

Missa Solemnis

By

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“Blessed is he who has overcome all passions and then proceeds energetically to perform his duties under all circumstances careless of success!”

Ludwig van Beethoven – 1818

CHAPTER ONE

KYRIE

The music moves through the air. To him it was everywhere. In every nook and cranny of Vienna – a city he knew every stone of. In 1822 it was more than just the capital of the Austrian Empire with its lingering memories of the Napoleonic Wars – it was a city shaped by its medieval core, Baroque grandeur and centuries old buildings.

The Innere Stadt – the inner city – he knew it so well, the beating heart, dense, walled, filled with narrow lanes, courtyards and palaces. The imperial residence, already sprawling with wings from many eras; guards in crisp white uniforms, courtiers, and bureaucrats moving constantly in its courtyards, like an army of ants, trampling it under foot. The prestigious Spanish and Winter Riding School, always active. Its long rectangular hall with its walls in white, beige and pale grey, illuminated by tall windows that filled the space with soft, diffused light. A floor of fine, pale riding sand, meticulously raked each morning. A royal box crowned by a portrait of the late Charles VI, last male ruler of the direct Habsburg line, to which riders would always salute before beginning their work. The atmosphere was always ceremonial – quiet, disciplined, almost ecclesiastical.

He knew it all so well.

Stephansdom - St. Stephen's Cathedral, the city's defining landmark with its gothic spire towering over the rooftops. The square around it crowded with carriages, vendors, and churchgoers. The interior was dim, incense filled, and echoing with sacred music – and oh, the music, the true soul of Vienna, it was his life, after the divine it was his greatest love, and curse – but only sometimes, in those moments of stagnation. But the city was always in motion. Graben & Kohlmarkt – with its elegant facades, home to luxury shops, cakes and confectioners, like Demel. All offering heavenly delights to indulge in.

He knew it all so well.

The Glacis, an expansive stretch of land that lies just beyond the city walls, serves as a crucial buffer zone between the bustling inner city and the quieter suburbs. This broad, open area is not merely a defensive perimeter; it is a vibrant space alive with daily activity. Here, carriages roll along the well-trodden paths that encircle the fortifications, their wheels clattering against the dirt and stones, while pedestrians meander leisurely beneath the shade of towering trees that line the walkways. The Glacis transforms when needed into a lively promenade, where military drills take place, showcasing the disciplined movements of soldiers, and public gatherings draw citizens together for celebrations and events.

He knew it all so well.

Vorstadte, the suburbs, rapidly growing – lively, crowded, and full of artists, taverns and theatres. A favourite stomping ground of his. The artisan districts of Mariahilf & Neubau, with its workshops, textile makers, and small theatres, offering culture amidst the grime. Leopoldstadt, a bustling district across the Danube Canal, home to markets and Prater Park with long avenues of Chestnut trees, horse riders, promenading families to see and be seen, and the military parades, a showcase of organisation and discipline, exemplifying precision and a polished appearance at its best.

He knew it all so well.

The many palaces and cultural landmarks. The summer residence of the emperor, Schonbrune Palace, a masterpiece with gardens, fountains, and the Gloriette overlooking the city from its elevated position. The zoo at Tiergarten, Belvedere Palace, complex of Prince Eugene surrounded by even more beautiful formal gardens. Burgtheatre, one of Europe's leading theatrical establishments. A centre of German-language drama and opera. Karntnertor Theatre, the opera house of his time, premiere of many of his works. He was intimately familiar with every corner of that building, just as he was with the city itself; he could recount the precise location of every nail, screw, and fitting that held it together. The very essence of the music that constantly fills the air in the theatre forever woven into the structure, resonating within its walls and foundations. It was as if the melodies were trapped in a timeless embrace, echoing through the corridors and rooms, forever playing a symphony that only he could truly appreciate. To him, each note seems to linger in the atmosphere, a haunting reminder of life and vibrancy, now preserved in a silent yet powerful harmony that would endure for eternity.

He knew it all so well.

Schottenstift, the Scottish Abbey founded in the 12th century, a centre of scholarship and music. The abbey was a place his boots had trodden many times over the years. St. Rupert's Church, the oldest church in the city, dating back to the 8th century. A small Romanesque structure tucked away in the old medieval streets.

But above all, Vienna, his Vienna, was the musical capital of the world.

A city of the arts – a city of music and joy – a city of light – and now a city of darkness attempting to overpower the sunlight, and they were everywhere.

The minions of the dark one.

He knows them all too well.

Lurking in the shadows and in those around him. Shapes in the crowd snickering, whispering their laughter, a haunting melody that dances just beyond his grasp. Despite his nearly complete loss of hearing, their taunts resonate in his mind with startling clarity, as vivid as the music that fills the air. He focuses on it – like a life preserver. Composing it within his fevered mind, bringing forth the start of the first movement – its words echoing in the cold air around him - “Kyrie eleison - Lord, have mercy upon us.” He will treat each movement like a symphonic movement. To him it would be more than just a Mass, he sees it as a heroic symphony – a victory – a triumph – to burn away the shadows that fall before the light and illuminate the path ahead for all.

