickly turned into a madman's smile as she heard how full the pouch was. "Got it off some haughty elf at the market. Order yourself a drink, my treat!" The biggest smug grin was plastered on Kaide's face as she sat down, throwing her feet up on the already filthy looking table.

Raven was a long time friend of Kaide, though the term "friend" could be loosely translated to someone who stuck around for more than a week and hadn't betrayed her yet. Considering the people that Kaide surrounded herself with, that was a rare find. The young lady had come across the tiefling at the tavern one night. Her life had taken a turn for the worse and her hopes were even further gone than the beer in her glass. They got to talking and Raven turned out to be pretty 'rad'.

"Shut. Up!" Raven let out playfully as she stared in disbelief at her friend. She instantly perked up to reach out for the coinpurse. "Oh Kaide, you sly, sneaky little shit!" She almost squealed with excitement as she felt the weight of the purse, frantically opening the pouch to reveal its contents. "'Little shit'? I get called that quite frequently, yes..." Kaide let out. The tiefling had been called so many things, it even started to feel like a compliment. "I am starting to think you have a thing for elves. Are you sure it is not some hidden obsession?" The raven haired woman snickered, inspecting a shiny coin in her fingers.

The horned half-demon scoffed at Raven's remark. "We're not starting that again. Do you want something to drink or not?" Kaide was not concerned with elves or their wellbeing in the slightest, but she was invested in their wealth. Everyone who said money does not make you happy is a liar. Kaide raised her hand to attract the attention of the barkeep and ordered four beers by yelling across the bar. The place didn't really offer any fancy drinks, but being able to order without worrying too much about expenses gave her a certain feeling of freedom. Kaide now diving into the pouch as well, the two young women started inspecting the coins. Seeing a gold coin shine with her own golden gaze made her eyes light up. Man, if she was lucky enough she could even get herself new gear out of this. Kaide had some great catches before, but this definitely topped it all.

Four steins of beer were placed on the bar. This place definitely didn't provide service at the table, but Kaide was quick to take one of the golden coins before closing the pouch again and fetching the drinks herself. Raven, still filled with excitement, eyed after her friend as she went to the bar. "Keep the change," the tiefling let out casually as she nonchalantly tossed the gold piece onto the counter. She took the four steins back to her friend at the table, two for each of them. She put the drinks down and without hesitation, downed the first in one go.

"I'm going to look for a good cause to spend it all on. No use in holding onto it. Maybe some new gear? I could get a new pair of boots to replace these ragged duds. I might even get my blades sharpened." The tiefling was already fantasising about what she could spend the money on, mumbling out loud as she carefully picked out the coins again together with Raven. "I don't think I've ever seen coins this clean, Kaide. We will probably have to rough them up. No one is going to accept our coins in this state. They will know it's stolen," her friend let out with concern, showing off how shiny they were. "Nu-uh!" Kaide let out as she quickly snatched the coins. "We? I never said I was sharing," the girl said in a cocky manner.

"There, girl," Claire whispered to her horse, Josephine, as she and her two most trusted associates slowed to a halt outside of the tavern. "This is where the tracking spell leads," her mentor, Nord, confirmed. Herron, the young guard that kept the noble maiden safe, was already standing next to her, holding up his arms to help the elf dismount. Not that she needed any help. The young man was strong, but had a soft spot for Claire. For the past seven years, he had been her loyal personal guard. "I'm not surprised that half demon ends up in a place like this," Claire let out in disgust, making eye contact with Nord, who got off his mount as well. "Nord, secure the exits. Herron, with me please," the noble practically demanded as she got off her horse.

Raven chuckled softly at Kaide's ingenious ways of dirtying up the coins, but was quickly taken out of her jolly mood when a good looking elf entered the tavern. "Ehr... Kaide?" Raven let out as she froze on the spot. It was clear she was a pure blood elf, and an agitated one at that. Her clothing gave away her nobility, and fit the description of 'haughty elf'. The noblewoman brushed a lock of hair behind her ear as she looked around the tavern, eventually locking her eyes on the table in the back. The tavern slowly quieted down as the unusual guest walked up to the tiefling and her human company. As Kaide was still fantasising about her catch, her friend hissed again, "KAIDE!" This time, accompanied with a kick to the shins. "What?!" Kaide let out as she was about to kick back, but was interrupted by an unfamiliar voice. "Kaide?" Claire let out in a luscious voice, inspecting her thief from head to toe. Atop her head grew a set of dark red horns surrounded by messy black hair pulled back into a ponytail. Worn out leather clothing showcased the fact that she had no wealth of her own to speak of.

