

Pre-Character Prologue

Fifty years ago, mankind began to lose the ability to lie. The Deceiver's Plague hit like rain, spreading across the lands in a wildfire of illness and rot. Those who survived the pain of their tongues writhing in their throats emerged with lips that spoke only truth. And in this, they believed they had become something more. Something better.

Yet there lived those who remained their former selves— with hearts that could spin lies as easily as breathing air. Their flesh began to decay, their bodies began to fall apart. The truthful king of the lands sought to eradicate these fallen failures, and sent soldiers to capture them. Their tongues were ripped out so that they could not lie in the face of the new era, and thus the liars were reduced to beasts.

If a shelter had not been built, perhaps your story would have ended somewhere in the near future. Like so many of those who perished in the eradication. But a castle across the Great Lake became known, in whispers of the night, as a sanctuary for liars, where maybe... Just maybe... You have a chance to live again. Not as a decaying beast, but as a human. You must now get up. Keep running.

~~~

## Pre-Interaction Storyline

The howls of hounds nip at your ears, striking a fear colder than the night air frosting at your lips. You know what will happen if they catch up. You have seen the tongueless prisoners before, their skin peeling and their fingers missing.

A sharp pain throbs on your arm. You don't have to look to know that the decay is spreading. Your flesh has already lost its battle, and you pray that at least your legs will take you faster.

Shouts ring in the distance, little fires burning behind you in the absolute darkness of the moonless clearing. You clutch your arm as you continue to run, the tall grass sweeping your knees and cutting your heels. The air sears your lungs, numbing your breaths and encouraging the tears that fall from your eyes.

Just a little further now. The barks of the hunting dogs are getting louder, and you begin to make out words that are yelled by harsh voices. You wonder if these people had once been your neighbors. People who you had once brushed shoulders with on the busy market street. Now they are just soldiers. Soldiers who will stop at nothing to drag you back, to brand you as a liar and an inferior production of humanity.

Fog begins to curl at your waist, gray and smoky. This means you are close. You want to look back, but you know that precious time will be lost. The pain in your arm crawls up, brushing against your neck and strangling your shoulders. But pain is not something you can think about right now. The view of the bridge appears ahead, just as an arrow lands, narrowly missing your ankle. A stumble costs you a second, but you keep sprinting.

MC: "Please. Please."

Another arrow lands ahead, followed by another, and another. You feel the whisper of sharp teeth grazing against your leg, growls threatening to slow you down. Incapacitate you.

Blood. Fear. Violence. Someone screaming. Begging. Crying. Weeping. Your mind is fogging, and the images flash across your mind like dreams from a sleepless night.

Anger. Pain. Fire.

Another arrow.

Sorrow. So much sorrow, so much noise. Everything culminates in fear like you've never felt before.

They're going to catch you now. They're going to catch you. *Run, little bunny, they're going to catch you.*

And your foot hits the first wooden plank of the bridge.

All noises cease except for the sound of your soles hitting the ground, your ragged breaths tasting of metal and decay.

You thought you could run all the way, but your legs suddenly give out. Instinctively, you curl and try to back away, but when silence greets you, you stop.

A heavy fog has descended over you, the darkness replaced by a hazy cloud of silver. Water runs softly beneath you, crashing and ebbing against waves upon waves. For the first time in a while, you can breathe.

Breathe, little lamb. Breathe.

With shaking hands you pull yourself up against the railing, taking one step at a time forwards on the bridge that doesn't seem to end. The pain digs into your arm, and you gingerly press a hand against the bloodied sleeve. At first, you tried to bandage it. But it became apparent soon enough that the bandages were doing nothing but prolonging the stench of the rot.

As you walk, you try to let your mind wander. You're safe. At least right now.

PROMPT: What memory do you think of?

A: The fireplace at home, where logs always sizzled.

B: The woods near the farm. The sun filters dazzlingly through the leaves.

C: The streets of food vendors and trinket shops.

A - **The fireplace:** The crackling of the fire soothes your soul, if but for a moment. Embers dance like dying spirits, faeries twisting in the dim glow of the light. A warm cup of something rests in your hands, and you bring it to your lips. Liquid, hot and sweet. When you look outside, light snow is falling, covering the ground in a shallow bed of white. Winter is harsh, but it doesn't seem so bad when you are curled up by the fire, dozing off to the warmth against your cheeks.