He sees it.

The piece will begin with a captivating instrumental melody that sets the stage, enveloping the listener in a rich tapestry of sound. As the music unfolds, the chorus enters, resonating with the solemn intonation of “Kyrie” repeated three times, each utterance echoing with a profound sense of reverence. Following each choral phrase, a soloist mirrors this invocation, creating a harmonious dialogue that emphasises the significance of the number three, a powerful symbol representing the Holy Trinity.

“Yes,” he mutters, “the chorus shall be the people of the world and the soloist – the priest calling...calling to our saviour.”

A sudden cough erupts from him, a deep, guttural sound that seems to seize his entire body in its grip. It is a violent spasm, one that reverberates through his chest and leaves him gasping for breath. As he struggles to regain his composure, he can taste a metallic tang on his tongue, a slight indication of copper that hints at something more

sinister lurking within. The sensation is unsettling, a stark reminder of the fragility of his body, and it sends a shiver down his spine as he struggles to regain his composure, the world around him momentarily fading into a blur of concern and confusion.

He knew his race was coming to an end. The question was how long he had? "Oh, Lord, give me the time," he fervently prays.

But first the darkness – the long night.

They were here. They are always nearby.

He could hear them. High above upon the steeple of the cathedral. He knows what they look like, small shadowy misshapen gargoyle-like creatures' scrambling over the spire. The crack of their leathery wings upon the night wind, their whispered mockery clear to his ears.

He reassures himself that they won't win, that victory was within his reach. He would overcome his adversary – "*his thorn in the flesh*". Yet, as he braces for the challenge, another violent fit of coughing seizes him, more intense than before. The force of each spasm feels as if it might fracture a rib, leaving him gasping for breath. With a grimace, he expels a mixture of thick phlegm and blood from his mouth, the stark reality of his condition hitting him like a cold wave. Each cough echoes in the silence, a harsh reminder of the battle raging not just outside, but within his own body.

Then he feels the hands upon him, rough and unyielding, like the talons of a crazed predator poised to shred its victim.

"Come on then, on your feet," the voice of the beast says to him.

"What do we have here?" Echoes a second voice.

In his frail state, the figures looming over him appear as monstrous beasts, nightmarish creatures sent from the shadows to deliver the final blow. He attempts to fight back, but his efforts are feeble, barely a murmur against the overwhelming strength of his captors. These so-called monsters are, in reality, Police Constables who have inadvertently discovered the tramp huddled in a corner, nestled against the cold stone base of St. Stephen's Cathedral. The towering spire looms above, a stark contrast to his vulnerable position. The officers' uniforms, once symbols of protection, now seem to him like the armour of predators, ready to pounce on their prey. The dim light of the evening casts long shadows, heightening his sense of dread as he grapples with the reality of his situation, feeling utterly powerless against the world that appears to have turned its back on him.

"No...no..." he protests weakly.

"Drunk, huh?" The Constable announces.

"Fools..." the words of the tramp are spoken softly – almost a murmur. He coughs long and hard.

"Lend us a hand, will you?" The first Constable asks his colleague.

"Alright," the second Constable replies, "but if I get the plague, it's on your head."

"Don't be silly, now come on." The Constables exert a bit more force to subdue the vagrant, who struggles against their grip as they manoeuvre him towards the street. With each step, the tramp's resistance becomes more frantic, "no – no – let me go", he shouts, his voice finally rising above a hum.

"No loitering, we'll get you a nice warm cell to sleep it off." The officers remain resolute, their determination evident in the way they tighten their hold. They drag him closer to the waiting police wagon parked at the curb. The wagon looms large, its frame glinting under the flickering flame of the streetlamp, a symbol of authority and order. As

they reach the vehicle, the Constables prepare to lift him inside, their movements synchronised and efficient, ensuring that the tramp is securely contained and that the situation remains under control.

“Alright, in you go.”

They roughly hoist the man into the back of the wagon, the heavy door slamming shut with a definitive clang that echoes in the still air. The man, his hands grimy, clutches the cold metal bars of the cage in a desperate, yet hopeless, effort to escape his confinement. His eyes, wide with panic, dart around as he realises the futility of his struggle. Suddenly, a violent fit of coughing overtakes him, forcing him to collapse onto the floor of the wagon, gasping for breath. The dim light filtering through the barred windows casts shadows across his weary face.

“Another busy night,” the Second Constable comments.

“At least this one’s a new face,” the first Constable responds.

“Breaks the monogamy.”

The two Constables laugh as they hop up onto the wagon and get the horses moving. As the wagon pulls away down the street; high above on the spires, small wispy figures giggle, but it could be the wind or a mere trick of the shadows.

But the tramp knows better.

He closes his eyes clinging to the music in his mind: “Kyrie eleison - Lord, have mercy upon us”.

