



You Have Been Lied To...

Sebastian looked at the five words hastily written on the wall behind the Overseer's desk. He blinked once, twice, three times trying to make sense of it all. A truth behind a lie - it's what he'd believed for so long. That they lived in this damn vault at the whim of someone or something else, when all the while...

No, it couldn't be that. Why would it be on the wall? And who the hell would ransack the office, leave a message like that and then... Nothing else. Plus how the hell had they gotten in and out of here?

You don't know what you're talking about...

"What the fuck?" asked Lucy - she'd been the first to arrive after Seb. She'd been followed by Sev, who's eyes hadn't left him from the moment they'd finished reading the words. Adam had arrived last - late, as fucking usual. Seb turned to face them - it wasn't just Sev, they were all facing him now.

They don't trust you.

Shut up.

They never have.

"Is this you? Some kind of game?" asked Sev. Perhaps the voice was right.

"Yes, Sev, that's precisely it. I convinced you all to break in here so we could find out what the Overseer was hiding, but then snuck up first, ransacked the place and wrote on the wall in blood," said Seb. "I traded information and rations for a key card to a room that I could already get into. Because that sounds like the smart thing to do,"

"Take it easy, we're all just a little freaked out," said Lucy.

"Speak for yourself," said Adam. His eyes were lit up with what seemed to be excitement. That in itself was a little unnerving.

"If it wasn't you, then what the hell is going on?" asked Sev, his large arms folded. "We're in the most secure, highly guarded area of the Vault and there wasn't a god damn guard anywhere on the way."

"I figured our contact had just arranged for a change of shift or something," said Lucy.

"Or maybe this is some kind of trap and we're going to have to fight our way out," said Adam.

"We're not going to have to fight our way out," said Seb, holding up his hand. "We just need to think - who would want this office empty? And who would want us to find this message?"

"The Overseer?" asked Lucy.

"I hardly believe he'd go to the trouble to do this to their own office," said Seb. "We've never even met with him - always got our orders through that damn terminal in the systems room."

"So what do we do?" asked Lucy.

"Adam, keep an eye outside the door. Lucy, you check the console for anything that might help us. Me and Seb will check through all the files and see if there's anything that tells us what's been going on," said Sev.

He's a better leader than you.

"You mind?" asked Seb.

"Sorry... boss..." said Sev, stepping back and offering Seb the chance to come up with his own plan.

"... What Sev said," said Seb. Afterall, it was what he'd have done anyway.

Sure it was...

Seb ignored the voice as he and Sev began to sift through the mulch across the desk and the floor. But there was nothing of any real relevance - old Vault-Tec memos and reports about how uninhabitable the surface still was all these years later. By the minute this was feeling more and more like a fools errand.

"Hey Seb," said Adam from the door. "You know how you said you'd traded information and rations for a Key Card to a room you already had access to?"

"Yeah?" asked Seb, trying not to miss any details in the paperwork.

"You may have been right," said Adam. Seb and Sev exchanged a look and Seb walked to the door - and damnit, if he wasn't right. There was no scanner outside. Because these were the Overseer's private quarters. He didn't need a lock on his office door... And the systems room had been left...

"Unlocked..." said Seb.

"What?" asked Sev.

"Everywhere was unlocked," said Seb.

"Uh, guys?" said Lucy. Seb, Sev and Adam made their way over to the console where Lucy replayed the security footage from the camera in the corner of the room. She replayed the feed. The Overseer, recorded from behind as he randomly picked up old files and papers and littered the floor with them. And then the desk. Before he pulled out a knife and ran it across his palm - one by one he wrote out the words that now adorned the wall.

Without a glance at the camera, he walked to his desk, and moved some of the papers aside.

"What the fuck?" said Seb, his eyes widening. Without another word, he turned from the camera and walked to the desk, he knocked the papers aside, until he found a small slot big enough for...

"The keycard..." Seb said. He pushed it into the gap, and then stepped back as the floor started to lower. As he rejoined his friends, he glanced back at the camera feed, to see the Overseer raising his hands in surrender, before disappearing into the passageway beneath his desk.