B - **The woods:** Leaves crunch beneath your boots as creatures scurry up the branches of the trees. The sunlight is like liquid gold, dripping through the cracks in the canopy of branches above. Somewhere, a raven calls, and you find a spot to sit down at. Leaning your back against the rough bark of the trunk, you close your eyes and listen to the rustling wind around you. It caresses your cheeks, plays teasingly with your hair.

C - **The market:** The smell of food wafts through the air, tickling your nose and calling out to your empty stomach. You take a bite into the sandwich you just bought from the old man that always sets up his tent near the entrance of the market, and look into the windows of the trinket shops that sell all sorts of gadgets. Shining compasses, bejeweled necklaces, cursed rings. You smile as you see a familiar face in the crowd, and wave.

And then? The stench of blood. You snap out of it, realizing that you are no longer standing on wooden planks, but concrete rock. A pair of massive double doors looms before you, wrapped in golden swirls and covered in... scratches. Dents in the wood make it apparent that some sort of scuffle happened here in the past.

Wincing at the pain in your arm, you lean your good shoulder against the door and put your weight into it. With a groan, the door shifts, inch by inch, until the gap is big enough for you to slip through. You suck in a breath and gingerly ease yourself through the space, squinting as it takes some time for your eyes to adjust to the dim lights inside.

There appears to be nobody here. Not a shadow moves under the yellow glow of the chandelier, but the floors and banisters of the stairwell are absolutely spotless. You smell a faint aroma of floral sweetness, and for a second it takes you back to a meadow, under a sky with a singular cloud lazily floating about.

PROMPT: You...

A: Call out to see if anyone's there.

B: Wander up the sprawling staircase.

A - **Call out:** "Hello?" Your voice is strained— hoarse. Has the rot spread to your throat? But you clear it and try to speak again, and this time you hear the voice of someone you think you once knew in the mirror. "Is anyone there?"

For a long minute, there is no reply. A half-torso statue of a woman stares down at you from the hall, as if beckoning you. Her lifeless eyes pierce you in gray brushstrokes, as if telling you a secret that may save your life. A shame you will never hear the statue speak.

But a sound does come from somewhere overhead. The sound of something dragging, in short intervals, against the floor.

B - **Wander up the stairs:** Your footsteps are silent, because you are careful to not let them echo. It is strange how deathly quiet everything is at this hour. You cannot even hear the owls calling softly, as you so often used to listen by your bedroom window.

Each step of the stairs takes you higher, and seemingly deeper into the castle. After a day of running, your feet are beginning to ache. All you want is somewhere to curl up and close your weary eyes, but your boots take you one step after the other. What a blessing it was that the decay had not yet spread to your legs. Perhaps you would have collapsed out there, with the dogs surrounding you and the sharp light of fire searing your skin.

A sound echoes somewhere overhead, and you stop, gripping the banister tightly. The sound of something dragging, in short intervals, against the floor.

If one thing's for certain, it is that you must be careful here. Before they took his tongue, the man who always sold storybooks by the corner of the busiest street in town had spoken of this place. Before they took her tongue, the woman who ran that peach porridge stand had spoken of this place. After they took their tongues, those prisoners in their living graves had written of this place. And everyone seemed to draw the same conclusion. *A haven for liars could never be safe.* But what choice do any of you have? Haven or not, this is the

only place you can live with your head lifted above your chest. You clench your jaw and continue up the staircase.

Level after level, the noise seems to continue coming from above. Just when you are running out of strength in your legs, you reach the landing of a floor that seems... strange. The air smells more strongly of flowers here, perfuming your body. You hope for a childish moment that it can mask the stench of your decay.

Large doors line the winding hallway, which stretches almost endlessly. It turns just out of view, and you crane your neck to see in the dim lighting.

“Hello?”

A stranger’s voice rings out in the silence, sudden and cutting. You flinch, but force yourself to stay as still as you can.