The damp, dreary cells are tucked away beneath police headquarters, exuding an air of despair and neglect. Echoes of human suffering seep through the heavy metal doors, punctuated by the haunting sounds of moans, groans, and the occasional cough, creating a sonata of anguish that reverberates through the cold, stone corridor. Flickering oil lamps cast a feeble glow, their flames sputtering as they struggle against the oppressive darkness, while the advent of gas lamps is only now just beginning to emerge, hinting at a future where light might chase away some of the shadows. The atmosphere is thick with a sense of hopelessness, as the walls seem to absorb the sorrow of those confined within, each cell a silent witness to the stories of despair that unfold in the depths of this grim underworld.

A door swings open at the far end of the corridor, revealing two figures who step into the dimly lit passageway. As they make their way forward, the sound of their footsteps reverberates sharply against the cold bluestone floor, creating an almost haunting echo that fills the air. One of the men, a police Sergeant in his mid-40s, carries an air of authority, his seasoned demeanour suggesting years of experience on the force, and yet his current expression is panic, far removed from any semblance of power.

Beside him walks a younger man, Anton Schindler, mid-20’s, his presence marked by a quiet intensity and cultivated restraint. His chestnut hair is parted and styled with precision, a subtle sheen suggesting pomade, framing a face both youthful and solemn. Round spectacles rest lightly on his nose, their thin metal rims catching the light-an emblem of intellect and introspection. He wears a black wool overcoat tailored to his slender frame, its high collar and broad lapels echoing the neoclassical tastes of the era. Beneath it, a crisp white shirt with a stiff, high-standing collar rises to meet a carefully knotted black cravat, the ensemble evoking the formal dignity of a barrister,

scholar, or junior statesman. His gaze is steady, contemplative, touched with melancholy, yet his expression hints at deeper currents.

"Again, my apologies. We had no idea. We thought him a vagrant – a drunkard," the police Sergeant tries to explain his position.

"He's not a drunkard," Anton retorts sharply. "He's just been very ill of late."

"Yes. And again, my sincere apologies."

"The emperor will hear of this outrage."

The mere utterance of those words nearly causes the Sergeant's eyes to bulge out of their sockets. His expression becomes more panicked, as if the very fabric of reality had been torn apart by the implications of what he had just heard.

"What – no – it's a mistake, a simple error of judgement," he proffers in defence.

"More like incompetence."

"Yes, incompetence – very incompetent officers. I'll reprimand them immediately."

The two men halt in front of a grimy cell. The Sergeant fumbles with a set of rusted keys, the metallic clinks echoing in the dimly lit corridor, until he finally manages to unlock the door with a reluctant creak. He steps aside, gesturing for Anton to enter the cramped space. Inside, the supposed tramp is huddled in a corner, surrounded by the oppressive stench of decay and neglect. The walls are stained and peeling, and water drips incessantly from a broken pipe overhead, creating a rhythmic patter that only amplifies the desolation of the scene. The flickering light from the corridor casts eerie shadows, revealing the man's dishevelled appearance, as he sits in the filth, embodying the despair of his surroundings.

Anton is ready to explode, finding it extremely hard to control himself at the sight before him. "Do you treat all your prisoners like this?"

"We did not know." The Sergeant feebly responds. His voice was barely a whisper, a fragile echo of uncertainty that hangs in the air like a thick fog. His eyes, cloud with a mix of regret and confusion, dart all around as if searching for answers that elude him. The gravity of the situation has overwhelmed him, leaving him grasping for clarity. "We did not know," the silence that follows his admission is palpable.

"And now you do", Anton informs him. It takes all his control not to throttle the man. "Can I have a blanket, please?"

The Sergeant gives a brief nod before turning away, his complexion ashen, nearly matching the pallor of the man confined within the cell. Anton approaches, kneeling to get a closer look at his friend, who at 51 years old appears frail and unwell. The man's dark hair, streaked with grey, stands on end as if he has just been jolted by a surge of electricity. His face, marked by intelligence, is framed by sharp features and deep-set, piercing eyes that seem to hold a flicker of madness.

"Ludwig," Anton speaks his name.

Ludwig van Beethoven gradually lifts his gaze; his eyes meeting Anton's with a mixture of warmth and recognition. The familiar contours of his friend's face bring a sense of comfort, a reminder of the countless moments they had shared in both joy and struggle over the last couple of years.

"Anton...my friend."

"Are you hurt?"

Beethoven's eyes suddenly go wide in anger. "Fools – imbeciles – morons!"

Anton can't help but smile, despite the seriousness of the situation. "Let's get you out of here."

As dawn breaks over Vienna, the cobblestone street in front of Beethoven's residence begins to stir with the sounds of early morning traffic. Nestled in the vibrant heart of the city, this unassuming building boasts a quaint front courtyard, where a small alcove provides just enough space for his carriage to rest. The gentle clatter of hooves on stone and the soft murmur of voices fill the air, creating a lively backdrop that contrasts with the serene atmosphere of the composer's home. The modest facade, with its simple charm, reflects the genius within, while the surrounding hustle and bustle hints at the rich cultural tapestry of Vienna, a city that has long been a cradle for artistic brilliance.

But during the night that brilliance had been sorely tested.

The enemy had made a bold strike.

An audacious offensive.

