

*Paris, France*

1939

There was darkness coming, Marcello could feel even before he could see it. It was like seeing a rainstorm before it dumped its contents on you. He could still smell the metallic smell of blood and death riding on the clouds to Paris. Marching boots, rumbling wheels, coming closer and closer. He could not get the sound of the impending doom out of his head, still fresh in his mind after the last vision. It did not matter that he had dreams of the future for years, he could never undo anything he heard or saw, the silent screams of the enslaved haunted and deafened him. He often wondered if this was a blessing or a curse, to catch a glimpse of what lay ahead, with all the pain and suffering. He tried to block it, but he could still see the dark forces whispering in the enemies' ear, urging them to go faster and faster until it was overwhelming. He bit his lip to keep from screaming out loud as his gaze turned to the city below him.

Paris was covered in a haze as sunlight broke through the handful of clouds leftover from the afternoon's rainshower. He almost felt ashamed for not enjoying the view more as the sun hit the metal of the Eiffel Tower, dancing upon it in the evening light. On the street far below, he could hear the splish splashes of people walking through puddles. The splashes unwillingly turned into thuds. The thumping thuds of feet hitting the ground as one perfect, deadly, living machine. He could smell the trouble coming like a rainstorm about to downpour.

"Look, their brave men cry aloud in the streets," he muttered as the ancient words he had memorized as a boy came back to him. "The envoys of peace weep bitterly as they are forgotten," an image of a train car flashed through his mind, "No one is respected," the cries of the enslaved and forgotten rang out again, their calls for deliverance were shouts in his head. The silent screams were becoming deafening to him, he could not ignore them. The cries of the captured were audible, he could not close his eyes without seeing their pain. He clenched his jaw and grabbed his head, trying to block the sound out even though he knew it was futile. You could not block what was coming from your head. He would know, he had tried. He could not ignore it just like the haze that hovered above Paris.

A drop of water fell to ground, the sound of its plop as it landed in a puddle below brought him out of his head and pulled him back into reality. He breathed a sigh of relief, he knew his visions were divinely given, but that did not mean he had to enjoy them. The ones at night were often the worst. He had often woken up in a cold sweat, wondering if what he had seen was a nightmare or part of a future reality.

He had often cried out as he sank further in his pew during mass at the cathedral of Notre Dame as another vision of the darkness coming closer struck his mind and pierced his heart. His heart ached for the people who were swept up and annexed into the wave of darkness that was striking against Europe. War was beginning. The whispers in the street corners said as much. Austria annexed screamed the headlines. Poland has fallen, came the broadcasts on the radio, then Belgium and the Netherlands surrendered. Marcello knew in his heart that war had already begun. It was only a matter of time before France was overwhelmed by the typhoon of war about to engulf them. Whatever peace Europe had known after the Great War had already begun to

shatter into a million pieces, the fall of nations was imminent. He could see that clearly, but there was something else on the very edge that was making its way into the center.

Suddenly he knew what it was, his King's servants standing strong amidst the ongoing, crashing waves of darkness, shining their light like sunbeams breaking through the clouds. He couldn't quite grasp how wonderful this was, pure and sweet salvation. It was almost ridiculous, his head said, like umbrellas floating into the evening sky, that this life giving, life saving redemption was even possible. The eve of war was no longer coming, it was upon them like a dam about to burst, but he now knew there was something that would persist through the darkness.

Marcello breathed in the crisp evening air as the bells of Notre Dame began to toll as they pulled him yet again back to reality. He basked in the twilight time as high above the city the stars woke up as the bells tolled on, seemingly turning day into night with each toll. Down below he could hear evening mass ending as the priest read the passage, with the familiar words of the Psalmist floating up to his ears, "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations and the whole earth." His mother had always called this *selah*, the act of be still and know that God was God no matter what happened around them. His gaze turned back to Paris as raindrops started falling, turning his blonde hair into soaking brown. He laughed and yelled out, "Selah!" to the heavens in the midst of the oncoming darkness as the raindrops fell all around him. This was what he was looking for, this sense of peace and purpose only given by his Creator gave him an answer to if his visions and dreams were truly nightmares. They were not, these glimpses were a call to action, to seek, search and find another to save. He now had a new task, to stand as light amidst the darkness that would eventually end.