"How is your drink?" The slightly dangerous undertone from the elf made it clear she was not pleased. Herron followed behind her closely. As Kaide made eye contact with the elf, she instantly recognized her latest victim. What was SHE doing here? The demon had never expected to be caught, nor to be followed to a rotten part of town such as the tavern they were in. "My drink is just fine.." She calmly answered, accompanied by a slight, cocky smirk tugging at her lips. "Are you lost, princess? Do not worry, I am sure there is someone around who would gladly escort you back to your golden castle. Being your kind, I wouldn't want to be out on the streets by myself around this part of town. Especially at night," she stated in a mocking manner as she got up. She grabbed the two steins that she downed and walked over to the bar to return them, planning to head for the exit next. "Princess, hmm?" Claire let out a snobby chuckle. "An escort?" Claire raised an eyebrow in Herron's direction. The elf watched as the tiefling tried to casually take her leave. She had hundreds of encounters with thieves, each one just as sly and pathetic, and this encounter was not going to be anything new.

It was surprising to Kaide that the look of this place had not scared the elf off yet, but it was definitely time to take her leave as discreetly as possible. "Yes, but not me. I do not do escorts," Kaide joked as she placed the empty jugs on the bar and continued making her way to the back door. "Though, I would advise you to leave sooner rather than later, this is not really a suitable place for a pampered princess like yourself." As Kaide tried to act cool, Raven remained frozen at the table. She was both terrified for her friend's life and entertained by how Kaide truly got herself neck deep in the shit she just created. "Now, if you will excuse me," Kaide started, looking back at Raven one more time before trying the door. When Kaide pushed the door, however, it would not budge. It was as if it was locked. It was usually an old, creaky door, but some unexplainable force prevented it from opening up.

"You don't need to try. My associate outside has mastered fine spellcasting." Claire reached out her hand expectantly, waiting for the demon to realise she was like a rat caught in a trap. "My coin purse, wretched demon," the elf hissed under her breath as her eyes remained locked onto Kaide's. The entire tavern was now watching this happen like a scene from a theatre play. Herron was standing with his hand on the hilt of his sword, ready to draw his blade at any possible threat.

The tiefling cockily folded her arms and turned back to the elf. "First off, I do not know what you are talking about. Secondly, what did you just call me?" It fell quiet for a moment, but not long enough to allow Claire to form a response. "You have quite the nerve to show up here," Kaide hissed. Instead of returning the money, she pushed past the noble elf, giving her a rather hard shove as she made her way to the front door with more haste this time. Kaide didn't expect to receive any help from around her. Here, everyone lived by the quote 'every man for himself'. But as Kaide approached the door, Herron stood firmly in front of it, ready to draw his sword. "Who is this? Your boyfriend?" Kaide let out as soon as she realised the guard was with the elf as well. "My coin purse, you wretched demon," Claire repeated rather boldly. Following behind the tiefling, she grabbed her by the upper arm. As Kaide made a dodging move, prepared for a lunge, she found herself dumbfounded that the elf was in fact not attacking. She yanked her arm free from the blonde's grip and reached for one of her daggers. "Keep your fucking hands off me!" She hissed, clenching her blade's grip with her right hand without drawing it. Herron, however, drew his sword the moment the tiefling threatened to pull a weapon. No matter what, Kaide was not about to admit she had the elf's coins, nor hand them back. She came eye to eye with Claire's piercing gaze. "I have just enough backup to deal with little THIEFLINGS like YOU. Don't make me ask again." Claire's threat was laced with malice as she glared into her golden eyes.

"Tieflings." Kaide corrected Claire in a casual, yet unamused tone. "Not all of us are thieves. But it is not as if the likes of you would ever care to understand," she growled. Silence filled the tavern as tension grew between the two. Business like this was nothing new in the tavern, or around these parts of town. Though, it still made good entertainment. Raven slowly moved from her seat as she noticed the focus was on Kaide rather than her. Kaide's eyes travelled across the tavern and locked with Raven's for a moment. Her friend was distancing herself from the incident, which did not surprise the rogue.