In a moment of profound vulnerability, he was struck down, a blow that could have easily extinguished his spirit. Yet, by an extraordinary twist of fate, he found himself cradled in the embrace of the divine grace of God, which not only preserved his life but also ignited a fierce determination. This miraculous survival he tells himself will become a catalyst for his relentless pursuit of justice, propelling him to rise from the ashes of despair and continue the battle against the infernal kin.

And yet he feels so tired, worn out, bone weary. It's easy to speak the words of resilience and defiance in your head, but not so simple to put them into practice, as the world trips you up in so many ways. He tells himself that each day he still breathes is a testament to his strength. He must continue to transform his pain into purpose, driven by the belief that his struggle is not in vain but rather a vital part of a larger narrative that demanded to be told.

Or to be composed and performed in music – in his mass - the “Missa Solemnis”.

“Get this into you, it'll warm you up.”

Beethoven accepts the bowl of warm broth proffered by Anton. “Thank you.”

Anton looks at Beethoven in sympathy, but not pity, rather in approval, as the composer's secretary for the last couple of years he knows exactly what this man has endured, the illnesses, the debts, the personal problems with Karl. Anton is sure that he would have given up if he had to face and overcome such obstacles. And yet despite all the complications this man was still able to create such wonderful pieces of music.

Despite having known Ludwig for quite some time, Anton remains perplexed by the sheer intelligence that seems to emanate from him. It's as if Ludwig operates on a different wavelength, effortlessly grasping concepts and ideas that leave others in the dust. Anton often finds himself pondering the nature of genius, recognising that such extraordinary talent cannot be easily dissected or understood. It's a phenomenon that transcends logic and explanation; geniuses like Beethoven simply exist in a realm of their own, where creativity and intellect intertwine seamlessly. This realisation both fascinates and frustrates Anton at times, as he grapples with the mystery of Ludwig's abilities, acknowledging that some things are simply beyond comprehension.

It was in 1814, Anton encountered the renowned maestro for the first time, a serendipitous meeting that would mark the beginning of a significant chapter in his life. At just 18 years old, he was a law student and an aspiring violinist who had recently

relocated to the radiant city of Vienna. Their paths crossed unexpectedly when Anton was tasked with delivering a note from the esteemed violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh. Shortly thereafter, Beethoven recognised Anton at one of Schuppanzigh's performances, leading to a budding connection that would see Anton performing in two of Beethoven's own concerts. Although their relationship did not evolve into a close professional partnership right away, it eventually blossomed, with Beethoven enlisting Anton as his secretary and entrusting him with various business matters, thus intertwining their fates in the world of music and beyond.

Dealing with Ludwig van Beethoven could often be a test of patience, as his emotional fluctuations spanned a wide spectrum, leaving those around him, including Anton, acutely aware of the unpredictability that accompanied his genius. Anton, like many others who had the privilege-and challenge-of knowing Beethoven, had learned to navigate these turbulent moods with a mix of understanding and flexibility. While the composer's erratic temperament could be exasperating, Anton found that, for the most part, he managed to remain unfazed by the emotional storms that often surrounded Beethoven. It was a delicate balance, one that required a certain level of acceptance and adaptability, allowing Anton to appreciate the virtuosity of Beethoven's artistry without becoming overwhelmed by the chaos of his personality.

"I'll contact the chancellor, arresting you – idiots." Anton states firmly as he looks to Beethoven who is busy eating and not paying attention.

Ludwig is seated at his cluttered desk in his work room, a cozy blanket draped over his shoulders, providing warmth against the chill of the morning air. The slurping sound of the soup loud in the stillness. Sheets of music scattered across the surface of the desk; each page filled with notes and scribbles that reflect his creative process. In the corner of the dimly lit room stands an old grand piano, its polished wood dulled by time and use, the keys slightly yellowed yet still capable of producing haunting melodies. To Anton's romanticism, the air is thick with the scent of aged paper and the faint echo of past compositions, creating an atmosphere that is both nostalgic and inspiring, giving a sense of how Beethoven immerses himself in the world of sound and emotion that he so passionately crafts.

Anton softly smiles to himself shaking his head slightly in bewilderment, Beethoven's creative sphere is covered in papers and music scores; an ordered mess that only creative geniuses comprehend. His eyes then move to the framed quote from Friedrich Schiller's book "Mission of Moses" that hangs on the wall above the desk: *"He is of himself, and it is to this aloneness that all things owe their being"*.

Anton approaches the piano with a sense of curiosity, his footsteps soft against the polished floorboards. As he reaches the instrument, his gaze falls upon the incomplete score of the "Missa Solemnis," which lies open on the music desk, its pages slightly ruffled as if they have been turned in a hurry. The notes, some meticulously inked while others remain mere sketches, seem to beckon him, inviting his creative spirit to breathe life into the unfinished work. He studies the intricate markings and annotations, each one a witness to the labour and passion that have already gone into this monumental piece. The air around him is thick with the weight of unfulfilled potential, and he can almost hear the echoes of the music that yearns to be realised, practically urging him to pick up the quill and continue the journey Beethoven has begun.