"Well..." said Seb. "I guess we know where he went, the only question now? Do we go after him?"

Seb turned and looked at the rest of the Tunnel Snakes, and felt a prickle up the back of his neck.

You will be the death of them.



The hum of the mechanism echoed through the chamber as the platform descended, the gears grinding in protest. Above them, the flickering fluorescent lights cast jagged shadows on the damp, rusted metal walls. Seb led the way, his boots steady against the uneven surface. Sev moved just behind him, eyes scanning every corner. Lucy and Adam followed closely, but Adam's nervous glances over his shoulder suggested his mind was already somewhere else, anticipating danger that hadn't yet arrived.

Always ready to kill, just like I taught you.

The platform came to a halt, revealing a dimly lit corridor. It stretched ahead in a straight line, ending at a heavy metal door; the Snakes exchanged a glance.

"Guess this is where the Overseer went," muttered Sev.

Seb ran his hand along the cold, cracked wall, searching for any trace of a mechanism. He found a small panel and pressed it; the door hissed open, revealing another stretch of corridor beyond. The air felt different here, crisper, cooler, carrying a faint, unfamiliar scent.

"What the hell is that smell?" asked Adam, wrinkling his nose.

"Fresh air," Seb muttered, stepping forward.

"Well, fresh air smells like shit." Adam scoffed.

When they finally stepped out of the tunnel, the world beyond was nothing like the sterile, suffocating walls of the Vault. The vastness of the open sky stretched overhead, an impossibly blue expanse marred only by the faint streaks of clouds. The sun was a blazing orb in the sky, making them squint against its brightness.

Seb froze, his heart hammering in his chest. The surface, this land beyond their former prison was nothing like the Vault-Tec reports had suggested. It wasn't a barren wasteland. It was certainly strange, crumbled buildings, rusted vehicles, skeletal highways scattered across the horizon. But in between, nature had begun to claw its way back. Grasses and vines crept up broken concrete, and small patches of greenery dotted the earth, a rebellion against the decay.

"I saw this in my dreams," Sev murmured, so low that it wasn't clear if he was speaking to the others or unable to keep the words in as he marveled to himself. He lifted one massive hand to shield his eyes from the blinding glare.

"Holy shit," whispered Lucy. "It's... beautiful"

"Beautiful?" Adam scoffed, kicking at a pile of dirt with a sneer. "Looks like a graveyard to me"

And it won't take long for them to bury you in it.

Seb took a cautious step forward, feeling the earth beneath his boots shift and crunch. Lucy joined him, her eyes scanning the horizon, her expression torn between awe and disbelief.

"We've been down there, living in fear of radiation, of the surface being uninhabitable... and for what?" she asked softly.

"Doesn't matter, not like we came up here to sightsee. Come on, the overseer must be up somewhere around here," Sev growled.

"Sure, if we assume he hasn't been killed by a giant mole rat or whatever this place has to offer," added Adam.

Everything here wants you dead, not just some radioactive rats.

Seb ignored them, his gaze drifting to a set of tracks in the dirt. Footprints, fresh ones, leading away from the tunnel.

"He went this way," Seb said.

They followed the trail in silence, the weight of the surface pressing down on them. Every sound seemed magnified, the rustle of leaves, the distant call of what might be birds, the crunch of their footsteps over gravel. The footprints led them through the ruins of what might have once been a small town; the skeletons of buildings loomed like silent witnesses.

"What is...all of this?" Lucy paused by a cracked storefront window, peering inside.

"Focus," barked Sev. "We're not here to play archaeologist."

Seb held up a hand, stopping the group, silence fell, thick and charged. The air felt taut, as though something was watching them, Seb's eyes flicked ahead, narrowing on something in the distance.

"What is it?" whispered Adam.

Seb pointed. Ahead, the trail of footprints ended at a massive, overgrown building. Its walls were covered in vines, and its entrance was marked by faded letters.

