

White vines slither through the crumbling walls, struggling to cover visible holes in the wooden surface. Wooden planks clank, as the tendrils move them around in their never-ending quest to hold the makeshift hut together.

A white vine springs from the other end of the table, prompting my mesmerized eyes to follow its tip. It's tip briefly turns towards me, before picking up the candles and lanterns laying on the floor.

"Hewwo!" an over-excited little girl appears next to the busy tentacle, breaking my state of trance.

Being more aware of my bizarre surroundings, questions flood my mind, "Who are you? What is this place!"

The little girl sniffles, "Azeline? Are you still not okay?"

That word has a nostalgic ring to it. Oh, it's my name! But, who am I? Terror creeps in as I struggle to remember anything I should have. My hands clutch my lowered head, in a vain attempt to claw back my memories.

"Don't do this again! Please!" her pleading tone sobers up my panicked mind.

Think about something else! I pinch the sleep of my purple dress that covers my fair skin and run my fingers through my dark purple hair. Focusing my thoughts on my appearance as opposed to this memory loss calms me down. Terror dissipates as my mind focuses on one question. How do I recover my memories?

Should I let her know of my amnesia? What if she is the one who put me in this situation? She could take advantage of me and start planting false memories.

"I am just messing with you," I feign a smile.

"Not funny," She puffs her disgruntled cheeks, "At least you are okay now."

“Thanks for taking care of me,” I play along, assuming that I recently fall sick.

She rolls her eyes, neither denying nor affirming my statement.

“How was I like, before?”

“Unpleasant,” she looks uneasy, “Don’t be like that again.”

Her hesitation hints at a delicate subject. Have I done something horrible?

“Promise.”

“Deal!” she makes a big smile, “Let’s celebrate!”

“For what exactly?”

“You are back to normal!”

“Sure?” the possibility that memory loss swings me back to normalcy tickles me.

“What do you want to do?” she presses her cheeks.

An opportunity to revisit my past appears, “Let’s talk about the old times.”

She throws a cautious stare, “Why?”

“I want to reflect our... friendship, partnership, sisterhood,” I throw relationship jargon, unsure what kind of bond we had, “Do you remember the first time we met?”

“Okay?” she makes a puzzled stare.

Deafening silence as she waits for my input. Amidst the silence, A vine covered with lilies descends from the ceiling and excretes white nectars filling the table’s empty glass.

“Thirsty?” she shoves the glass that emits a fruity fragrance.

The liquid resembles diluted milk, with yellow particles floating near the rim. Enticed by my parched throat and wanting to be polite, I take a sip. As the viscous fluid tickles my taste buds with its sweetness, my mind falters, submerged into a dreamlike state. Buried memories unearth themselves from the forgotten corners of my mind and surround me. They arrange

themselves to form a dreadful scenery of a smog-filled sky that shades a convoluted maze of shacks.

Chicken bones and pottery shards fly towards the ground of this dusty alley as I stuck my hand again inside the trash can. It wanders through the rotting garbage, before rubbing a smooth solid object. I pull it out, expecting something valuable, only for it to be solidified poop.

I throw that disgusting lump back before I fall to my exhausted knees, “What am I doing with my life?”

The trash can stands in silence, offering no answers.

“Why does he make me do this?” I murmur at the container.

The trash can moves ever closer, ready to hug me with its invisible arms. Oh, that’s just my upper half collapsing towards it.

As the trash can brace for impact, a gentle yet strong hand pulls the hem of my dress, stopping my face from slamming its metallic lid.

“Hewwo!” a girl mumbles as I straighten myself up.

As we lock eyes, she holds up a strange book. The cover of the book depicts a terrible sketch of a naked man flexing behind a cityscape. However, its title, ‘The City Ends’ compels me to take and examine the book closer. I flip and scan through the table of contents to find questionable chapter titles. Highlights are, ‘Weird Trick to Get Rich! Bankers hate this!’ and ‘My Secrets Unleashed’. I even get migraines as my eyes go through one of the chapters.

Upon closing the book, she hold her palms up, expecting alms while sending a teary stare that melts my cold heart. This excuse of literature has no takers, and I seem to be her last hope.

Strapped for cash myself, I kneel and give her a sympathetic gaze, “Let’s find other

suckers.”

“Wowwy wowwy!” she makes a delightful smile as she takes back the book.

I gaze back at the poor trash can. It just sits there in its tranquillity, praying that I find my inner peace in this godless city. I gesture the trash can a silent farewell before the we stroll away from the alley.

“Better?” she stares at the half-drunk glass cautiously.

“How long did I... blank out?” I open my eyes to see that I am back in the vine-covered room

“Oh, did you?” She sends a confused stare, “I thought you are just appreciating the drink... for a few seconds or so?”

To my relief, only a brief moment passes as I relieve those memories that feel like hours. That relief contorts in concern as I reflect on what my miserable past.

“How do I look like to you when we first met?” I sigh.

Caught off guard by the unexpected question, her eyes dart around the room as if the walls, covered by the vines, hold the answer.

“I was digging up a trash can, before proceeding to talk with it. I must have looked like a crazy hobo.”

“You even smell...” she makes a big smile, “but I love you whatever you are.”

As comforting as her smile be, I am flustered that she denies neither my craziness nor my hobo-like appearance. Even added that I stank.

“Thanks,” I snarks, “But why were you trying to sell me that book when I look... penniless?”

“I shoved it to whoever I met,” Her lips paint a nostalgic smile, “And you are the first one who bats an eye.”

“After we leave the alley, what happened?”

“We wandered around and met Hazel.”

Hearing an unfamiliar name, I twitch my eye, “Of course. Hazel.”

“The way you convince her to buy the book, is that morally right?”

Not having a clue of what she said, my eyes turn towards the half-drunk liquid. I gulp it again, hoping that lightning strikes twice.