"I fear I'll never finish it," the voice of Beethoven reaches Anton's ears breaking his reverie.

He glances over his shoulder to find Beethoven standing just behind him, a fragile figure at this moment and yet still imposing. Every time Anton is with him, the composer's presence is evident, radiating an aura of genius that seems to fill the air with an electric charge, with his tousled hair and intense gaze, and his expression so often a blend of determination and passion. The morning light casts shadows across his face, highlighting the furrowed brow that speaks of countless hours spent in contemplation and creativity.

Suddenly the air is filled with the unspoken dialogue of music and emotion, inviting a deeper connection to the art that transcends time. As he stands there, Anton is all at once overpowered by the future weight of the maestro's legacy, he shakes his head to clear the cobwebs as the Latin phrase "*Ars longa, vita brevis*" comes to mind – "Art is long, life is short."

"It's been what, three years since you began?" he enquires, wanting to get his mind on other matters.

Beethoven, acutely aware of his friend's words and the subtle movements of his lips, responds with a simple shrug, a gesture that conveys both his understanding and the limitations imposed by his hearing impairment. The shrug, while seemingly a minimal response, encapsulates a complex interplay of emotions-acknowledgment, resignation, and perhaps a hint of frustration-reflecting the inner world of a man navigating the silence that envelops him.

"What began as a mere commission, has grown into something much more," Beethoven insists.

"I know, but why?"

Beethoven, unable to grasp Anton's words, swiftly reaches for a small, handcrafted conversation book resting on his desk. With an unwarranted sense of urgency, he hands it to Anton, pressing the book and a well-worn pencil into his hands. Anton recalls how often Beethoven would explain to him how the pencil serves a dual purpose: it is meant for the initial stages of thought and sketching out ideas, while the quill is reserved for the meticulous task of transcribing the final score. The distinction between the two tools he said was part of the creative process, emphasising the importance of both inspiration and execution in his musical endeavours.

Anton discovers a blank page and quickly jots down his question - "but why?" He then raises it for Beethoven to see.

"You know how I've dedicated my final years utterly to serving the kingdom of God?"

"Yes."

"That dedication is channelled exclusively into this mass."

"I see," Anton replies.

"This physical and material world no longer exists for me...there is only the spiritual. No more flesh." Beethoven speaks in a passionate tone. And then the music suddenly comes to him, from out of the ether, he senses it, then he hears it. "Kyrie eleison – Christi elision – Kyrie eleison" – D major, with motion to B minor and G major.

"Mit Andacht", he whispers.

Anton nods knowingly, Mit Andacht doesn't just refer to devotion, in the context of musical tempo and expression, it doesn't just dictate speed - it dictates spiritual or emotional atmosphere. As a violinist, when one saw this on a score, you knew the composer is asking for a performance that feels prayerful, humble, and deeply sincere.

As he opens his mouth to speak, he hesitates, captivated by the sight of Beethoven. The composer stands with his eyes gently closed, his body swaying ever so slightly, lost in the ethereal sounds of the first movement of the “Missa Solemnis” that resonate inside his mind. Anton observes this transformation with a mix of awe and curiosity, recognising that in the throes of creating this monumental mass, Beethoven seems to transcend his usual self. It is a state of being Anton has never witnessed before in him - one where Ludwig appears utterly detached from the mundane world around him, enveloped instead in a profound connection to the music that flows through his thoughts, where the weight of the world fades away, leaving only the purity of artistic inspiration.

“From the heart – may it return to the heart,” Beethoven speaks softly as he slowly opens his eyes looking directly at Anton, or more precisely straight through him and what lies beyond the veil. Anton remains motionless, caught in the gravity of that gaze. He feels that he is no longer a confidant to a man, but a witness to something else. A builder constructing a bridge between the earthly and the heavenly – he couldn’t shrug this image, it was too powerful, as if it was burnt into his mind.

And then in a mere moment of time, he once again finds himself gazing at his friend, a simple man, an ordinary mortal standing before him.

“I know it appears to many that I work at a level of intensity and organised chaos,” Beethoven says, “but I no longer write for my contemporaries but for eternity.”

Anton is speechless a moment before uttering, “You truly believe that this work can be a conduit to God?” As he speaks, he simultaneously writes the words down in the conversation book.

Beethoven carefully reads the words. “A pathway...for those who will listen,” he answers. “Oh, I know people consider me mad - eccentric. They turn their backs on me. Shut their doors. But my music has always been a path to something greater...I just know what it is now.”

Anton looks for the man he knows, but at this moment he doesn’t see that man standing before him, only the music and the unsettling sensation that the veil hadn’t just been lifted; Beethoven had walked through it, leaving nothing behind but the frantic heart-driven scores on the pages of his manuscripts.

“You’ll get no argument from me,” Anton says while scribbling it down.

