

# *Kaide & Claire*



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## Chapter 4

# Desires and undesires



Two days had passed since Kaide had been locked in the brig. Down there, the nights were even colder than they were a few decks above. Dereck had dropped by several times to check in on her, but the conversations never lasted long. Claire kept a close eye on him and there was plenty left for Dereck to do during the day. The tension of getting caught on board was no longer unnerving Kaide, instead it was counting down to the day they would return to Winthstorm. Unless she could convince Dereck to let her out before the authorities saw her, her chances were very slim once they returned.

"Hey," Dereck chirped playfully as he made his way down the stairs. Kaide watched as her only distraction in the day approached. Well, that and the rats at the lower deck. "Hey..." She let out quietly, sitting up and clenching his jacket in her arms. Her wrists had been shackled in front of her. "Did you get any sleep last night?" Dereck asked. "Night? When is it night and when is it day, anyway? It's hard to tell the time down here." Kaide chuckled bitterly, gently rubbing her eye. "It's fine... Are we at the next stop yet?" The tiefling watched as Dereck sat down beside the bars. "Almost. We already spotted Gaitso island in the distance. Shouldn't be long before we hit land," he confirmed. "Right," Kaide breathily replied. There was a silence in which Kaide didn't exactly know what to say. She had to play it safe, work on Dereck's guilt somehow. Anything that could get her closer to this man without being obvious about it was a step closer to her freedom.

"So... What's the deal with this Gaitso island? Is it pretty?" She asked carefully, leaning further forward to show her interest in the conversation. Dereck smiled a little awkwardly. "From what I understand, it's not a regular island. I'd like to take you out for a stroll, but I hear you don't want to end up there alone," he said. "Something about it being abandoned and haunted." "I think any place is better than on the ship of Claire Valeria." Kaide let out, emphasising the elf's name in a slightly mocking tone. "That makes two of us," Dereck chuckled in response. "Well, at least you have the choice to walk away, right?" Kaide questioned. A pained expression crossed Dereck's face as he thought about the answer. "I wish it was that simple." His response instantly sparked her curiosity. Her inquiring glances begged for answers and it was hard for Dereck not to notice them. "What?" He asked. "You don't seem all too fond of her, yet you spoke in her defence earlier. She seems to be the boss over you, but you won't let her boss you around," she let out sharply. The half elf couldn't help but laugh at her observation. "Claire and I share a history... And it's been a while since I last saw her in person," he admitted.



Dereck and Claire? Was he speaking of a past romance? This made the whole interaction more frustrating, as well as entertaining. He was apparently loyal to her, but there was a friction Kaide could possibly use in her favour. "So... What did you do to get your heart broken by her?" Kaide concluded a little too quickly. "I was the one who broke it off, actually. Not her," Dereck corrected. "Ah, I guess that makes more sense to me," the tiefling let out in a flirtatious tone, carefully eyeing Dereck up and down. Honestly, the man was not bad looking, even somewhat handsome. "We weren't a great match. It was more than seven years ago," he explained. The two shared some shy glances as Kaide tried to play on his feelings. "I'm glad you come by to keep me company, Dereck," she let out quietly, before being interrupted by a bell.

Above deck, the men were called to ready the ship as they approached the harbour. Claire wanted all hands on deck for a smooth docking. Nord was sent to look for Dereck below deck. As the man made his way down the stairs, he spotted Dereck with the tiefling prisoner. The spellcaster's presence made Kaide uneasy. This man had cast a spell to prevent Kaide from using her infernal powers, but unbeknownst to them, she had never even used them before. The rogue relied solely on her weapon skills and her quick reflexes, but Nord being able to place a curse on her or to prevent her from using certain abilities was a kind of power she could not fight. "Dereck, can you spare a moment? We have a briefing soon, the information is of utmost importance," the man stated in a friendly tone. Dereck looked back and smiled apologetically at Kaide. "Yes, I'll be there in a minute," he replied, to which the older man nodded understandingly and made his way back up. "I have to go up for the briefing," Dereck said as she stood to see him off. "Actually- I have a favour to ask," Kaide said, feeling a bit rushed with her request now that Dereck was about to leave. The man gave her a curious and questioning look. "My belongings. My dagger has a ring tied to its handle. Could you return it to me? It might not look like much, but it holds value to me," Kaide said. The question came a little unexpectedly for Dereck, who was surprised by the genuine nature of the small request. "Yes. I promise to look for it," Dereck reassured. "Alright, thank you," Kaide hummed. "Will you be good for now? I will see you after the visit," Dereck informed. "I'll be right here," Kaide chuckled lightheartedly, watching how Dereck fixed the sleeves of his blouse on his way to the stairs. Kaide let out a sigh as she once again had only her boredom for company.

About an hour had passed as the party prepared to disembark. Everything had been well planned before reaching the island to ensure the process went smoothly. The instructions given by Claire were clear; stay on the path, stick together and stay calm. The small harbour was empty, with not a single other ship in sight. A light fog settled over the area, obscuring their vision past a few metres. They set foot on land and made their way into the village. It seemed like a nice place in terms of wealth; the streets were clear, the buildings well taken care of. The eerie thing however, being that there were no people around. With each step further into the village, a heavy dragging feeling settled more and more upon their shoulders.



"Isn't it weird how empty this town is, despite the state it is in?" One crewmember noted curiously to Claire, who was leading the party with a map. "Please, refrain from questioning too much and keep your eyes open. We need to remain focused," she let out. Nord, who was scanning the area for spiritual energies, followed the elf closely. "Nothing hostile so far. I can sense we are nearby," Nord confirmed, his hands glowed with a soft golden energy as they moved in the direction of Claire's path. As they walked through a main street, the sudden sound of shutters slamming closed in the distance startled the group. Herron was quick to take a protective stance in front of Claire. Nord held his hand up in the direction of the sound, and everyone held their breath in silent tension. "It is clear. We can keep moving," Nord confirmed calmly, as the energy he sensed did not feel threatening. Claire let out a relieved sigh, briefly placing a hand on her guard's arm as a way of thanking him.

