

As I walked ever so cautiously down the winding stone staircase, I knew I had everything to lose by trespassing here, it's a miracle I had gotten this far into the castle to begin with. The air has a taste of rotted meat, and the smell of it was almost enough to cause my consciousness to flee, the farther and farther down I walked, the worse it got. The two walls parallel to the small stone steps weren't like any I had ever seen, they were made of jagged pebbles, and the dim torches attached to them shone just enough light for me to see that the inner wall was stained in blood, it didn't seem fresh, but it was clear someone was escorted down here with their head shoved firmly against it the whole way down. The outer wall was stained too, but these stains suggested even more barbaric, horrific actions beyond my comprehension.

The stench gets overwhelming, and that's when I see the cause of it within a cell just off to the right. Apparently out some people are executed in-house, and let's simply say they don't get a proper burial. I decide to go down the other left corridor (mainly to distance myself from the stench), as I walk, I take note that one of the torches seems to have been taken from its perch on the wall. I hear an aggressive voice, one I'm almost certain is coming from a guard yelling out orders, guess that's who took the torch, I decide it'd be in my best interest to take one too.

It seems the further I walk, the more I realize there's nowhere to hide, the halls are straight, no winding paths, or anything of the sort, the best I can do to hide is putting my back against the wall... Unless I start taking more torches. One by one, I grab the torches, pushing the hot ends against the dry, dirt floor to silently extinguish them. Inevitably the guard, or perhaps *guards* if there's multiple of them is going to notice something's up, but hopefully by then I can find where they've been keeping the hostage, my friend Lilac who I'm trying to save, and then get the both of us out of here alive.

Lilac was brought here because she was a woman who stepped out of line, did something a man was allowed to, but a woman was not. To us women, acts like hers are a sign of hope, to the men in charge of our society however, they're acts of defiance. So, my friend sneaking into a school meant to train knights, claiming to be a man, only to be caught as a woman was deemed "preposterous", and she was labeled as "a witch" by the king, and was sent to this hideous place. To the king's credit, he does have an *actual* witch in his dungeon right now because of it, but unfortunately for him, she's not a fan of the hierarchy, and worse yet, she's on the wrong side of the bars.

I continue trekking down the halls, eventually cluing in that this is all one big loop, the light gradually lessens, as I put out more and more torch flames. As I continue onward, eventually I hear a faint, dry voice wheeze "Free me." I whisper back "I'm sorry." and keep walking. I wonder how many of these people truly are, or- well, *were* innocent. The majority of the cells I passed held either piles of bones, nothing at all, or dead bodies, but there were a few blinking eyes, filled with pain and fear. I'm worried what they've done to Lilac in the time she's been in capture, all I truly know is that she's not dead yet.

Suddenly I see a wooden door off to the side, I can't read what's written on it, but I get the feeling that it holds more cells, perhaps meant for those they wish not to kill? I put my ear up to the door but I don't hear anything... Strange. I look down the hall behind me, and see the same staircase I used upon entry. Or at least what I can only assume to be the same staircase... the same rough texture and stains of blood seem to be present, but it's difficult to tell with how far down the hall it is. Regardless, I decide to raise my torch to the door, and watch as the fire spreads slowly burning it to ash.

Generally, I dislike the smell of burning wood, but any smell's better than that of old flesh, so I take a moment to allow the scent into my nose for a few moments of bliss.

Once burnt down entirely, I look beyond the door, quickly stomping out the flaming pile of ashes with my boot, that's when I hear a voice yell out, and I immediately jolt my head to face it.

"WITCH!" I hear the voice yell. Shockingly enough, I hadn't used any magic to burn down the door, it really was thin and weak enough for a torch to take care of, but I might have to use some now in order to deal with this guy... I suppose committing to stealth wasn't the best plan anyways.

He rushes towards me and hoists his sword into the air above me, I shove my torch into his abdomen, causing him to drop his weapon in shock. No magic needed apparently.

"Thanks for the sword! Sorry about the stomach..." I shout out to him as I take the weapon from the floor, and dash through the vacant doorway. Hopefully that's the only encounter I have, it's hard to tell if anyone's coming to help him out, agonized, crazed yelling is hard to hear over.

My suspicion seems to have been true, the cells contained in this room were completely empty, but in much better shape than the ones in the other room, some even looked untouched. As I make my way through the room, I notice a strip of paper with familiar looking handwriting on the floor. I rest the sword against the wall and cautiously pick up the letter to read it.

*"I told you not to be a hero, I told you I could handle it, but I knew you'd be here anyways. Not that I blame your... to put it bluntly, lack of faith in me. Regardless, Lilac is safe with me, just as I told you she'd be, and if you've gotten this far in, I have a feeling you can make your way out just fine.*

*Safe travels,*

*- Lex"*

"Thanks, Lex! Glad to know you suddenly give a damn!" I think to myself. Furious would be an understatement for how I felt, but I decided to swallow my anger, drop the letter, pick up my newfound weapon, and focus on making my way out of this nightmare inducing torture chamber...