Beethoven nods thoughtfully, his gaze drifting around the dimly lit room, filled with the echoes of creativity. Anton observes as Ludwig moves with a deliberate grace, finally coming to a stop beneath the timeworn crucifix that hung solemnly on the wall above his cluttered workbench. The crucifix, with its chipped edges and faded colours, watches over him, a silent witness to the countless hours he had spent pouring his soul into music. In this personal sanctum, where the weight of his genius mingles with the power of faith, Beethoven feels a profound connection to both his art and the divine, as if the very essence of his creativity is intertwined with the spiritual presence that looms above him.

“The bible tells us that we’re saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus and not by our own efforts or works,” Ludwig says before adding, “but he compels me to do this. I follow his word, his light.” Beethoven turns to Anton. “His glory guides me where there is only darkness.”

Anton smiles warmly and slowly mouths the words, “Faith climbs the mountains that doubt builds; I guess.”

Listening carefully and watching the movement of the lips Beethoven returns in kind. "My dear, Anton, my dear friend."

Anton writes down the following words as he speaks them to Beethoven, this cluttered way of communicating is second nature to him now. "Well, one thing is for sure, given what has occurred over the last couple of years: with Karl, and your dire financial situation. It's a miracle that you've achieved what you have."

"True," Beethoven replies, "but my faith sustains me. Even when occult forces rally against me at every turn and on every corner."

"What do you mean exactly?" he writes.

"The evil one does not want me to complete my work. He sends devils. In flesh. In spirit. They surround me. Torment me. Place hurdles before me. Lay traps to entangle me." Anton is silent, thinking at what he just heard, but before he can answer, Beethoven continues. "When you try to bring goodness into this world, evil will always try to prevent you. It's the nature of wickedness."

Anton is once more silent, as an historian he is acutely aware that throughout history, individuals and movements striving to foster compassion, justice, and progress have frequently faced obstacles that seem to arise from nowhere, manifesting as challenges, setbacks, or outright hostility. This dynamic illustrates a fundamental truth: the existence of good is often met with the counterforce of evil, which seeks to undermine and thwart those efforts. Understanding this interplay can provide insight into the struggles faced by those who endeavour to create a better world, highlighting the resilience required to persist in the face of adversity. This of course sounds well and good in his analytical mind, but as he gazes into Beethoven's eyes he clearly sees someone who has stood before true darkness.

"I'll admit you've had some bad breaks but really..." he says forgetting to write it down in the conversation book. Beethoven, not comprehending what he said grabs an ear trumpet resting nearby and puts it to his ear. Custom made for him, it features a wide, funnel-like bell to capture sound waves and a narrow, curved tube that tapered down to an earpiece designed to fit into the ear canal.

Anton repeats his statement.

Beethoven nods as he listens and then looks his friend directly in the eyes, "I don't have much time left, Anton." He proclaims without a shadow of doubt.

"Nonsense."

"The life of man is short. And mine draws to an end. I know it. I feel it. But I will complete this work and whatever others I can. Darkness shall not prevail while there is still light. I will overcome my messenger of Satan."

A palpable weight descends upon the room, wrapping it in an oppressive silence that leaves Anton grappling for the right words. Beethoven stands resolute, his expression unyielding, the gravity of his previous statements hanging heavily in the air. The morning sunlight is suddenly obscured by passing clouds, casting a sombre gloom over the space. The atmosphere grows increasingly dim, as if an unseen spectre of despair has crept in, covering the room in a shroud of darkness that feels almost tangible.

"Uncle." Comes a gentle voice and with it the morning rays of the sun once more emerge from outside as the clouds pass by and the darkness retreats before the light.

Anton turns to discover Karl Beethoven, aged 16, in his night shirt, standing in the doorway. Ludwig's nephew, pale skin, untouched by labour or sun, glows softly in the

morning light, and his dark eyes-wide, solemn, and intelligent-seem to study the viewer as much as be studied. His short wavy black hair, even when carefully combed refuses to lie flat, hinting at a restless spirit beneath the surface. His posture is upright, trained, yet not stiff; there's a quiet tension in his shoulders, as if he's holding back a question or a dream.

"Ah, young Karl, morning," Anton says glad for the intrusion.

"Good morning Mr. Schindler," Karl responds politely.

"Your uncle had quite the night. But everything is alright now," he reassures the young man. Anton turns his attention back to Ludwig speaking slowly as to be understood. "Well, I must be off. I'll call by later to see how you're doing?"

Beethoven nods in gratitude. "Thank you, Anton."

"I'll see myself out." Anton exits the room, giving Karl a reassuring tap on the shoulder as he does.

A heavy silence settles between uncle and nephew, an unspoken unease floating in the air like a thick fog. Both men stand still as if nailed to the floorboards, their eyes occasionally darting to one another, yet neither daring to speak. The weight of their shared history loomed large, filled with unaddressed grievances and unvoiced emotions that had built up over time. Each was acutely aware of the other's presence, but the words that could bridge the chasm between them remained stubbornly unformed. Time seems to stretch, amplifying the discomfort as they wrestle with their thoughts, each hoping the other would find the courage to shatter the stillness that had encased them.

"Well, I best be getting ready for school," Karl says finally shattering the silence. As he turns to leave is he halted by the voice of Beethoven calling to him. He lets out a gentle sigh before turning to face his uncle.

