

# *Kaide & Claire*



An original story by Cenny & Anniek - Cenikicosplay



## Chapter 2

# A coin well spent



Kaide was playing with a gold coin in her fingers. A little more relaxed now, she made her way to her usual blacksmith and leatherworker. She had better spend the money, or at least what was left of it, while she still had it. The encounter with the elf was pretty nerve-wracking. She still wondered how the elf had managed to track her down so quickly. The rogue was well-versed in ridding herself of unwanted company, but this encounter was different. Pushing the thought out of her mind, she spotted the familiar face of the leatherworker, Mesut.

Mesut was working on some freshly received skins. He looked up and smiled, seeing his favourite customer come by. "Whenever I see a twinkle in your eye, I am both happy for you and concerned for those who crossed you," the tanned man chuckled. "Looking for me or Collin? I think he just left for some groceries," Mesut said as he spoke about the smith. "Both will do," Kaide let out proudly. "Today's prey got off easy," she chuckled. "But nonetheless, I have plenty to spend." She took a handful of gold pieces and proudly showed them off. Mesut gave a slight gasp at the sight of the young thief's catch. These coins were in pristine condition, too clean to be from a commoner. "Remember I told you I wanted new boots?" Kaide commented, "I finally have the budget to buy those from you."

"I'll be damned. These are too clean... Did you rob a bank or something?" the man asked as he inspected the coins closely. "I would also greatly appreciate it if you could repair this for me," Kaide started as she took off the leather dagger sheath she wore on her upper thigh. She tossed it over to the man and made herself comfortable, hopping up on top of the nearest workbench. One belt buckle was broken and the leather torn. It was partially held together with shoelace, which worked fine; it just did not look the part. "That looks pretty worn out. I could replace the straps for you, give the leather a treatment, replace your buckle and get your shoes done. If you would draw your dagger with a little more grace, you wouldn't rough up the leather so much." Mesut turned back to the coins and continued to inspect them. "For this amount, I'll even add a couple of lockpicks."



"You're not giving out free lockpi-" Collin started as he walked in, interrupted by the sight of the coins. "Oh, wowzers." The bearded man let out, mesmerised by the shine of the coins. "Kaide, hi." His slightly irritated demeanour changed when he saw the tiefling at his workbench. "Where did you get that?" Collin asked, sceptical of the cleanliness of the gold. "Don't ask too many questions. Do you want it or not?" Kaide pressed, smirking at Mesut. She looked back up at Collin when he came in closer... "I'm shopping for new gear. You think you could get me a nice set of new daggers and a couple of throwing knives? Don't worry about the cost, I'm not on a budget today," she flaunted. The rogue intended to empty her pockets as soon as possible. She wasn't one to hold onto her riches too long. One could lose the money or get robbed if you kept it in your pocket, but once spent, no one could take it from you.

Collin raised his eyebrows with a smile at Kaide's bold statement. "Well, it happens that I just finished a very neat set of throwing knives. If you would like to take a look?" the smith said as he put down the groceries that he had just gotten. The man had already moved over to get his most recent project from one of the workbench drawers. Mesut took his opportunity to continue his conversation with Kaide. "I could have your sheath fixed up by this afternoon, but the boots will take more time. If I work through the night I could have them for you tomorrow. I could take your measurements again, to make sure the fit is right if you would like." The leatherworking was interrupted by a grunt from Collin's side. "If you want to spend more time with her, you can just ask her directly," the smith teased. Kaide quickly caught onto the brotherly banter that seemed to make Mesut slightly uncomfortable. It was nothing new and it didn't bother her. Her relationship with the two craftsmen was one of convenience, she brought them good business and they didn't ask too many questions. "Collin, please shut up," Mesut scoffed. Collin let out a laugh and unfolded the cloth, revealing a set of three throwing knives. "Have a look."

