

Lisander Dust hasn't always had the surname reserved for the orphans and bastard children of the Mud District. Of all the last names in Spirea, *Dust* is the one most commonly spat out in disgust. With a name like that, he'd be lucky to get a job in the drainage trenches, trying to extract enough water from the ground to keep the Mud District from sinking into it. It's pitched as a noble profession—as noble as a muddie can be—and the pay is good enough to put food on the table at least three nights a week, but with the constant trickle-down of used water from higher districts, it's ultimately a futile one. When Muddies die on the street, their bodies often simply sink into the mud before anyone can be bothered to pull them out and identify them, but Dusts often seem to simply disappear, as if they never were to begin with. Dust to dust.

Lisander was born Lisander Alabaster; a mouthful of a name for a child still learning to spell. His mothers were determined that he grow up wanting for nothing, and as a result he had to live up to their expectations early. He learned how to act and sing, paint with watercolours and toil away for hours at needlework. He would fence and ride horseback during the daylight hours and then the three of them would read literature in the evenings before retiring. He lived a charmed life, but it was a life built over a shadow. Over the mud that was slowly sinking its foundations and eating at the floors.

His mothers insisted that he learn these skills to better navigate the Marble District, a world of glistening silk and plush carpets beneath the feet of guests, but when he left them, these skills proved even more useful in the life he built from himself in the muck he was left to.

Lisander didn't escape under cover of darkness. He didn't even leave at dawn, or on a rainy day. On a day made bright and rich with sunshine, Lisander packed up what coin he could easily carry, a dagger and shortsword given to him for his birthday and layered a crisp blouse over a pair of blue silk pants. Beneath that, he wore all black. He told his mothers that he would be going out to see some friends, and that he wouldn't be back until the evening. Perhaps he'd stay over, but he'd be back. Then he pulled on a pair of boots, slung a cloak nonchalantly over his shoulder, and strode out into the bright daylight.