"I don't mean to be a tyrant..."

"I know, uncle. You just want what's best."

"I do." Beethoven replies softly.

"I'll be late," Karl says turning to leave.

"Karl," Beethoven calls after him, the trumpet to his ear, "will you come with me to the library tomorrow?"

"Yes, uncle," Karl answers without hesitation. Despite the tumultuous nature of their relationship, Karl truly does love and admire his uncle.

CHAPTER TWO

In the heart of the National Library of Vienna, nestled within the opulent confines of the Neue Burg Wing of the Hofburg Palace, the atmosphere is steeped in history and artistry. The library, adorned with exquisite marble floors and grand statues, creates a majestic backdrop for the solitary figure of Beethoven. Seated at a sturdy wooden desk, he is engrossed in the delicate task of examining a collection of ancient musical scores intended for church masses. The desk is cluttered with a rich assortment of compositions, including revered works by the likes of Johann Sebastian Bach and Joseph Haydn, their notes whispering tales of divine inspiration and musical genius. As sunlight filters through the tall windows, casting a warm glow on the pages, Beethoven's brow furrows in concentration, his mind racing with the possibilities of harmonies and melodies that could emerge from these timeless pieces. The library, a sanctuary of

knowledge and creativity, serves as the perfect setting for a composer of his stature, where the echoes of the past intertwine with the promise of future masterpieces.

Beethoven is immersed in the documents, as if he were a learned scholar unravelling the mysteries of the cosmos. With a worn pencil in hand, he jots down fleeting thoughts and insights, each stroke a step closer to enlightenment. Moments later, Karl enters the room, his arms laden with a collection of ancient manuscripts, their pages yellowed and frayed with age. He carefully sets them down on the desk, the musty scent of history wafting through the air, mingling with the intensity of Beethoven's focus, as if the very essence of creativity was waiting to be unleashed from the depths of those timeworn texts.

"Good, good, well done," Beethoven enthuses.

"Thank you," Karl says.

Beethoven goes over the new documents, pleased with what new treasure he has in his hands. "It is a journey, Karl," he says out of nowhere, his mind following a sudden train of thought, "creative enlightenment. It invites us to explore the depths of imagination and unlock the potential within. It encourages a profound connection with our inner self, fostering an environment where ideas can flourish and creativity can thrive. But it is not always easy. Its processes often involve stepping outside of conventional boundaries, allowing for the exploration of new perspectives. Do you understand?" Beethoven asks his nephew as his eyes fall upon the young teenager, no, Beethoven thinks to himself – young man.

"I believe so," Karl responds, articulating each word carefully to ensure his uncle can follow the movement of his lips. In all honesty, he often finds himself adrift in the sea of his uncle's eloquent discourse. While he recognises that much of what his uncle shares is steeped in profound philosophy and rich with wisdom, it remains a realm that feels just out of reach for him. This creative domain, vibrant and intricate, is one that Karl struggles to penetrate, leaving him feeling somewhat disconnected from the insightful conversations that flow so effortlessly from his uncle's mind. Despite his uncle's attempts to guide him through this labyrinth of thought, Karl grapples with a sense of alienation, yearning to grasp the concepts that seem to dance just beyond his understanding.

"As one delves into this enlightening experience," Beethoven continues, "they may find inspiration in the most unexpected places, transforming everyday moments into opportunities for artistic expression. The essence of creative enlightenment lies in its ability to awaken a sense of wonder and curiosity, urging individuals to embrace their unique voice and share their visions with the world. Through this transformative journey, creativity becomes not just a skill, but a vital part of one's identity, enriching both personal and communal experiences."

Beethoven finishes his lesson, and a palpable silence envelops the space as his intense gaze locks onto Karl's for several drawn-out moments. Then, breaking the tension, a warm and affectionate smile spreads across his face.

"Now go and find any Gregorian Chants from the 12th or 13th century," Beethoven tells him.

"Yes, uncle," Karl turns to leave but is halted by Ludwig's voice.

"Good work, Karl," Beethoven informs him.

Karl nods and sets off on his next expedition. Beethoven watches his nephew walk away with an affectionate smile upon his face. But behind the joy there is always a dark

cloud lurking. His relationship with Karl was at times anything but fatherly – although deep down in his heart he truly considers Karl to be his own son and he loves him deeply. Yet the relationship has been a volatile one defined by a bitter legal battle with his mother, an overbearing attempt at surrogate fatherhood, that has caused a deep emotional rift between the two.

Ludwig let's out an audible sigh. He only wants the best for his nephew.

A laugh.

Soft.

Mocking.

Echoing in the corners of his mind.

Beethoven blocks the mocking laughter in his head. He quickly slams shut and locks the door on the past, firmly reassuring himself that he is nothing like his own father.

He shifts his gaze back to the array of manuscripts strewn across the desk, pausing in contemplation. The haunting strains of the “Kyrie” from the “Missa Solemnis” begin to resonate within him: “Kyrie eleison - Lord, have mercy upon us.” The melody envelops him completely, echoing vividly in his mind as it weaves through the towering bookcases of the library, saturating the air with its presence. Known for his meticulous approach to his craft, he rarely engages in artistic endeavours without purpose. Yet, with this composition, he is immersing himself in an extraordinary level of detail, striving to craft the most harmonious music that aligns perfectly with each line and word of the text.