Kaide hopped off the workbench and made her way over to Collin. It had been a long time since she had been able to shop without any restrictions, and she could hardly contain her excitement. The tiefling took one of the knives out of the cloth and carefully ran her finger along the blade. "These sure are sharp," Kaide mused as her finger tested the blade's edge. Without warning, the girl turned around and threw the blade into the table, embedding it into the wood mere centimetres from Mesut's hand. "HEY-," the man yelped. Kaide let out an entertained chuckle at the man's startled reaction. "I'll take them," she exclaimed when she turned back to Collin. "We have a deal then," the smith said with a smile.

The last agreements were made and Kaide paid the craftsmen a part of the price upfront. She agreed to return to the workshop the next day to pick up her boots and the repaired sheath. It wouldn't be a problem for her to stick around this part of town for a few more days now that she had some funds to find herself a decent inn to spend the night.



As the evening fell, Kaide sauntered the streets, looking for the lucky inn that she was going to spend her last bit of money on. Not that it was hard to find one around here. When it started pouring, however, Kaide stopped her search and immediately entered the first one in sight; the Rosewood inn. It was cosy, in a more luxurious way than Kaide was used to. The smell of finely cooked pork and cinnamon replaced the stale beer and stew she was familiar with, a warm fireplace keeping the nighttime chill at bay. Some guests of the inn were already having dinner, and the rogue's mouth began to water at the smell. She walked up to the bar to meet with the lady of the inn.

"I would like a room for the night, and whatever they are having," Kaide said as she pointed towards the table not far from the bar. A couple sat enjoying a feast consisting of large slabs of spiced ham, with a pint of beer to wash it down. The lady at the bar raised a distrustful eyebrow at Kaide. "If you intend to pay," the woman said with a laugh. "The ham is usually a three person meal, season bound." The woman seemed to emphasise the size and therefore the price. "You look like you had a great day," the woman let out as she wrote down the order. The tiefling wasn't surprised that the woman seemed suspicious. "Well, you could say I've definitely had worse days," she smiled. "I don't care about the price. I'll pay." She reached in her pocket and pulled out three gold pieces, placing it on the bar. "I guess this will be enough for the room. I'll pay for the dinner after." The rogue walked off and found a table in the far corner. It was perfect, as it provided a good overview of the entire inn, not to mention it was more of a secluded spot.

Her drink was brought over immediately, but another thirty minutes passed until a waiter came with the food. It looked like a gigantic feast to Kaide. There was a big chunk of meat, decorated with roasted nuts and slices of cheese. The man put the food down and smiled politely. "Enjoy," he said as he refilled her drink. Kaide politely nodded at the waiter and waited for him to take his leave. She was still in a good mood, despite the happenings of the day. In the end she still benefited from it. When she was alone, she eagerly dug into the food. She knew there was no way she was finishing it by herself, but that didn't bother her in the slightest. Tonight, she was going to enjoy the comforts only wealth could provide.

Another half an hour later, Kaide's meal was interrupted by a familiar irritated voice from the entrance. "I told you, I can't just leave her out there." The high pitched, know-it-all tone already made Kaide feel sick to her stomach. She slowly slid down in her seat in an attempt to avoid attracting too much attention. Great, Kaide managed to pick the inn the elf happened to be staying at. She kept her eyes on the blonde as she continued munching on her dinner.