Once the group arrived, the party came to a halt in front of the shop. The building had a strange degraded look to it, squeezed unnaturally between two others. It was as if everything in the city was well taken care of, except the shop and the surrounding area. Withered weeds stuck out from in between the cracked stones and the shutters surrounding the curtained windows dangled from their hinges. The scent of dust filled the air around the shop. Claire let out a nervous hum as she inspected the door briefly before checking in with Nord. "This is the place," he confirmed. "If things take a bad turn, use this." The spellcaster held up two small flasks before handing one over to Herron and the other to Claire. "The holy water will temporarily break any dark magic; enchantment, illusion, necromancy. This should provide you a way out."

"Alright. Everyone, stick to the plan. Herron, Dereck and Jacob, with me. Nord, please guard the outside. If anything feels off, call us back," Claire confirmed one more time. The party had been given clear instructions for this encounter. Do not, under any circumstances, speak with the enchantress and do not move or look at her until the trade is complete. Only one question remained. "Why are we visiting some enchantress on a deserted island exactly? If no one is to speak with them, why would you?" Dereck asked. "Because I am seeking answers only such an enchantress can provide." Claire declared as she and the party checked their preparations one more time before heading inside.



Herron carefully pushed the door open. The creak of the hinges echoed in the dark space beyond the door as it crept open. The entire room was remarkably dark. Even though the windows were murky and glazed over with a layer of dust, it felt strange how no light from outside seemed to reach through the glass. The guard took a deep breath before he stepped in, passing the threshold first with the other three following closely behind. He felt Claire's hand resting on his upper back and continued to walk in until he spotted a small, crooked wooden counter with some lit candles and old paperwork on it. Once the last person stepped inside, the door suddenly slammed shut. Everyone jumped from the loud crash behind them, followed by an eerie silence. Claire took a moment to collect herself before speaking up. "Hello? The name is Valeria..." Claire called out carefully as a rustling sound crept through the darkness behind the small counter. She stepped beside Herron as she prepared herself mentally to face the enchantress.

A dark opening loomed behind the counter leading to the back of the shop. Herron and Claire kept their eyes on the passage while Dereck's and Jacob's attention was drawn to the eerie noises surrounding them. The silence was broken by quiet whispers, rustling, distant singing and the clattering of metal. When they looked around to pinpoint where the sound came from, they noticed the interior began to shift. Some crooked shelves were now filled with potions, jewellery, jars with fungi and curious potted plants. Others held skulls, scrolls and arrays of books that seemed to be falling apart due to old age. The walls were decorated with draped furs. Wherever they looked, something new revealed itself in the dim candle light. This shop was unlike any they had ever seen. None of the items seemed like they were local, they were almost ancient or mythical looking. Dereck quietly stared at the shop's contents, fascinated by how swiftly everything seemed to change in front of his eyes.

"Where... Did the door go?" Jacob whispered to Dereck after the man noticed the doorway they had entered through had vanished. Dereck locked eyes with Jacob for a moment as he carefully shrugged. Claire swallowed softly, growing nervous as something approached them from the dark doorway behind the counter. She couldn't see or hear it, but she could feel it coming. Herron took a deep breath as he tried to let go of his nerves, preparing for whatever was coming their way. A purple mist filtered in as quiet footsteps approached the group. An unnaturally tall figure of a woman appeared in the shadows of the passage in front of them. The woman hunched slightly as she stepped through the doorway into the light. "Welcome, travellers," The enchanting woman let out in a warm, soothing voice as she stood behind the counter, hunching over its wooden frame.



The woman looked skinny and frail, her skin a dark and dusty tone. She was dressed in worn, tattered rags; almost like a mummified being. Soiled bandages covered her eyes and the left side of her head, from which protruded a pointed, demonlike horn. Deep crimson hair was styled in what felt like a thousand braids floating around her. Her neck, chest, upper arms, wrists and even long, bony fingers were adorned in golden jewellery. Her bright red lips curled in a soft smile, slightly revealing the sharp teeth underneath as she rested her long, black claws on the crooked wooden boards. Her appearance gave everyone the chills, and Dereck quickly recognized her as a demonic entity. They were supposed to be meeting an enchantress today, not a demon.

"How can I... help you? My dear, bitter soul?" Dereck could hear the whisper of the woman as if it was right next to his ear, despite her not having moved towards him. None of the others seemed to respond to the demon speaking directly to him. Upon gazing back towards the demon, he found the shop to have changed its contents once again. Dereck found himself in a separate dimension within the shop, allowing him to communicate openly with the entity in his own personal bubble. Her gentle hitching breath waited hungrily for Dereck to speak out his desires. "Help me?" He asked carefully, noticing no one else reacted to him. "Not with anything you have in here." Dereck scoffed quietly as he looked at the jewellery and documents around him. What he desired was the freedom to do as he pleased, not the riches these shelves displayed. "Are you certain...?" The entity asked, unsatisfied with Dereck's meaningless response. Dereck's eyes soon wandered to Claire. "I can do anything, Dereck... Anything you could ever dream of," the demon whispered. "You are not the enchantress we were supposed to meet here. I know your kind," Dereck growled. "Your services come at a price, and there's nothing left for you to take from me," he said bitterly.

