

Kaede Thompson was beginning to wish she hadn't taken that last right turn in the tunnels under Mercy. Blood trickled from her left ear and both nostrils and matted her black hair. Her pretty Japanese features were a swollen mass of purple. Her head pounded viciously every time she tried to get a handle on her thoughts, something that was becoming more and more difficult as time went on – mostly due to the constant probing and attempts at brainwashing through psionic assaults from the two Fortunata who stood by and watched her. Groaning a little, she slumped against the wall of her cell.

An avid urban explorer, Kaede had always shown a knack for knowing just where to go when she was crawling through the dank underbelly of the Etoile Isles – she'd narrowly miss cave-ins, dodge packs of Infected and skirt patrols without even trying. She was practically a legend, an unstoppable finder of all the secret nooks and interesting spots under the crumbling cities above. She was never sure how she knew where she needed to go; she told her friends once it was just a hunch. She had no idea what the Fortunata corps wanted with her, especially because she was twenty years older than they normally grabbed children, if not more. The rumors were vague on the whole timeline thing; some even claimed the spiders bred the psionic bitch patrol in vats somewhere. Whatever the real truth was, it didn't matter now.

Being a legend wasn't enough to get her out of the fire this time. She wondered, between the reprogramming attempts, threats and actual physical violence, if someone had blocked her gift the day she was caught – it wasn't like her to make a mistake that obvious. She had, at the time, assumed right was better than left at a tunnel split. She followed the dank, old sewer system to a dead end with a rusted metal grate in it. Grinning, she had applied her foot to it and kicked it in – only to come face to face with a Wolf Spider brigade headed by a Fortunata Mistress. Words were exchanged and Kaede was hauled off for 're-education' and a position in the 'esteemed' Fortunata career, whether she wanted it or not.

The Fortunatas had backed off and left her alone in the cell again. She was sure they were still watching, could almost feel the probing tendrils of their thoughts in her head, but she didn't care anymore. She was convinced that one way or the other, she wasn't leaving this cell – either they'd get what they wanted and her brain wouldn't be her own anymore, or she'd be dead. Kaede was as good as gone. She'd never see her friends and family again.

She tipped over, landing on the floor with a thump, and cried herself to sleep.

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"You know, she has resisted far longer than I thought," the lithe Mistress intoned, almost sounding like a cat circling its prey. "I had assumed she would be an easy break when we found her. The dossier said she was only a minor precog."

"This is why we take them when they are younger. It's harder when they have more identity, more things to hold them to their life," stated the more heavily built one beside her, her voice an ice cold wave. "She will fight, and we will damage her. Eventually, she will break. They all break."

The first Mistress laughed, as if the concept of breaking a human being's spirit was the world's greatest joke. The second one silently stared at the monitor bank before them, her focus intent on their prisoner.

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Kaede tried to scream, but no sound left her mouth. Her face was distorted in a silent, anguished cry as pain both physical and mental tore through her in waves. She was no longer sure what day it was. What time it was. Sometimes, she wasn't even sure who she was anymore. It felt like the Fortunatas had been systematically tearing her down for years, but it could have been as little as days. She had not seen the outside world in some time, and since she had been woken up randomly by a swift boot to the ribs every time she fell asleep, she was unsure of the passage of time. She was confused, scared, and in agony. She just wanted it to stop...

"Give in, Kaede. Be one with us, and we will stop this pain," the slim Fortunata cupped Kaede's jaw with her long-fingered hand and looked her in the eyes. Kaede's head was spinning and she could not focus. The woman in front of her looked like a tanned blob of a muppet in a silly hat, her voice infused with the wah-wah muted trumpet effect of a Charlie Brown adult, and that made her laugh despite her pain. The Fortunata frowned and let go of her chin, backhanding Kaede viciously. A streamer of blood sprayed across the floor and trickled down her chin. "You dare laugh at the will of Arachnos?"

The mental barrage hit her like fire from a Vulcan cannon, rapid and damaging, tearing through whatever little defenses she had left and shredding her consciousness entirely. Kaede spasmed violently, her body rocking back and forth as if she had been electrocuted; her nerves shorted and fired as one, her muscles tensing and releasing. All the thoughts she was having ceased at once as her brain and body simply gave up under the relentless and brutal psychic attack. She finally fell to the floor, eyes wide in terror and unblinking, glassed over in death.

"Tch. She wasn't strong enough to be one of us after all," the Fortunata intoned, disgusted. She stood and kicked the corpse in the gut for good measure. "Throw her off the side of the fort. The sharks can have her useless body." She pivoted on one foot and left the two Wolf Spiders behind to finish the job for her.

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The first reports of a ghost haunting Fort Darwin appeared less than a week later. Described as a skinny Japanese woman with long black hair and a white Widow outfit, she was dubbed Operative Yurei around the Arachnos water cooler. Most agents believed she was a joke; something a drunken guard made up so he wouldn't get in shit for passing out at his post and letting some gangers trash his base.

When the incidents happened en masse, though, everyone was made a believer – even if they wouldn't admit it.

A Fortunata mistress known for her brutality and dangerously violent methods of interrogation was found wrapped around a construction beam in the downtrodden section of Mercy as if it were her lover, attempting to talk it into sleeping with her. She could not be dissuaded, and became violent towards the Arachnos soldiers who were sent out to bring her back into Fort Darwin. Three were severely injured before she was finally subdued and locked in the infirmary. A second Fortunata was found naked and gyrating on top of the Fort itself, waving her clothes in a circle over her head and shouting something about 'spring break' and 'jell-o shots'. She, too, hospitalized at least two during her capture, although no one can figure out where she was keeping the poisoned claws she attacked with.

The area of Fort Darwin where the woman in white first appeared was flooded with hundreds of thousands of foam packing peanuts. Every time some were removed in an effort to unblock the tunnels, thousands more rushed in from the air vents. Eventually that whole hall was blocked off, ruled out of service. Official reports stated mechanical malfunction, but anyone who worked there knew better.

A set of six Wolf Spiders suddenly decided to form a boy band and began holding a concert on the wall in Mercy proper. Two were shot on sight by an Arbiter; the other four escaped. A message was received by Arachnos officials a short time later stating that not only would the band be back, but this time they'd have better amps and a new lead singer.

Computers inside Fort Cerberus blared nothing but a loop of the Nyancat song for a day solid before suddenly returning to normal functionality.

All these events have only one thing in common: Yurei. They were all preceded by either a sighting of the woman in white herself, or were punctuated by a haunting –and mocking – female laughter from an unseen source. Arachnos officials deny the existence of this ghost, blaming mental illness, virii, assaults from outside psions or other things for their issues, but the quiet rumble among the rank and file is that Operative Yurei is watching...and all of them are going to be her toys soon.