Claire had walked in, accompanied by her guard who held onto her bag. Both were completely soaked by the rain. "I want to take a short break and look again. If we don't find her tonight that tiefling might sell her by morning," the blonde let out as she pulled some wet locks out of her face and wrung out her hair. Despite the noble's high quality attire, staying that long in the rain wasn't good for any type of clothing. "Why haven't we heard from Nord yet?" she quietly whined. "I don't know. Maybe Nord has already found Josephine? I am sure he will return here as soon as he has any news," Herron responded reassuringly. The guard was completely drenched himself, but still was most concerned with the elf's wellbeing. He reached out to Claire's soaked cloak, offering to take it off. As Claire cooperated, he folded the cloak over his arm. "Miss, not to be rude or anything, but are you sure you want to continue looking? Searching in the dark isn't easy. We don't want to encounter that thief in the dark of the night. Besides, you might catch a cold out in this dreadful weather." A short silence followed as the elf contemplated her next move. Her guard was right, but her heart was aching with the thought of her beloved Josephine being lost in the city. "I- I can't just leave Josie out in the cold either. Who knows what will happen to her? But you're right..." The elf reached to take her coat back. "Thank you. You need to rest as well. We'll get up just before sunrise. Hopefully Nord will have some good news to share." The lady of the inn soon came by with some blankets for her guests. "Miss Valeria, you two should get yourselves warmed up at the fireplace. I will have Lennet prepare a nice ham for you," the lady offered. "Thank you, ma'am," Claire responded, smiling politely before she was escorted towards the fireplace by Herron, who hung their clothing out to dry at a safe distance.

Kaide had little to do other than observe. Did the elf just say 'the tiefling'? Was she now being blamed for taking the noble's horse too? Why would she? Stealing a horse and trying to sell it involved too many third parties, which meant it came with a high risk of getting caught. Not to mention that the elf's pure white ride would attract attention. It was impossible for her to understand what was so special about this elf. She watched as the tall guard with dark blonde hair even pulled up a chair for her, attending to her every need. It disgusted her to the point that her entire dinner was ruined by the elf's presence. The fact that the person whose money she was spending was sitting in the very same room unnerved her. Kaide hurried to finish what she could of her meal. She lasted twenty minutes before the nerves were too much for her and made her decide to turn in early. She left some coins on the table to pay for the food before quietly getting up from her seat. The noble and her guard were conveniently facing the fireplace so Kaide took the opportunity to head for the stairs in the back of the inn. She would call it a night and retreat to her room.



Claire and Herron had been at the fireplace for a while before the food was served. Claire didn't have much appetite; occasionally glancing in the direction of the entrance in the hope that Nord would come by with good news about her horse. After warming up by the fire and a halfhearted attempt by Claire to eat something, she moved to a seat by the window, keeping eye on the entrance as the hard rain pattered against the glass. Herron had advised the noble to get some rest, but she couldn't calm her worries enough to sleep. She remained glued to the window, staring at the vague figures and shapes through the tinted glass for a good hour. The late hour and the worries in her head eventually tired the elf out enough to make her fall asleep where she sat. When Herron noticed the elf had finally dozed off, exhausted by her silent tears, he got up from the chair near the fireplace and lifted the noble in his arms to carry her to bed.

Kaide was awoken by the sound of a rooster crowing early in the morning. The tiefling groaned softly as she rolled over and pulled the blanket up further. It was barely light outside, and thanks to the rain everything was still covered in dew. She was awake, but didn't really have any schedule for the day besides picking up her newly commissioned gear. Kaide's window was facing the side of the inn where the stables were located. Just as she was about to fall back asleep, she heard an excited outcry of a familiar voice just beneath her window. "You found her?! Josephine! Oh, I missed you! I missed you so much," The elf's relieved weeping was heard clearly all the way from Kaide's room. The tiefling got up to peek through the window. The noble's mare had been found it seemed. The rogue honestly couldn't care less. She leaned out to reach for the shutters and pulled them shut before returning to bed. She could sleep in for at least two more hours before making her way back to the leatherworker and the smith.

And so, she did. Kaide got up a few hours later. The fact that the elf and her company had already left the inn was a pleasant surprise. It meant that Kaide didn't have to worry as much about being spotted, but the tiefling didn't want to hang around the inn for too long either. Chances were that the elf and her party would return here again later. She got dressed and made her way downstairs. The tiefling raised her hand towards the woman behind the bar as a casual thank you before she walked out. After Kaide paid for her commissioned gear, she will have already burned through all her funds. She already knew that the place she would spend the next night would be a lot less luxurious. With a steady pace, she made her way to Mesut and Collin's workshop.