"An answer..." Claire said quietly in return after the entity asked her what she wanted. She was surprised by the appearance of the enchantress, expecting her to look differently. It had been said the enchantress was breathtaking in her beauty, and one glance was all it took to be lured in by her charms. To Claire's surprise, the being in front of her held no such draw from the brief glances she stole. Claire tried to not let her judgement get the better of her. "I want to know how my mother passed away. You will not tempt me with mere illusions, I will know it's not real," the elf let out quietly. "My dear, they are not illusions. I can do anything," the enchantress promised in a tempting tone. "I can do so much more than just give you an answer..." As the enchantress came closer, Claire could hear a familiar voice singing in the distance. The warm gentle breeze of a sunny spring day blowing through her hair. A quiet piano playing as she was pulled in by the soft and warm voice of her childhood memories. Claire could feel her breath come to a halt, closing her eyes as she listened to the notes. How long it had been since she heard this symphony, pulling on her heartstrings. The shelves and walls shifted to reveal sealed letters and sheets of music as she tried to look where the voice of her mother came from. "The magical stone you carry with you will suffice. But is that truly the request you want to waste it on? There is so much more for you to gain, Claire... And so much more that you could offer."



"Any wish, even that which is deemed impossible. Everyone always has something to offer. Would you want that?" The demon let out in Dereck's dimension. "You can't change the past," Dereck interrupted as he darted his eyes back into the shop, glancing at some items he recognized from his childhood. A wooden toy sword he crafted in the woods, the handheld catapult he caused a lot of trouble with and his favourite deck of cards. "If I could give it to you... Would you want it back...?" The enchantress cooed, towering further over Claire to reach closer to Dereck. As her hands rested on the elf's shoulder, Claire let out a soft groan in discomfort. "Do you miss it dearly?" The whisper continued. Dereck could feel a cold breath beside his ear as the entity continued. The items in the shop shifted once again as he felt the walls closing in on him more and more by the second. "I can give you anything you desire... But I can also rid you... Of your un-desires..." The demon promised, wrapping one claw around Claire's neck, causing the elf's breath to falter. The situation made Dereck feel uncomfortable and he sternly kept his eyes on Claire in order to avoid eye contact with the entity as it continued its efforts to tempt him. "If I would have asked you six years ago... Would I have been able to tempt you?" The soothing voice whispered once again in his other ear.

Dereck was about to look away once again until he noticed the long fingernails started to close around Claire's throat. The demon was now standing over Claire, who seemed tense. "Tell me what you truly want, Dereck," The demon whispered once more, sending a shiver down his spine. Noone reacted to the entity taking hold of Claire or the elf's uncomfortable demeanour, and it made Dereck certain he was the only one seeing it.

On Herron's end, the whispers were a lot quieter. In his dimension, he was hearing a quiet happy humming from Claire. The gentle voice of the entity whispered as the room seemed to darken, apart from a shining light on Claire standing beside him. "Does it... make your heart ache? To speak your desires?" The entity murmured in Herron's ear. The guard knew not to respond or look at the enchantress, but he couldn't help but watch Claire. "No need to be shy, Herron," the entity whispered again as the elf's face gently turned to him. He could hear her giggle as if she was at a distance. "Is it the elf, Herron? Do you desire her...?" The man didn't respond, gazing down at the floor like he had been instructed. Herron was much more difficult to crack, but it wasn't hard to see what the man longed for. It embarrassed him that the enchantress was straightforward about it too. "Herron-" Claire let out; troubled, as she felt something tightening around her neck, making it hard to breathe. Her guard however, knew not to be distracted and did not respond to the elf's call for help. It didn't take long for the entity to realise Herron was too headstrong to give in, so she merged his dimension with Jacob's as her focus shifted to easier prey.



Through Jacob's eyes the room was very bright. There were riches everywhere, the finest wines, contracts galore and the sound of people cheering and calling his name. The smell of a feast and the giggles of cute ladies filled the room. When Herron looked back at Jacob, he saw the man laughing almost manically while he stared into the abyss. "I want it! I want all of it!" The man yelled out excitedly as his hands reached up to the demonic entity. The guard was startled with what he witnessed. The demon glanced at Herron with a content grin, making the guard quickly avert his eyes again. What was Jacob thinking? Was this what the demon was after? Would it truly be possible to have any wish fulfilled? Herron searched for Claire through the noise encompassing him. The elf had her hand on her chest, like she was worried. Things had begun to go awry and it made Herron uneasy. He reached for his pocket and wrapped his hand around the small flask of holy water that Nord had given him. In case of an emergency, it would buy them time to escape the shop.

Claire was focussed on her trade, but noticed the dark presence in the room was making her feel heavy. Her initial call for help to her guard seemed to have fallen on deaf ears, and the longer she was inside the more pressure she felt on her throat. Breathing became difficult, but she told herself it was just her nerves. A short glance in Herron's direction showed the man was still standing nearby with his hand on the flask, giving her enough peace of mind. The sound of the piano started to occasionally miss the notes and the singing became a quiet humming. Claire closed her eyes again, doing her best to maintain her focus. One slip up could cost her or any of her colleagues their lives. "Just the stone... In trade- For one answer-," she let out firmly, trying to convince herself the peaceful sounds around her were not real. The gentle familiar touch of her mother's hand resting on her shoulder, accompanied with the sweet voice right behind her made Claire falter for a moment. "You'll never get an opportunity like this again, Claire..." Tears welled up as Claire felt her touch, freezing for a moment before reluctantly pulling away. "No- I stand by it-" Claire's breath hitched as she tried to swallow her tears. She felt cramped up, her throat tight and her breathing becoming more shallow by the second.