“Is someone there?” The voice breaks, almost pleading. It sounds like a child, pure and naive, terrified in a world of monsters. “I’ve hurt my leg, can someone help?”

A part of you long ago would have rushed to help. But you are not her anymore. Instead, you feel for the knife that is hidden just under your skirt. The blade glints, reassuringly violent with a promise of protection. One foot after the other, you stay close to the wall, listening intently to the sounds of dragging that seem to get louder with every step.

Step.

Step.

Step.

Step.

Step.

And then you see it.

The beginning of a shadow that stretches beyond the curve of the wall. It is wavering, long and slender, and the voice calls out again. “Please, I don’t know where I am.”

You take another step, pressing your back against the wall. It will be okay, little lamb. Go and take a look, why don’t you?

You take the last step, and your eyes widen in absolute horror that clutches your throat. It is in the form of a man, swaying and upright, with his back to you, but... But...

His leg, the pants torn off on one side at the thigh, is covered in sickly, wilting flowers. The petals give off a sweet stench of withering, and protrude directly from his skin, which is scarred and burned. You cover your mouth to keep from vomiting. His clothes are dirty and ripped, and there appears to be stains on it that you don’t want to know the source of.

In a child’s voice, the man cries once more. “Anyone? I’ve lost my way, it hurts so much.” Goosebumps cover your skin as the man lifts his hands to tear at his hair, and it falls out in clumps between his fingers.

PROMPT: What do you do?

A: Confront the man.

B: Quietly step away.

A - **Confront:** “Who are you?” Your voice comes out much steadier than you expected.

The man stops all movement, then... twitches slightly. As if savoring the moment, he turns around ever so slowly, the movements of his arms and neck spasming.

All that comes out of his flower-covered lips is a long, airy groan. His maddened eyes seem to flick to your arm, and you instinctively hide it behind your back.

The man takes a long inhale, taking in the air. You wonder what else he can smell besides the sickly sweet flowers covering his own body. You identify them as common meadow flowers. Ones you used to adore. When freshly bloomed, they glimmered under the sun, children of the light and everything good. On his body, they are wilted. Drooping and brown.

And then you have a split second to react before he lunges. All reason leaves his clouded irises, and he throws himself against you with a mouth stretched wide open. In your surprise you are tackled to the floor, his body pressed against yours. With horror you realize that the knife has plunged deep into his stomach, but he doesn't even seem to notice. It takes every ounce of your strength to hold his face away as he snaps his teeth, rabid and hungry like a wolf struggling to reach your flesh.

Spittle and blood fly, splattering across your face. He bites into your arm, and the pain almost makes you faint. Your skin comes away, already weakened by the rot. You clench your jaw to keep from screaming, and attempt to use your knee to kick him away. It is no use. He is about to tear another chunk off your arm.

“Please.” A voice rings in your mind. “Please help me.

I can't die here. Not yet.”

Pain shoots up your arm like you've never felt before, and his eyes, bloodshot and bewildered, suddenly still. All movements stop, before the man slumps onto the floor as suddenly as he had lunged. Your breaths come in quick gasps, and you quickly retrieve your knife, getting to your feet. It is only then you realize another figure is standing, watching you intently. You only catch a glimpse of his blue coat when he turns and vanishes deeper into the hallway.

PROMPT: Do you run after him?

A: You chase him.

B: Stay where you are and catch your breath.

A - **Chase:** See Female + Lyas Storyline

## Vago Storyline

B - **Stay where you are:** You have no strength left to pursue him. You press your free hand against your wounded arm, and sag against the wall.

What the hell is this place?

“Greetings.”

You whirl, reaching for your knife again. The hilt is sticky against your fingers, and you realize with a jolt that there are several soaked, decayed petals sticking to the blade.

“And who may you be?” The new stranger regards you curiously, examining your face and tracing the bloody splatters with his eyes. You make no move to answer, but study him back. He smiles and raises his arms, waiting patiently for you to slowly lower the knife.

The young man offers you a half smile. “You seem to have half a mind about you still.” With a barely noticeable tilt of his head, he gestures for you to follow him. “I wouldn’t recommend staying out here. Some people have bad house manners, as you can see.”