VAULT-TEC REGIONAL COMMAND

"Well, that's... not comforting," Lucy muttered, her gaze flicking from the building to the group.

Seb moved toward the entrance, but Sev grabbed his arm. "Wait, this could be a trap."

"And if it's not? If he's in there, we need to know what he knows," Seb snapped.

He shook Sev off and pushed forward, the others hesitated before following with Sev begrudgingly bringing up the rear.

Inside, the building was dark, stale, and suffocating. The walls were lined with cracked monitors and dead terminals, their screens blank and lifeless. Dust swirled in the shafts of sunlight that filtered through broken windows, casting long, stretching shadows across the room. The silence was unnerving, broken only by the sound of their footsteps echoing against the empty space.

"Spread out," Seb whispered, his voice barely a murmur. "But stay close."

They began their search, methodical but tense. Signs of recent activity were everywhere, displaced furniture, scattered papers, a half eaten ration bar left carelessly on a table.

"Someone wasn't that hungry," Adam said, lifting the wrapper with a smile.

Seb's pulse quickened as he moved deeper into the building, the weight of the moment pressing down on him. What had he expected to find? Answers? Closure? Instead, he was beginning to suspect they wouldn't find what they were looking for. But they would find something, they found him.



Lucy turned down a hallway, immediately noticing the remnants of a struggle leading to an old, broken door at the end of the darkened corridor.

"Guys..." She whispered, turning around just enough to spot Sev and Adam - motioning for them to come here. Sev briefly turned away, getting Seb's attention and within moments, all four of them stood together, staring down the hallway at the door.

Finally, Sev shrugged. "Standing here won't solve anything."

The big man shot a look at Seb, who took a moment, smoothing out his jacket before nodding his head and stepping out in front. "Right. Come on."

Seb began down the hall, followed closely by Sev and then by Lucy and Adam. Lucy was busy watching behind them, hoping to all things good and holy that no one tried to overtake them from the rear. As hard as she focused, though, her mind kept wandering to what it felt like to finally see the sky, feel the breeze on her face, to-

"You should return home..."

"I **can't**." Lucy replied without thinking, shaking her head for good measure.

Adam turned his head towards her. "What?"

"I didn't say anything." Lucy fibbed, trying to turn their attention back to the task at hand, pointing towards the door the group was approaching.

"It sure sounded like you-"

"**Shhhh!**" Sev turned abruptly, his finger up to his mouth.

Adam nodded his head first, and Lucy, she felt her hands beginning to shake. She'd never heard that voice outside of her apartment. It was unsettling. A part of her wanted to heed his words, to return to where she'd come - but before she could say anything, she heard Seb begin to speak.

"Okay... here goes nothin'" Seb whispered as he pushed on the broken door, his breath catching in his throat as it squeaked softly.

Everyone was at high alert as the door swung open, revealing a single chair in the corner of the room, shrouded in the shadows, and even more evidence of a scuffle - broken glass, paper strewn about, broken furniture - but none of that mattered as they stepped into the room and Sev stopped everyone, pointing at his ear.

They all listened, and one by one they all heard it. Breathing.

Lucy noticed something on the floor and she tapped the other three before she knelt down to take a closer look at a rather large dark spot on the ground. Adam knelt beside her and pointed at a few partial footprints coming from the spot, leading towards the far end of the room.

"Is that-?" Adam began.

"Blood..." Lucy finished.

Adam stood. "Do you think it's--"

"It's about... *time* you four found your way to the... surface..." A breathy voice interrupted Adam from the far side of the room. Seb and Sev wasted little time, approaching the source of the voice.

"Overseer?" Sev questioned as the bloodied and beaten face of a man in a blue jumpsuit matching theirs came into their view. He was tied to the chair, but it appeared that whomever put him there was faced with one hell of a fight.

The man nodded his head. "The name is Overseer... *Pryce*. Good to... Meet you.. I.. I only wish it were under better... circumstances."