Claire dared to open her eyes, finding the demon holding onto her neck as it loomed over her. "What- What are you doing?" Claire exclaimed, petrified. "It seems you are not the only one interested in a trade...Your party members have better offers," the demon growled. The unopened letters displayed on the walls for Claire were being torn to shreds wherever she looked. "Wait- No! Leave them alone!" She yelled, desperately reaching her hand for the demon's arms to pull them off her, but the grip became tighter and more painful by the second. "H-er-n!" Claire could barely manage to make a sound, desperately trying to reach for the flask on her belt.



Dereck heard the crackling of the flames around him, and a young girl calling out desperately. The girl from his memories pleaded for help as the heat of the fire licked at his skin. As Claire's and Dereck's dimensions merged, Dereck watched as the letters from Claire's room fell to the floor and caught fire. The elf was desperately calling out with what little breath she had left. Dereck snapped out of his trance as Claire suddenly reacted to the demon's assault. "Claire-!" He called out. "Let her go!" He screamed as he stepped towards her to help.

"Is that all you want in return?! For all of this?! Give it to me, please!" Jacob pleaded, desperate for the wondrous and fulfilling life that was promised to him. Unphased by the demon now hovering over him, he reached toward the creature's outstretched arms. "Say it. Say... we have a deal." The demon cooed, promising that the lavish lifestyle for Jacob was a mere confirmation away. As Herron caught sight of Dereck suddenly lunging at Claire, he instinctively reached out an arm to her. "WE HAVE A DEAL! WE HAVE A DEAL!" Jacob cried as the demon attached itself to the man. Herron watched in horror as he saw the demon transform into an indescribably hideous creature that started to merge with Jacob's form. The moment Claire felt her throat being released, she gasped for air. "The holy water- Herron!" She coughed. As Claire's legs buckled underneath her, Herron quickly caught her in his arms. He yanked the flask from his belt, opening it to spread out its contents around them.

The holy water tore down the dimensional barriers and illusions, pulling them all back into the reality of the dusty, dark shop. A loud screech was heard as the demon that was halfway merged into Jacob was now forced to withdraw itself. Dereck reached for the second bottle on Claire's belt, desperately trying to pull it off as he saw the entity's true form. As Dereck turned again, Jacob's scream momentarily filled the room, before it was cut short as the demon's violent separation caused the man's body to shatter. Horror filled the rest of the group as the room turned red around them.

Another blood curdling scream pierced the silence, this time from Claire as she witnessed what happened to Jacob. Herron was quick to cover the noble's mouth as her legs gave out once more, putting her full weight onto Herron. The demon sat over what remained of Jacob, gleefully devouring him. The man had paid with his life.



Dereck was too stunned to move, his grip on the flask tightening as his hands shook. The dusty shop fell silent; except for the sound of sharp teeth gnawing on flesh, like a hound worrying at a bone. Unsure what to do next, all of them stared in horror at what was happening. Herron held onto Claire tightly, slowly shifting his hand to cover her eyes instead of her mouth. It left more room for her to breathe, while she was too afraid to make a noise. "Dereck... The holy water..." Herron let out calmly, too afraid to move any further. Any sound or movement could alarm the monster. Dereck barely glanced back before staring at his hand again. Without much thought, he uncorked the flask and flung the contents in the entity's direction, sending another demonic screech through the room. Dereck barely registered his actions as he flung some of the liquid over himself, Herron, and Claire. The idea of turning away from the entity was both terrifying and a relief. Claire felt the splatters on her face, and she tensed until the screeching died out into silence.

This time, only the soft huffing of the party filled the room as the threat seemed to have gone. With one party member lost, the other three had to take a moment to process what had just happened. As they caught their breath they looked around the shop once more. Everything had escalated so quickly that they were at a loss for words. "Why- Did you not tell me this was a demonic entity?" Dereck let out, agitated as he glared at the blood covering their clothing. Herron noticed that Claire was still shaken, and the girl had yet to process everything. "Jacob- Just fucking died, Claire. That was not just an enchantress," Dereck pressed as he clenched his fist. "Dereck. This is not the time. We need to get out of here!" Herron barked back, checking on Claire as she leaned against him. "Was that what you wanted? Did you sacrifice him?" Dereck continued, now feeling the actual adrenaline kick in. "No-" Claire muttered quietly, struggling to stay standing as she stared in horror at Jacob's remains. "Don't look..." Herron suggested, gently leading her in the direction of the door. Dereck watched as Claire and Herron made their way to the exit.

The group outside had been waiting several hours before the door opened. They were shocked with what they saw. First the elf and her guard stepped outside, their clothing drenched in red like they had come back from a war. Their gruesome appearance gave the waiting party a shock. "Claire...?" Nord let out worried as he stepped in, reaching out to the elf that seemed to be staring absent mindedly. "Who has been injured?" Nord asked as he briefly looked the noble over, who was as pale as a ghost. "We lost Jacob," Herron said matter of factly. "Dereck is alright." The guard nudged his head back in the direction of the shop's entrance. Nord nodded, grateful for the clear update, as he watched Herron guide Claire towards a stone fence to the side to sit down for a moment.



As Nord entered the shop, he found Dereck staring at his colleague's remains on the floor. It was a gruesome sight. "Dereck, my boy. Please come outside," Nord instructed, waiting for him to react. When the dark haired man didn't move, Nord approached him instead. "I'm sorry for what happened. I think the enchantress was long gone. You were likely facing an entity that had taken her place," the man explained, judging from the state of the shop. He reached out to Dereck's shoulder, trying to be supportive, but his gesture was coldly rejected. "Don't- Touch me," Dereck groaned as he yanked himself away from Nord's gentle hand. "Jacob fucking died, Nord. I saw the man being ripped to shreds... I need a drink," Dereck hissed, angrily turning towards the door. Nord was about to object to the man's poor choice for coping, but looking around once more he fell quiet. This was never supposed to happen and if he had known, he would have never let the four of them go in on their own. They were lucky to have even made it out alive. He reached out to a flask of holy water to pour some of its contents over his late colleague. "I'm sorry, Jacob... Thank you for your service..." The man whispered pained before turning away.