When Kaide arrived, Collin was throwing something in Mesut's direction, which seemed to be a leather pouch. The smith chuckled and the two seemed to have been teasing one another relentlessly. "I swear to god, Collin. I will-!" Mesut hissed, but immediately quieted down when he spotted Kaide. "Kaide~" the leatherworker let out in a slight singsong voice as he watched the tiefling walk in. The man rubbed the back of his neck with his free hand and lowered the leather pouch that had just been tossed at him by his coworker. "You're back! I got your shoes done," he said and cleared his throat. "Got your shoes done." Collin repeated teasingly after Mesut in the same, slightly raised pitch. The leatherworker turned red to his ears as his colleague caught onto his tone. "You are so dead the moment she walks out," Mesut growled in a flustered tone. "Oh- no. Please. Don't mind me." Kaide interrupted without formally greeting the men and gestured for the two to continue. The tiefling leaned against Mesut's workbench. "Don't worry. I'm just here to pick up my stuff. I'll be out before you know it." She crossed her arms and scanned the workshop for anything out of the ordinary as Mesut got up to gather everything Kaide needed. "What is going on? Making bets?" Kaide asked suspiciously. The way the two craftsmen had changed their behaviour the moment she walked in was remarkable. It was nothing new for them to get on each other's nerves. "Bets? No, no no. You see, Mesut here was-" Collin couldn't even finish his sentence before he was rudely interrupted by Mesut. "Shut up!" Mesut said in a raised voice. It caused Collin to pause, before he calmly started again. "Mesut here, was telling me what he heard about the noble elf that is apparently visiting town. The daughter of Valeria. I bet you were involved in that girl's business. Something about her horse?" Collin snickered, wiping his hands clean on his apron to take the final payment from Kaide. The mood in the workshop was friendly and playful, but Mesut was clearly embarrassed by the insinuations his friend made.

At the mention of the noble elf, Kaide frowned. Great. Now that spoiled, self-absorbed elf was already the talk of the town. She hopped onto the workbench that she had been leaning against and crossed her legs while her tail tapped against the wood in a frustrated manner. "You could say something like that. I bumped into her at the market square yesterday. Really not as impressive as you'd think. Anyway, I was hoping you could throw in a discount?" she said, hoping to shift the topic away from the elf. Not to mention that the tiefling wasn't afraid of some flirtatious conversation if it meant she'd save some money. Mesut got up to get Kaide her new boots to let her try them on. "I think your catch was pretty impressive. Can I see the other half again?" Collin asked bluntly. The bearded man was clearly not into negotiation. It was not hard to piece together thanks to the rumours, the pristine coins, and Kaide's comments.



Where Kaide first seemed dead set on spending all her coin, she now realised the temporary high was already wearing off. She promised to pay though, so she would. She accepted the boots from the leatherworker, who seemed eager to help her try them on. She politely waved him off with the intent of keeping the man at a distance, but her piercing gaze ate at his resolve. "Well, I might be able to cut the price a little... The leatherwork didn't take as much time as I thought." Kaide smiled playfully at Mesut's words when the man carefully started about a possible discount. "Oh no, no Mesut. Don't fall for her golden gaze. Eyes on the golden coins." Collin warned as he impatiently gestured with his hand to receive the payment. "But what if she is not a happy customer?" Mesut suggested as he watched Kaide lace up the boots he crafted for her. "What if the town guard is not happy, looking for a little rogue who stole a noble elf's coins?" The smith's words were dangerous, but his tone wasn't. "The town guard is never happy. You act like they weren't already looking for me. Worst case, my criminal record gets bigger. They'll just put it on my tab." Kaide was not afraid of the empty threats of turning her in. If it became too heated for her around town, she would just fetch a ride to the next city. It was a solid strategy which had kept Kaide out of big trouble for a long time.