"What is going on here?" Sev asked, his mind always working, analyzing the scene around them. "Why did you leave us the--"

"The keycard." Seb finished, shaking his head. "Why didn't you just tell us--"

"I wanted to." Pryce responded, his breathing becoming more labored. "Trust me.. The more you four snooped... around... the harder it got to hide... the truth... But they.. They--"

"Vault-Tec?" Lucy asked, stepping forward.

"They came for me before I could..."

"Go home before you get--"

"No! **I won't go home!**"

Everyone was taken aback at Lucy's sudden outburst, but Adam was the only one who seemed curious more than anything. "Wait, are you... *Hearing something?*"

That question seemed to resonate with both Seb and Sev, who looked to one another before turning their attention towards Lucy, who found herself embarrassed and unable to hide any longer.

"...Yes?"

Adam let out a sigh of relief. "I thought I was the only one..."

Lucy and Adam turned their attention to their friends. Sev stared at Seb, waiting for their leader to say something, but Seb only looked away and nodded his head.

"What does it mean?" Sev queried, his confusion all but confirming that all four of them had been hearing voices. They began talking among themselves, until Pryce let out a sigh, drawing their attention.

"That.. That was us. An attempt to keep the Vault-Dwellers content." He drew in a haggard breath. "But.. but you four... Were always different and we couldn't figure out why."



"Stop speaking in riddles," Seb snapped, clearly frustrated. "Were we part of some damned-" he paused, fumbling for the right word only for Lucy to fill it in for him.

"Experiment?"

Pryce's chuckle at that preposterous question turned into a wheezing cough but he shook his head when Lucy started towards him. "No. That's not... important... now. We don't... have... much time. I need to tell-"

"How long?" Sev cut him off, bluntly cutting to the chase. "How long have you been coming to the surface? How long since the seal was broken?"

"Since... before my time as Overseer."

The words fell like a hammer, the weight of that lie they'd been forced to swallow all their lives hitting them each a little differently.

Sev's expression was troubled, eyes dark with anger as he took a step away from the group, beginning to pace. He had no patience for the words coming from the Overseer's mouth now that the lie was out in the open. The air wasn't frying them from the inside. The ground wasn't a molten hellscape. The breeze outside had awakened something in him and he felt more clear-headed than ever before.

Chains, dummy.

Probably pumping us all full of who-knows-what in that recycled air.

In the so-called purified water.

The hairs on the back of Sev's neck were still raised, the premonition settling into grim certainty like lead in his guts as he widened that circle, eyes sweeping over every corner of the room. He could hear the others murmuring, trying to digest what they'd been told and what they'd already seen. He could hear Pryce's labored breathing. When he closed his eyes, he could feel something else. The faintest vibration, nothing steady like what he was used to feeling in the womb-like confines of the maintenance tunnels - the moment he tried to focus on its source, it was lost under his own pulse pounding in his ears. His breathing

quicken and he heard the softer sound of Lucy's voice, the plaintive note at the end and the fact that it was louder than before making it clear she'd headed in his direction and had just asked him something. He turned back towards the group, the words, "it's a trap," on his lips but when he took that step forward, the metallic ***CLICK*** of the pressure plate he'd just unknowingly triggered was almost deafening in the sudden silence.

"GET DOWN!"

The words that absolutely were not his own, burst from his lips and without thinking, Sev dove at Lucy, catching her with a modified spear and flinging them both to the floor. Seb and Adam both hit the deck as well, seconds before someone's makeshift booby trap went off. Half a dozen railway spikes flew across the room, exploding from concealed and pressurized railway rifles, the deadly projectiles crisscrossing mere inches over their heads.

Dust flew. Debris scattered. The smell of blood was far stronger now and when Sev let go of Lucy, he stayed crouched over her for a moment, listening. Something was ticking faintly and the shelf on the far wall had been obliterated, revealing a ragged hole in the wall behind it that seemed to lead to the next building over.