Back at the ship, the remaining men were shocked to see the group's return. It took them a lot longer than they had planned and the crew had assumed the worst. The red stains on their clothes and a missing crew member set everyone on high alert. Despite being curious about what exactly went down, no one dared to question them. None of the group that had gone inland had really spoken up once they were back, apart from the announcement that Jacob hadn't made it. Claire was escorted to her room onboard by Herron, while Dereck preferred to get the worst stains out at the docks. Everyone prepared to set sail once more. They knew the island was bad news and the sooner they were out, the better.

Claire remained in a stunned silence as she stood inside her cabin. The maid was startled when she saw the noble covered in blood, but was quickly reassured by Herron that she was okay. She asked if she had to prepare a bath, but the mere idea that the elf would soak in the same liquids that stained her clothing made her sick to her stomach. A slight shake of the elf's head said enough. As the maid tended to the girl and got her out of her sticky attire, Herron turned to face the wall. He didn't want to make Claire feel uncomfortable, but didn't want to leave her side either. He took off some of his own pieces of clothing that were stained the most. Claire was soon down to her undergarments, and luckily everything underneath her clothing had remained dry and clean. It left the maid with the task of taking care of the noble's hands, face, and hair.



"I will get you some nice warm water. You stay seated, alright?" The maid instructed, guiding Claire to sit down on the nearby chair. She gave Herron a slight pat on the shoulder as she passed him on her way out. When the door closed, Herron could hear a quiet sniffing starting behind him. "Hey... It's okay," Herron let out quietly. "We're safe now." "What have I done...?" Claire let out as she softly started sobbing. "Hey-," Herron tried as his heart broke at her distressed voice. "It's okay..." he continued. "What happened isn't your fault. Is there anything I can do for you?" He asked, to which the elf continued to quietly sob, shaking her head even though it was outside of Herron's view. The elf's soft gasp followed by silence made Herron worried. "Claire?" He asked, before turning around to check if the elf was alright. He saw her sitting in a light coloured under blouse with long legged underpants. Despite her being entirely covered, it was the least clothing Herron had ever seen on the noble. Claire's bottom lip trembled as she stared at her bloodstained hands, trying to hold back her sobs. She was convinced it was her fault that her associate met such a terrible fate. She had put all of them in such a dangerous situation. The blood on her face was smeared from wiping her tears away. It made the blonde painfully aware of the dirt on her skin and the literal 'blood on her hands'.

"Hey- hey look at me," Herron cooed as he got down on one knee, sitting in front of the noble to hold her hands. "We're going to wash it off, okay? It's going to be okay." He pressed. "I'm sorry I couldn't protect you from that, and I'm thankful Dereck was so quick to take action," Herron said. Claire looked up to lock eyes with Herron for a moment, until the maid walked in. The blonde carefully pulled her hands back from Herron's, sniffing as the maid came by with a bucket and cloth. "Alright, let me wash this off for you. We'll get you freshened up." The maid smiled sweetly, sitting down beside Claire to reach out for her hand. "Okay- Okay..." Claire muttered thankfully. "I'll bring the dirty clothing below and freshen up as well. I will see you later, okay?" Herron smiled reassuringly, carefully picking up Claire's discarded clothing before he left.

When Dereck finished rinsing the largest stains out of his clothing at the docks, he made his way back on deck. Nord was waiting for him to show up and speak about what had happened. "Are you alright?" The tall elf asked. "Couldn't be better, Nord. This trip is a bloody nightmare," he huffed sarcastically. "How is Claire..? I may have been too harsh on her," Dereck concluded. Thinking back on how he lashed out at Claire, despite the noble being equally unprepared for the horrors they had faced. "She's very upset," Nord let out calmly. "Promise me you will be patient. If you feel anger, don't project it on her," he pressed. "I'll speak with her later," Dereck let out as he watched Herron walk out with Claire's drenched clothing. "Now is not exactly the time anyway," he added. "You should get changed too," Nord suggested, smiling at Dereck's wry chuckle. "I will."



When the ship set sail again, the rumours spread like wildfire among the crew, and had even reached Kaide's cell in the brig. She overheard a conversation between sailors who had been looking for a place to discuss the rumours about the horrors without too many bystanders. It seemed things hadn't exactly gone as planned. One of the Valeria associates by the name of Jacob, hadn't made it back. She knew stories like these could be exaggerated, but the distraught voices of the men sharing their story said enough. This ending had been truly gruesome.

Several hours had gone by before Dereck finally showed up. The man was wearing something different than when he left. He had brought a tray of what looked like stew and bread for Kaide's dinner. "Hey," Kaide said quietly, to which the man briefly smiled in return. "Hey," he replied as he approached. He leaned his back against the bars, sliding down until he sat on the floor then placing the tray beside him. A sigh left the man's lips as Kaide curiously looked him over before inspecting the tray he put down. "Sorry," he apologised, "It was chaos on deck. I hope you didn't starve yet," he chuckled quietly. "I'm fine," Kaide replied. "Usually no one really comes down here, except for today," she noted, scooting closer to Dereck to be able to reach for the food on the tray. "So, where are we headed next?" the tiefling asked as she reached out for the bowl of stew first. "Ornitheas island, or known as chicken island," Dereck said, watching the girl's chained hands stick through the bars. To Kaide's surprise, the man gently took a hold of her wrist as she reached for the tray. She froze for a moment before he turned to reach into his pocket. "Chickens?" Kaide repeated inquisitively as she felt him put something metallic in the palm of her hand. "Only in case of an emergency," Dereck warned in a quiet voice. It became clear what he meant when she pulled her hands back. Two of her own lockpicks lay in her palm. "I looked for your ring. But I couldn't find it. Chances are one of the crew took it. With how many hands your belongings have been through, anyone could have taken it. I'm sorry," Dereck added apologetically. Kaide looked at him with bewildered eyes. The news about her ring being missing devastated her, but there was nothing within her power she could do. She stared at the metal pins in her hand. The guy definitely had a death wish, providing her with a way to escape like this. "Thank you..." she whispered as she made sure to put them away safely in her pocket.