The dark haired girl looked her boots over. They looked even better than she had anticipated. "But you know I will pay, Collin. I am not one to hit and run." Kaide chuckled playfully as she got back on her feet. "You did a good job," she complimented Mesut with a smile, whose face lit up with glee. "Why, thank you Kaide," the man let out. "So, no discount then?" The tiefling chuckled in playful defeat. She pulled the coins from her pocket as she started counting them out. After handing them to the smith, she was left with two gold coins for herself. She had spent the money just as quickly as she had earned it. Not that it bothered her, the new gear would be way more durable than the coins.

Collin picked Kaide's old boots up from the floor. "You can keep my old ones. Or throw 'em out. Whatever you like." Kaide said, gesturing at her shoes. She wasn't planning on taking her new boots off, nor was she willing to hoist her old ones around with her. "I'll make sure to dispose of them before Mesut decides to put them on a pedestal," the smith remarked, at which Mesut frowned. "I'm starting to think YOU have a thing for Kaide with the absurd ideas you come up with," Mesut huffed. The two continued to playfully bicker over Mesut's interest in Kaide, which the man politely denied. "Don't get so hissy, I'm just messing with you," Collin assured his colleague. The tiefling grabbed the other gear that had been repaired for her and got dressed up again. She took the sheath, fastened the belts around her right upper thigh and shoved the throwing knives into the slots. Even though a new pair of boots, knives, and reparations didn't seem like much, it meant a great deal to Kaide.



"So Kaide, heading out again? When will we see you next?" Collin asked, knowing damn well how Kaide could disappear for months on end without any sign or word. "I don't know," she let out casually. "You should come by soon." Mesut let out with a hint of disappointment in his voice. "Don't worry, I'll be sure to visit some time." The tiefling said as she raised her hand to give a final wave goodbye.

Two days later, Kaide was roaming the city streets. She was deep in thought as she half-mindfully kept an eye open for any happenings around her that she could benefit from. The tiefling didn't really have a plan for where she wanted to go, but after the elf ordeal, it would be wise to lay low for a while. When she turned a corner near the town hall, she came across a wanted poster with a drawing. It wasn't anything shocking to see some new bounties being announced, and Kaide usually made it a sport to see if there were any rewards for delinquents she knew. However, an unpleasant surprise was staring right back at her. A wanted poster with a sketch that looked an awful lot like her. Dark messy hair in a ponytail, a set of horns and a gradient over the top half of her face. Her only luck was that her horns looked different. Kaide calmly looked around as she ripped the paper off the board. "Shit," she cursed as she crumpled the paper up in her hand and stuffed it in her bag. She had thought that it would end at the somewhat messy confrontation she had had with the elf a couple of days before. It seemed that this noble meant business. The rogue pulled the hood of her cloak a little bit further forward to cover the red markings on her face and turned around to head in the direction of the harbour. With a bounty on her head, she'd rather leave Winthstorm behind all together.

Kaide was taking in her surroundings. The harbour was pretty busy and she loved that about public spaces like this. In crowded areas there was usually a lively atmosphere and an easy escape by disappearing in the masses. Many people were out on the streets, preparing their market for the afternoon. There was a vast array of scents lingering over different parts of the market area; fresh baked breads and pastries, fish, leather, the smell of coal and exotic spices. Many sailors on the ships seemed to be taking out exotic products that they had just brought home, while others were cleaning their ship and preparing for their next journey. One group of sailors even seemed to be labouring over the lifeless body of a gigantic shark. The creature must have been at least six metres long.