"Adam? Bryce?" Sev's voice came out strained, hoarse from that bellowing a moment before. He could see shapes in the swirling dust, hoping they'd heeded his warning. "You okay?"

"...the hell was that?" Lucy sputtered, lifting her head to see Sev standing up slowly.

He could see the damage done now, the various spikes embedded in the walls - oh no. As his eyes moved over the room, he saw the one embedded in the middle of Pryce's chest.

"Talk about a booby-trap," Adam joked, oblivious to the carnage as he reached out to touch another spike that had gone right through the center of a Vault-Tec ad. This one prominently featured the Vault-Tec Vixen herself, the spike impaled right through the middle of her cleavage.

"This wasn't-" Seb began, only for Sev to cut him off.

"We're being set up. This," he gestured to Pryce's body, "the message on the wall. The missing guards. It was too easy. All of this - it's a trap."

The two men were almost nose to nose in the middle of the room, dust still swirling around them.

"Guys?" Lucy's tone was filled with urgency as she pointed to a crack that was quickly racing up the wall and then across the ceiling towards them. "We need to get outta here. Now."

Rubble blocked the door they'd come in through, leaving them no choice but to flee through the hole in the wall before the room caved in on top of them. They found themselves inside what looked to be an old munitions building that time hadn't been kind to. It was a glorified shack, the crates and pallets that had once held weapons haphazardly stacked into place over the gaps in the concrete wall that looked like they'd come from a bomb blast.



"You weren't really lied to," came a booming voice over some kind of portable sound system. "You were protected. Coddled. But I guess it's the end of all that."

Lucy glanced at Seb, whose eyes were on Sev. Only Adam wasn't looking into the group, but outwards through a gap in the wall of the shack.

"Vault-Tec," he said. Seb clicked his tongue and Sev flexed those huge hands. Lucy, however, did neither of those things. Instead, she shrugged.

"I wanna meet these fuckers," she said, striding towards the door. She pulled it open and stepped outside, the renewed brightness of the outside world temporarily blinding them all once again. But when their eyes got used to the light, Lucy smirked and crossed her arms in that way she did. "You'd have thought a big ole' establishment like Vault-Tec would send more people."

"Nah," said Sev. "What's the point in risking more grunts - it won't change the ending."

"Damn right," said Adam. "Would be a shame for them to waste all those boot-lickers just to watch us free everyone from Vault 101 anyways."

"Ladies, gentlemen, please - let's not be rude," said Seb stepping forward, he glanced at the four Vault-Tec employees and smiled. "I'd introduce us, but I have a feeling you already know who we are."

"We do," said the one in the front - she was clearly the leader, but the two women on either side of her seemed like they were itching to take her spot. The man though - he was a wildcard. Sev pointed.

"You must be Erik," Sev said with a snarl. "I'm sure you fancy yourself the MONSTER but that's my role around these parts. Welcome to YOUR nightmare."

The man cracked his knuckles in response.

"Hello, Atty," said Seb with a wink, to the only Vault-Tec employee he'd ever considered to be something like a friend. "You know, it never would have worked between us, love."

She responded with a crude hand gesture.

"And you must be Dolly - this week. Got to say, I know the meds fucked me up some, but I want whatever you were taking. Because I heard stories about your trip..." Adam said with a smirk.

She offered him a wink.

"GG, right?" Lucy said. "I've heard of you. And now I get to turn you into a cautionary tail!"

"Are we playing, or what?" asked GG, the only one to speak. Seb smiled.

"Certainly," he said. "But there's something you need to realise,"

"What's that?" asked GG.

"We play to win," said Sev.

"And there's no world in which we lose," said Adam.

"And what makes you say that?" asked GG, with a look of mockery on her face.

"Simple," said Seb. "Because Tunnel..."

"Snakes..." Sev growled.

"Rule..." Garcia added.

And they all glanced at Lucy who added, "motherfuckers," with a grin.

Both teams broke into war cries as they sprinted towards one another, picking up anything they could to use as a weapon on the way.

And chaos reigned because war...

WAR NEVER CHANGES.