Dereck didn't want something bad to happen to Kaide, but he also considered her smart enough not to attempt her escape right away. "There are Valeria associates on the island in need of a contract renewal," Dereck said, "but I'm sure it will be a pleasant distraction for everyone after today's nightmare," he added. "I overheard the stories," Kaide cautiously mentioned, reaching out to the bowl once again to eat. "So, you're all leaving the ship when we get there? When do we arrive?" Kaide asked. "I think in a day or so. Getting bored of the brig already?" Dereck chuckled, "It's still an island, so I wouldn't put your bets on an escape there." She smiled cheekily in return. "I was just starting to enjoy your company here. I'll feel bad knowing I won't see you again after Winthstorm," Dereck admitted. Kaide swallowed her mouthful of stew before she replied. "No more 'devil' on board, I bet the snobby elf will be delighted," Kaide huffed as she finished her bowl.



"Devil, hm?" Dereck let out, watching the girl return the empty bowl to the tray to get the stale biscuit. "Just sheer curiosity; but which one of your parents was the-" Dereck struggled to get the word devil past his lips now that he was directly relating it to Kaide. Without knowing whether her roots came from a tiefling or directly from an infernal being, he put his fingers to his forehead to mimic her horns. "You know? Do you call it a demon?" He asked. Kaide smiled to herself and slightly shook her head. Everyone always wanted to know where she inherited her infernal features from. "My dad." Kaide started. "My mom was human." She didn't even bother to look at Dereck as she answered. "Was?" Dereck cautiously repeated after Kaide, finding her choice of words remarkable. "She passed away," she answered curtly. "Right. I'm sorry," Dereck said, awkwardly averting his gaze as well.

"What about you? Which one of your parents is the-" Kaide took another bite of the bread as she kept the conversation going. She brought her hands up to her ears and stuck her fingers out as if she elongated them, "- you know?" She mockingly mirrored his question and gestured back at him in the exact same manner, asking about his elven roots. Dereck looked back to see the girl mimic him, it lifted his mood and made him chuckle. "My mom was," he said quietly, reaching out to feel his ears. "How's the food?" Dereck asked, turning the motion of touching his ear into a casual neck rub. "The food is just fine. I'm teasing you, you didn't really have to answer that. Thanks for not forgetting about me," Kaide hummed as she grabbed the drink from the tray to wash down the dry bread.

"Dereck," Claire called out from the staircase, making her way down. "I'll be up in a minute," he called in return, only to spot the noble already approaching. "I'm honoured. Her majesty herself decided to pay me a visit," Kaide muttered sarcastically. "What are you doing down here?" The elf let out; a hint of irritation in her voice. "You got me locked up in here, remember?" Kaide scoffed jokingly. "Not you-" Claire hissed, folding her arms over. "I said I'll be up in a minute," Dereck repeated to Claire's dismay. "I don't want you fraternising with the tiefling. I will consider that mutiny, Dereck," the noble let out, concerned. "You already embarrassed me once by opposing my orders. Don't do it twice," she warned. "Can you stop being so fussy, trying to control me? The entire trip you approach me with courtesy, only to oppress me right after," Dereck barked defensively. "Oppress you...?" Claire let out a pained scoff. "You want to talk about oppression?" She added spitefully. "Do you?" Kaide interrupted with a wry chuckle. "Isn't being locked up for my mere existence considered oppression too?"



Claire stepped closer towards the cell, locking eyes with the tiefling. "You have quite some nerve showing up on my ship after the stunt you pulled. Why my ship? You really felt so set on revenge that you were willing to gamble your chances by following me?" "Claire, leave her out of this," Dereck implored. "I was looking for a way out of town and your ship happened to be the first one departing. Call it what you want; fate, stupid coincidence, bad luck. But if I had known you'd be on it beforehand, I would have picked another ship. Trust me," the rogue hissed.

"Looking for a lift out of Winthstorm? Why? Did you get cold feet after all the robbing and stealing? In need of a new place to hide and smear your name?" Claire asked, standing at the bars, glaring down at Kaide who hadn't moved from her spot. Dereck was about to object once again, but Claire's hand gesture told him to keep his mouth shut. "I saw the wanted poster they found in your bag. Stealing for a living, probably ending innocent lives for the convenience of avoiding the consequences. The authorities will be happy to have you." Claire's tone sounded threatening. The thought of what would happen with Kaide after she was handed over to the authorities left her cold. Through the law, thieves got what they deserved. "Claire, she has done nothing wrong since boarding your ship," Dereck pressed once again. "What about all the innocent people she stole from before then? It would be the right thing to do," Claire scoffed.