Kaide was fed up with the situation at this point. She was not giving up her newfound riches that easily. "If you want it, come and get it," she said daringly as she pulled her dagger out. "Hey! Take this outside, will ya?!" The barkeep yelled. The ordeal was escalating quickly, and they were not looking forward to clearing up any messes in their beloved establishment. Let alone fix formal matters with the town guard. "All tieflings are thieves. I have yet to meet one that wouldn't stab you in the gut for a coin or two." Claire stepped in confidently, her head held high and her hand gesturing for the barkeep to wait. The elf was willing to pay for the damages, but she was not letting an opportunity slide to put a tiefling in their place.

"Everyone here is watching you. If you decide to be erratic and attack me, the town will charge you for theft and assault on Valeria associates. I have yet to meet a tiefling that is honest, be the first worthy example for your kind." Kaide smiled at Claire's remark. "Do you really think that your status holds any value in my eyes? I'm sorry to burst your bubble, your highness, but you're nothing special to me. You don't have any status just because your dad happens to own a big company and drowns you in coin." Kaide kept up the confident facade, but Claire's words definitely made an impact. Attacking the snobby elf would bring her more trouble than she was willing to deal with. Kaide was not actually going to fight for her money, especially with an audience. "It would not be the first time the town is after my head for anything." The tiefling playfully flipped her dagger before pointing it at Herron. "But I'm in a good mood, so let's make a deal. Tell your boyfriend to sheathe his sword, your associate to drop the magic spells. I will hand you your pouch back and you will let me walk out the door," Kaide said, reaching into her pocket with her free hand to fiddle with its contents. She would honestly return the pouch, though she was certain the elf wouldn't even notice if some gold pieces were missing.

"Of course wretched creatures like you pretend to come to your senses in such dire situations. I hardly doubt your deals are ever fair, but I would rather avoid conflict." A sigh escaped from Claire's lips as her eyes inspected the tiefling up and down one more time before gesturing for Herron to sheathe his sword. The guard hesitated for a brief moment, before slowly lowering his weapon. The elf then lowered her voice as she spoke. "Let it down, Nord." Raising her voice again, she addressed Kaide. "My guard sheathed his sword. Your door is open. Hand me my coins, Kaide," Claire emphasised her name, sending a chill down Kaide's spine. It had the girl on edge. The rogue narrowed her eyes in a sceptical manner before spinning the dagger in her hand and sheathing it. Only moments later, she pulled out Claire's money pouch. She held it up to present it before tossing it in front of the elf's feet. Claire let out a soft grunt in disgust as she heard the coins ringing on the floor. "Enjoy your day, princess," she added mockingly as she immediately moved to the backdoor. Kaide seemed to walk out rather calmly, but it was taking all of her willpower to hide her nerves. The consequences of being caught were more than anything Kaide was willing to give up; her freedom. When Kaide reached the door, she nervously pushed against it. To her relief, it opened. The elf's arrogant smirk saw her out and without looking back, Kaide shut the door behind her.

Reaching in her pocket, she played with the handful of coins she managed to snatch from the pouch. A nervous smile tugged at her lips as she quietly scoffed to herself. Maybe she had not been able to keep all of her riches, but it was still a fair catch. The rogue then quickly headed into the city.

Back in the tavern, Herron approached to check in on Claire. "Are you alright?" he asked as he knelt down to pick up the coins off the floor. "I'm fine. This actually went a lot smoother than I expected." Claire smiled victoriously as she let out a lighthearted chuckle, kneeling down to help her guard. Each encounter was intimidating, but she had faith in her guard and trusted her mentor's support. "Thank you," she let out quietly. Herron handed her the pouch with a gentle smile on his face. "It's my pleasure." After they had recollected themselves, and Nord had joined them inside, Claire apologised to the barkeep for the ruckus. She was glad this particular tiefling did not set up a fight, as tieflings were known for their infernal powers, but this was not such an encounter.

When the elf left the tavern, however, her beloved horse Josephine, was nowhere to be seen. "Josie-?" The blonde let out nervously as she saw the other horses were still in the same spot. Herron noticed the girl's distress, though she was trying to remain calm. He felt the same frustration she did, watching as she bit her lip to prevent herself from losing her cool. "That petty half-demon took my horse," Claire concluded spitefully as Nord approached as well. "I want to track Josie down as quickly as possible. I will go with Herron and meet you at the inn. Please inform Sir Seinweigh that our trip may be postponed," she instructed Nord. Herron already untied his own horse. "She will pay..." The young noble growled, clenching her fists.