He takes you through the winding hallway, into turns that you had not noticed in your tense concentration before. You try to map out the structure of the floor as best you can, attempting to remember the little cracks and stains on the walls for future reference.

You both stop in front of a singular door with a little candle placed on the floor by it. The stranger knocks six times, curtly, and motions for you to enter. It seems that he can see the hesitation on your face, because he smiles again. “Go on. You will come out alive.”

Oddly ominous. But do you have a choice? Not here, little dove. Go on inside. You push down on the handle gently and walk in, closing the door behind you.

The rustling papers stop. A man looks up at you from behind a dark, wooden desk, lit by lamp burning orange and liquid gold. Involuntarily, your breath quickens at the sight of his features, strong and sharp. Yet it is not this that catches your attention, but the flowers that are also blooming along his cheek and jaw. Little and blue, they grow from his skin, seeming to plant their roots in his flesh itself. His cold eyes are unmoving, and you cannot tell if he is giving you time to take in the shock of everything, or if he is waiting for you to speak.

You are still thinking of this when he leans his chin against a fist.

“Hello.”

He drawls the word, almost bored.

You swallow.

“What happened?”

With a flick of his finger, he gestures to his own face, and you realize he means the blood that must be smeared across your cheek.

“A man in the hallway.” You decide to keep your answer short. Amusement flickers across his features, and he nods.

“Is he dead?”

“I believe so.”

Another satisfied nod.

“What is your name?”

PROMPT: What is your name?

A: [NAME]

“I haven’t seen you here before, [NAME]. Tell me why that is.”

“I just arrived today.”

“I see.” He pauses for a moment, thinking. Then he turns to you, eyes twinkling with that same amusement. “Would you like a bed for the night?”

The sound of a place to sleep sounds more than good to you right now, and you muster a nod.

“I would be grateful for that.”

Suspicion still claws at your heart, but you push it down. It is either this, or back into the hallways. You bite down, surveying the room. There is a bookcase on one side, and shelves of, to your surprise, little trinkets and statues amongst heavy books. A black coat hangs on the other side of the room, and a small couch presses itself up against the wall.

“Uris.” The stranger calls.

The door opens, and the young man from before walks in.

“Show her to a room.”

With that, he turns his attention back to his paperwork. The young man stands there expectantly, waiting for you to turn to follow him, but your eyes are still on the strange man behind the desk.

“What is your name?”

He doesn't look up. “Vago.”

Vago. The name is like midnight silk, rolling through a storm. You turn and follow the young man out the door.

When you close the door behind you, you turn the locks and press a chair against the handle. A little candle is also lit outside, and you wonder what it's for. The room is simple, with a bed, a desk, and a little wardrobe— more than anything you could ask for right now. You are pleasantly stunned for a moment, taking in the unexpected warmth of the room.

You wash your face in the little basin of water, and not bothering to take your clothes off— not that you have any to change into, you curl up on the bed and cradle your arm.

Tears threaten to spring to your eyes, but you shut them and hold yourself tighter.

*This is the fate of a liar.* Try to dream, little lamb. Try to dream.

And somehow, you fall asleep.

Your nightmares are filled with writhing, burning pain.

**B - Back away:** You take one step back. Then another. It was a mistake to come here, and you will not risk being found by someone who appears so... frighteningly mad.

A deep breath, and then another, when the man suddenly freezes. All movements cease, and an airy groan escapes his lips. He cocks his head, as if listening, and you dare not move, you dare not even breathe. You are certain that you have not made a noise, but sometimes, you just get unlucky.

The man turns. You spin on your heels and begin to sprint, the horrid sound of snapping following close behind. There is a rhythmic clacking of teeth, a sound that chills you to the very bone.

Run, not from soldiers, but from that which is the very definition of rot. You may not understand now, but you will. RUN!

Your tired feet take you through the maze of hallways, turning left and right with an urgency that leaves you no room to memorize the path which you have taken. Your pursuer is hot on your heels, and claws at you with a mad rabidness.

“Please.” A voice enters your head. “Please, anybody.

I cannot die here yet. Not here, not now.”