"Don't start with me about morals. As if you're such a saint," Kaide replied, getting up on her feet to face the elf up close. "I heard you led your party into a demon's lair and one of them didn't live to tell the tale," Kaide bit back at her. "It was an enchantress we were supposed to meet- It is none of your business anyway!" Claire let out in frustration, "I don't know why you think you can speak to me this way. That arrogance and audacity will cost you more than you realise. Once we arrive back at Winthstorm your pathetic life of robbery will be over," Claire let out with a grim expression. "You can't blame me for just trying to survive," the rogue growled. "You didn't need to speak with Dereck, did you? You just came down here to spit on me." Claire darted her eyes to Dereck. The man's expression and gentle head shake reminded her why she had come below deck in the first place. And with that realisation, she turned away. "I expect you to meet me upstairs, Dereck."

The tiefling wasn't finished, however. "Go ahead and turn me in. Maybe the glory of catching a pickpocket will make up for the fact that you caused the murder of one of your crew." Kaide threw at Claire's back as she began to walk away. The elf's expression suddenly darkened as she stopped in her tracks. "Take your words back," the elf let out as she felt the guilt riddle her with anger, turning back towards Kaide.



To Claire's frustration, Kaide didn't respond to her demand, casually leaning against the bars instead. "Take. Your. Words. Back. Or you will be sorry," Claire repeated in a very cold tone. She had barely calmed down from the shock of her colleague being torn to bits, and the tiefling's attitude set her blood boiling. Claire stormed back towards the bars. Kaide watched the elf approach once more, unimpressed. This noble didn't seem like the type to start a physical fight, and the rogue was confident her threats were empty. The tiefling's smile faltered however, as the elf grabbed the keys to the cell on her way past. "Claire, what are you going to do?" Dereck asked in disbelief, "Beat her up?" he added as he stood. Even Dereck was surprised to see the elf unlock the cell door. "I am going to teach her some respect," Claire growled. The tension in the room escalated as the cell door opened. Kaide cautiously pushed away from the bars and took a calculated step backwards to distance herself from the door.

"Apologise this instant. I will not let you disrespect me!" Claire hissed, standing in the door opening. "Yes ma'am," Kaide responded sarcastically, briefly brushing her tongue past her pointy fangs as she looked the elf up and down. "Well- I'm waiting." Claire voiced expectantly with a threatening undertone. "I'm sorry." The rogue's mocking unapologetic tone didn't escape the elf's notice. Claire balled her fists as she felt a spiteful rage pulse through her veins. On the other side of the cell, a smirk tugged at Kaide's lips as she watched her words get under the elf's skin. Despite the hopeless position she was in, it felt like a challenge to push the elf over the edge with some petty words. She wasn't going to allow Claire to simply command respect. A moment of silence lingered in the air as the two women stared each other down.

"Wipe that grin off your smug face. I don't like it." Claire inquired, breaking the silence.

"Why don't you make me?" Kaide wasn't planning to allow Claire to have the last word. Dereck could see where this was headed and stepped forward to try and intervene.

"Claire, that's enough. Let's go upstairs."

Glancing back towards Dereck, Claire gave a disgruntled huff. "You're right. I shouldn't waste my breath on a pointless quarrel with a bilge rat."

Kaide only scoffed to herself in response to the insult Claire threw at her. She had been called so many names in her life that it barely made an impact. "So that's what someone with a superiority complex sounds like?" She hummed just loud enough for Claire to hear. "No wonder you always have these men around to kiss your ass."

"Kaide-" Dereck admonished. The backtalk of the tiefling definitely wasn't helping his attempt to defuse the argument.

Claire, who was already cooking with hatred, was tipped over the edge by Kaide's latest insult. She didn't think twice. The elf suddenly stepped forward and launched an un-coordinated punch at Kaide. The tiefling's eyes widened in surprise as she barely managed to dodge the attack. "Woah- Woah. Hey!" Kaide let out as she staggered backwards to avoid the elf's wild swing, backing towards the wall, shackles rattling as she moved.



"Apologise!" The elf demanded sternly, preparing to launch another swing at Kaide. "Are you nuts?!" Kaide replied, taking up a defensive stance. The next strike sent the tiefling dancing to the right, before she tried to slip past the elf to prevent herself from being backed into the corner. Claire jerked her right arm back to which the elf's left elbow met with the tiefling's side when she passed. Kaide groaned at the impact but kept moving, preferring a more evasive strategy compared to Claire's rage fueled onslaught. As she slipped past the elf, she felt Claire grab her tail in an attempt to keep a hold of her. "Really?! That's a low move." She hissed through gritted teeth.

Before Claire could take another swing, the tiefling yanked her tail back, throwing the elf off balance for a moment. "Rude," Kaide let out angrily. When the elf turned towards her, she took the opportunity and roughly shoved Claire away from her, trying to create distance between them.

As the tiefling took a brief moment to check her tail, Claire threw herself towards Kaide's waist; tackling her to the floor where the two continued to struggle to stay out of each other's grasp. Despite the attacks not being as nasty as scratching or hair pulling, it was still like an escalated catfight. Kaide tried to stop the elf from lashing at her face by swinging her arms in front of her, hitting Claire with an accidental blow to her jaw from the tiefling's elbow. It hurt, but only slowed down the fight for a mere second before it fueled Claire even more. "I said; apologise!" Claire yelled as they continued to fight. Kaide tried to get a grip on both the elf's wrists, obviously not wanting to get hit. The odds were stacked in Claire's favour as Kaide stood no chance to successfully defend herself from all blows with her hands chained at the wrists. "What do you want an apology for?! For speaking the truth?! Not everything can always go your way, princess. Get used to it," Kaide growled.