Kaide walked past the docks while inspecting the ships that were anchored. She had travelled by ship before, the biggest issue now was that she couldn't afford to be picky. From the few ships that were docked, it was likely that only a couple would set sail soon. She was snapped out of her thoughts when a young boy suddenly shoved a flyer in her face. "Hey- hey you! Would you like to be a pirate?!" The young kid was spreading flyers around calling for applicants to set sail on any of the ships. Something about 'more gold than your arms can carry' and 'only for the fearless'. The boy looked a little scruffy, missing a front tooth, but he had a very enthusiastic energy about him. Kaide recognised the boy as he was usually distributing newspapers. These types of newspaper boys were often the most up to date and reliable source of information about the town, however they were also known to exaggerate their stories to make them more sensational. "A... Pirate? Never really considered it," she said as she took the flyer from the kid. More gold than your arms could carry sure sounded appealing. "Do they also hire short-term crew?" The rogue asked, as she wasn't exactly looking for a job. The kid nodded frantically as he pointed to the paper. "I heard they split the rewards from the deceased on board," the boy let out rather crudely, making a throat slitting gesture.

"Cut it out!" a big man called out to the young boy as he saw his gestures, approaching quickly. "I'm sorry, he likes to make a sensation out of the stories of the sea. We're just looking for crewmembers. Pays well, short trip, and leaves tomorrow morning." The man wiped the dirt from his hands, it was clear he had been carrying heavy cargo. The man eyed Kaide up and down and raised a brow. "You seem like you have a handy set of skills," he said as his gaze lingered on Kaide's weaponry. "She looks like she could kill pe-," "HEY! Hey! Let's not mention such things out here." The man was quick to interrupt the kid. Kaide glanced at the ship that the man was working for. She looked well taken care of, so the company clearly had enough to spend. At the same time it looked worn enough to not be suspicious or royal. Compared to the other ships in the harbour, it would be the safest option to get out of town. "You've got yourself a deal," Kaide said.

The next morning came and the ship and its crew were ready to leave. Kaide was hanging around on the top deck, overlooking the harbour. The harbour was already bustling at this early hour. Seamen were busy loading the last cargo, claiming their place to sleep on board and unpacking their humble luggage. Kaide didn't own much so she didn't have anything to unpack. She had been present at the ship since early morning and had the chance to claim one of the hammocks in the corner on the orlop deck. Everything seemed settled and she just had to push through two weeks before arriving at the next destination.



Three men that were standing at the docks caught Kaide's eye. They seemed to be talking to the harbourmaster and some papers were exchanged. The three stood out between the majority of the sailors around since they looked considerably better dressed. Two of the three were easily recognisable from their clothing. They were likely the ship's captain and his first mate. The captain looked to be of middle age and was looking the ship over, while discussing something with the young man that stuck to his side. The third man seemed to be just a little older than Kaide herself. The half-elf was neatly dressed and wore his mid-length brown hair, pulled back in a low pony-tail. Even though the guy seemed important, Kaide didn't know what his exact rank was amongst the crew.

Only a few minutes later, the captain and his first mate signalled that they were prepared to take their leave. It was a relief to Kaide. The sooner she was out of town, the better. More than half of the seamen took their position on deck and stood ready at the ropes to adjust the sail at command. The captain however had gotten himself in the next conversation, this time on deck. The man was laughing as he spread his arms open to enthusiastically welcome the last passenger that boarded. The loud laughter peaked Kaide's curiosity. When she looked over however, the captain was blocking her view of the new passenger. The tiefling walked around to the other side of the deck to get a good look. She was met with an unpleasant surprise. It was the blonde elf. The very same noble that she had had a run-in with three days ago. The tiefling froze in her spot as she immediately realised she shouldn't be on this ship. As she was still standing there bewildered, a crewmember passed by and dropped a big coil of rope in her arms. "We need all the help, missy. Stop staring and get to work." Kaide snapped out of her daze and noticed how some of the sailors were already shooting displeased glares in her direction as she wasn't doing anything useful.

The rogue kept an eye on the noble from a safe distance and eventually joined the rest of the crew to prepare to set sail. She worked herself to the far back of the group of sailors to stay out of the elf's sight and tried to blend in. There was no way she was leaving with this ship if that elf was on board too. This couldn't be real. There had to be a way out. Hell, she'd even jump straight over board if she had to.