Left. Right. Right. Straight ahead. Doors upon doors fly past you, and as much as you want to, you do not risk stopping to try one of them for the fear that it could be locked and cost you precious time. But your legs are losing strength, and your lungs are burning— the taste of metal fills your mouth.

You round a corner, pushing off the floor with your bad arm when you lose your balance, and fire shoots up your skin. A grimace fills your features, but the creature has not yet caught up to this sharp corner, and you have bought yourself some time.

“Please.” You pray once more. “Please, save me.”

A lit candle on the ground barely catches your eye when the door next to it opens abruptly. Your arm is grabbed, and you have no time to react before a rough hand clamps over your mouth and pulls you into the room. In a split second, the door is closed, and you hear an awful scream that sounds outside. The scream of anguish— weeping and sobbing in a way that twists your stomach.

Moments pass in silence, when you become acutely aware of the body pressed behind yours. You smell the distinct scent of blood and flowers, and you cannot tell if it is coming from yourself or from the hand that gently loosens its grip on you.

You scramble to get away, turning with your knife outstretched.

Before you stands a man. He hooks his hands in his pockets, and cocks his head at you. You swallow when you take in his features, soft and sharp at the same time, but what really catches your eye are the flowers that are also blooming along his cheek and jaw. Little and blue, they grow from his skin, seeming to plant their roots in his flesh itself. His cold eyes trace your decayed arm, your disheveled clothes, and the wild, frightened look that must appear in your eyes.

“No thank you?” He speaks softly, but there is an air about him that suggests he does not need to raise his voice to get what he wants.

You calm your ragged breaths, and when he makes no move to come closer, you cautiously lower your blade. “Thank you.”

You immediately raise your blade once more when he moves away from the door, but he remains disturbingly unphased. He brushes past you, towards the desk that sits in the middle of the room. You realize you are in an office of sorts, because he sits down and begins shuffling through papers as if nothing had just happened. There is a bookcase on the left side of the room, with shelves of little statues and carvings. On the other wall hangs a painting of the ocean, under which a couch rests. A black coat drapes itself, intimidating even without its owner.

“What is your name?” The man glances at you, an almost bored look darkening his gaze.

PROMPT: What is your name?

A: [NAME]

“First night here, [NAME]?”

“I’m afraid so. Looks like this is the only choice I have.”

He looks up, and leans his chin against his fist. If you are not mistaken, amusement twinkles momentarily in those dark irises. “I see.” His eyes flick to the blade you have still gripped in your hand, though it is lowered. “It is good that you ran. Your blade would not have, and will not, do much.”

You tighten your fist, and offer a tight smile. “At least I would have died trying.”

He does not respond to this, only regards you curiously. After an uncomfortable moment, he speaks. “You look quite exhausted.”

You nod, unsure of what he’s getting at. “That may be an understatement.”

“Would you like a bed?”

Hesitation grips you. It is either trust this stranger, or go back out into the hallways. He sees this in your face, but makes no move to reassure you. You swallow.

“Is there a room available?”

A ghost of a smile touches his lips. “We may not be an inn, but there certainly is a room available. Uris!”

You startle when the door opens and a young man walks in. His eyes widen slightly when he sees you, most likely surprised to find a visitor at such an hour.

“Take her to a room, will you?”

The young man nods, and turns, stopping when you don’t yet follow. Your eyes are still on the strange man behind the desk.

“What is your name?”

He has gone back to looking through his papers. “Vago.”

Vago. The name is like midnight silk, rolling through a storm. You turn and follow the young man out the door.

~~~

When you close the door behind you, you turn the locks and press a chair against the handle. A little candle is also lit outside, and you wonder what it’s for. The room is simple, with a bed, a desk, and a little wardrobe— more than anything you could ask for right now. You are pleasantly stunned for a moment, taking in the unexpected warmth of the room.

You wash your face in the little basin of water, and not bothering to take your clothes off— not that you have any to change into, you curl up on the bed and cradle your arm.

Tears threaten to spring to your eyes, but you shut them and hold yourself tighter.

This is the fate of a liar. Try to dream, little lamb. Try to dream.

And somehow, you fall asleep.

Your nightmares are filled with writhing, burning pain.