"Claire, stop!" Dereck stood at the doorway of the cell, at a loss for what to do. He wanted to pull the two women apart and stop this ridiculous scenario, but he didn't want to hurt them either. The sound of hurried footsteps approached from behind as Herron came rushing down the stairs after he overheard the shouts, accompanied by the sounds of a struggle. "What is going on?" The guard asked as he spotted Dereck standing at the open cell door. It was only when Herron approached that he saw the two girls fighting on the floor, Claire viciously throwing punch after punch at Kaide. "What are you doing, just watching?!" Herron scolded, pushing past Dereck. Dereck hesitated and looked from Herron to the girls. He went quiet as he just watched the two struggle. "... Damn." He hummed in a suggestive tone, immediately followed by a pained grunt from Kaide who caught a direct blow to the face. "Yeah, you're right-" He added, correcting himself as he realised this fight was not going to end well by itself. Kaide was dazed for a moment as a sharp pain shot through her nose, followed by a warm feeling that crept down over her upper lip.



While both Herron and Derreck awkwardly searched for an opportunity to put an end to the quarrel, Kaide tried to move from underneath the elf. She hooked her foot behind Claire's leg and kicked up before rolling her opponent onto her side. The rogue was halfway through her attempt to get on top of the other when she felt the elf's leg shift above her thigh, making it impossible for her to get up. With Claire focussed on their legs, Kaide took the opportunity to grab onto her wrists. However, what was supposed to work to her advantage soon became a disadvantage. As she tightly held onto Claire's wrists, the elf stretched both arms above Kaide's head, forcing her arms up as well before rolling Kaide onto her back again. Just as quickly as Kaide had seemed to have taken the upper hand, she lost it again. Once Kaide realised having her arms up would leave her defenceless she let go of Claire's wrists, hoping to protect herself once more. Kaide immediately realised her mistake as Claire grabbed the chain that linked Kaide's manacles and pinned the tiefling's arms above her head. With her hands pinned, Kaide was unable to defend herself any longer.

Kaide looked up at the noble with wide eyes, trying to anticipate the elf's next attack when she noticed Claire was completely shaking. The noble's cheeks were wet with tears. Her expression however was still locked in anger and frustration. Only requiring one hand to pin both of Kaide's, Claire was left with her right hand free to throw another punch. "Get off of me!" Kaide growled as she pulled on the shackles. With no defences left, she saw the elf's fist coming in her direction and squeezed her eyes shut. Flinching, she averted her face in a desperate attempt to brace for the impact... but nothing came.

"That's enough, Claire Valeria!" Dereck called out the noble's full name with Claire's right wrist firmly in his grasp. Judging by the shaking of the elf's arm, she had not intended to hold back. If it wasn't for Dereck, Kaide would have received the full blow to her face. Kaide only opened her eyes after she heard Dereck speak up. She was met with the sight of Claire towering over her, her hand still balled into a fist mere centimetres from her face, held back by Dereck. When she looked up, she saw Herron stepping towards them as well.

As soon as Dereck managed to interrupt the fight, Herron was there to back him up. The guard stepped on the chain that linked Kaide's manacles to hold her down so Claire could let go. The last thing he needed now was for the tiefling to refuel the fight. Kaide was trying to catch her breath as she looked from Claire to Dereck and back. The entire fight had come to an abrupt halt. The rogue didn't dare to move anymore. The look in her eyes was one of fear as she skittishly locked eyes with Claire for a moment.

Claire seemed dazed, judging by the way she absentmindedly stared at Kaide pinned underneath her. It took the elf a few seconds to come to her senses and lower her fist. Her spiteful expression had changed into one of shock. Herron reached out to Claire's left arm to help her back on her feet. "Claire- Are you alright?" He asked.



Whatever drove Claire to this moment, was not just something between her and Kaide. It was unlike the noble to lash out like this. It was a side of Claire that even Herron had never seen in all six years of being her guard. Claire looked up at Herron as she got up with his help. Finally back up on her feet, she instantly pulled her arms free of both men's grasp. "I'm fine." She replied as she stepped away.

Still pinned down on the floor boards, Kaide watched as Claire left the brig in silence. Herron was surprised by how Claire had pulled away from him and was walking out on her own. Honestly, he felt a bit rejected because of it. The guard hesitated for a moment, before he made up his mind. "I'm going after her," Herron said, locking eyes with Dereck. "She is your responsibility for now," he warned, before stepping off the chain that held Kaide down and following after the elf.

Kaide waited for the guard to disappear out of sight as well. She groaned and sat up, not wanting to admit she actually needed the help. She moved the manacles aside to get a look at her wrists. Her skin was irritated and bruised from all the pulling on the shackles. Aside from that, a bruised side, and a bloody nose, she had gotten off quite well. She leaned back against the bars before she wiped her nose with her forearm. "I had it under control," she muttered, looking at the blood smear that her nose left behind.

Dereck knelt down next to her with a smile of disbelief. "Are you serious?" Kaide's stubborn attitude amused him. "You shouldn't have provoked her. She would have broken your face if we hadn't stepped in. I know Claire, but trust me when I tell you that I have never seen her like this before," he said. "Then what should I have done? Just let her berate me?" Kaide inhaled sharply through her teeth as she pinched the bridge of her nose and looked up in an attempt to stop the bleeding. "Well, it would have saved you a nosebleed," Dereck replied with a lighthearted chuckle. "Don't tilt your head back," he said, carefully placing his hand on the back of the girl's neck and gently pulling her to lean forward. "Tilting back will cause the blood to run into the back of your throat.

"You don't need to coddle me. I know how to handle a nosebleed," Kaide replied, caught off guard by the man's tender gesture. "This is not my first, you know. I've received quite some beatings before," she scoffed. "Based on your pretty face, I'd call that a bluff," Dereck replied flirtatiously as he withdrew his hand. Baffled by the sudden compliment, Kaide looked up, locking eyes with Dereck. She wasn't interested in Dereck like that, but she had to admit it would be convenient to have an ally on board. "Stay put. I'll go get you a washing cloth," he promised.

