

In the dark of night, in the back alleys of Ul'dah, once more, was Kazuko. Except instead of hiding from sellswords in a pile of garbage, slipping into unconsciousness, she was sobbing with her back to the wall.

"I blew it...Godsdammit, I blew it!" she exclaimed. "I stupidly told her I had a home in Gridania. And now I can't be saved like she was!" The Auri woman choked back another sob as she pulled out a dark orange, spiky, heart-shaped crystal, her thumb rubbing the smooth surface. "Should've said I had no home... not like that estate is a home anyways. I'm not a ward, I'm a swivin' research subject..."

Armored footsteps could be heard as the glow of a lantern illuminated the alleyway, its source, a single Highlander mercenary.

"Finally, I've found you. The Garlean sympathizer," He remarked from behind his helmet. "Was told to bring your head for a hefty sum of gil!" He raised his axe, set down the lantern, and began to charge.

"Do it!" A voice hissed in Kazuko's metaphorical ears. "Take that inner turmoil, and use it to defend yourself!" A massive orb of dark energy formed in Kazuko's hand, which she brought to her chest, closing her eyes as she let it merge with her very being. With her Odenta in hand, and her jealousy, sorrow, and rage at the forefront of her mind, the angry Auri woman charged forward, knocking the sellsword's axe off balance before driving her blade right into the eyehole of his helmet. Blood splattered over her frail form upon impact, and once she retrieved her weapon, the man fell dead at her feet.

"Bravo!" The voice from before echoed, belonging to a figure clad in black and silver armor, their face obscured with a horned helmet. "I'm proud of you, standing up for yourself. If the world won't help you, you must help yourself, after all." The Raen closed her eyes, bowing her head in silence briefly for the life she had just taken, before turning to the helmeted figure.

"I know, Ameya," The fledgeling Dark Knight responded to her Shade. "I wish it never came to that."

"You can still do it over. You're going to Limsa Lominsa, correct? Don't bother with an inn room. Just don't mention that you have a home. Continue lying by omission like you always have."

"Yeah...that's where I screwed up, when I mentioned Nazyl picked me up at 'home'."

Before Ameya could respond, more footsteps could be heard.

"Shite, it's probably the sellsword's employer!" Kazuko exclaimed. "I've gotta ru-"

"No, you are not running. You're going to give them a piece of your mind!" Ameya exclaimed.

“In these bloody clothes!?”

“Obviously! Scare ‘em straight!” With those words, Ameya placed her hands on Kazuko’s shoulders. A glint appeared in her eyes, that in the light of the lantern, made her look absolutely deranged.

“Now, I expected the job to be do-” Both footsteps-belonging to another Highlander man, this time in noble’s clothing-and voice stopped once their owner spotted the sellsword’s body, and Kazuko, bloody with a sadistic smirk on her face and holding her Odenta, ready to attack, standing over it.

“One more step and you’re next!” Both Shade and Spoken shouted in sync. “You will leave this alleyway, and return to your home. You will not speak of this again, nor will you send anyone after me again. One wrong move, and this blade will meet your throat.” The nobleman scurried off, a few droplets of what was likely urine being left behind. Ameya removed her hands from Kazuko’s shoulders, letting her have full autonomy back once more.

“Rest now, Kazuko,” Ameya reassured. “All you have to do now is head to the Gladiator’s Guild. BUT! Don’t tell Jubei ANYTHING.” Kazuko gave a firm nod in response to Ameya, before putting her weapon away. Slowly wiping away the sellsword’s blood with a cloth she kept just for that purpose, the determined woman made her way towards the Gold Court.