He swiftly reaches for his pencil, the urgency of his thoughts propelling him into action as he begins to jot down a flurry of notes that have just surged into his mind. With a sense of determination, he scrawls several lines that are barely decipherable, each word tumbling out in a chaotic rush, as he desperately tries to capture the essence of his fleeting ideas. The graphite flows rapidly across the page, determined not to let this moment of inspiration slip away. His heart races as he focuses intently, aware that the clarity of his thoughts could vanish as quickly as they arrived, compelling him to write faster and with less concern for neatness, prioritising the preservation of his creative spark over legibility.

He puts the pencil down and rereads his work, nodding contentedly, satisfied with the effort.

“Let me express it properly, oh God,” he whispers softly, offering his words up as a silent prayer.

Beethoven turns back and begins delving into the fresh musical material Karl just brought, he immerses himself in the intricate scores laid out on the page. With each note he reads, a melody begins to take shape in his mind, and he instinctively hums along, allowing the music to resonate with him. The harmonious sounds echo in his thoughts, filling him with a sense of joy and satisfaction. Caught up in the moment, he pauses, his creative spirit ignites, he quickly grabs the pencil to jot down a flurry of additional notes, capturing the inspiration that flows through him like a vibrant current.

After several minutes of intense scribbling, he finally sets the pencil down, allowing his fingers to relax. A wave of exhaustion washes over him, catching him off guard. He lets out a deep yawn, a reminder of the lingering fatigue from the previous day's events that still clings to him. With a heavy sigh, he closes his eyes, seeking a brief respite from the mental strain, hoping that just a moment of stillness will rejuvenate his weary mind.

The world around him fades as he embraces the quiet, allowing his thoughts to drift away, if only for a little while.

The music quickens around him.

Even when his eyes are closed.

And in a blink - he is off.

In a heartbeat, the landscape transforms around him as he finds himself soaring above the vast, golden sands of Arabia. The endless expanse of desert stretches out beneath him, a mesmerising tapestry of undulating dunes and shimmering heat waves that seem to dance in the sunlight. As he glides effortlessly through the sky, a profound chant echoes in his mind, "Christe eleison - Christ, have mercy upon us," resonating deep within his spirit. This haunting plea intertwines with the exhilarating rush of the wind, creating a symphony of emotion that envelops him, urging him to embrace the beauty and mystery of this dreamlike journey. The world below rushes past in a blur, yet time feels suspended, allowing him to savour each fleeting moment of this ethereal flight.

As he soars above the vast expanse of land, the arid deserts stretch out beneath him, their golden sands shimmering under the sun's embrace. His journey culminates at the sacred site of Calvary, where the cross stands as a poignant symbol of sacrifice and redemption. In the distance, a breathtaking city emerges, bathed in the warm hues of a glorious sunrise, its towers and spires glistening like jewels. This is the New Jerusalem, a vision of hope and divine promise that beckons from the horizon.

The atmosphere is charged with a sense of reverence as the celestial sound of voices rises, filling the air with the hauntingly beautiful refrain of "Christe eleison." This melodic invocation resonates deeply, echoing the longing for peace and salvation that has echoed through the ages. As the music swells, it seems to transcend the earthly realm, inviting all who would hear it to partake in the vision of a kingdom that is both near and far, a place where love and grace reign supreme.

In this moment of tranquillity, the essence of the coming kingdom of God unfolds before Beethoven, inspiring him with a profound sense of purpose and creativity. The vibrant imagery of the New Jerusalem, coupled with the transcendent harmonies, ignites a spark inside him, urging him to translate this divine revelation into his art. It is a powerful reminder of the intersection between the human experience and the divine, where music becomes a vessel for expressing the inexpressible, capturing the beauty and complexity of faith in a world yearning for hope.

Tears form in Beethoven's eyes at the sight of such beauty.

His heart swells with joy.

His soul takes flight.

Then.

A sudden wave of darkness engulfs the light, sweeping across the landscape like a thick, impenetrable fog. The vibrant melodies that once filled the air come to an abrupt halt, leaving an eerie silence in their wake. In the stillness, shadows creep into every corner, saturating the world with an all-consuming blackness that seems to swallow hope itself. The outlines blur and disappear, as if the very essence of existence is being erased, leaving only an unsettling void where colour and sound once thrived. The absence of light feels almost tangible, wrapping around his senses and evoking a deep, instinctual fear of the unknown that lies in the depths of the dark.

A chill grips his body.

A feeling of dread fills his heart.

Darkness surrounds him.

And then.

The dark opens its eyes and looks at Ludwig van Beethoven.

The shadows stir, as if awakening from a deep slumber, and slowly, they begin to take form, revealing a pair of piercing eyes that glimmers with an unsettling intensity. These eyes, shrouded in the essence of blackness, fix their gaze upon him, drawing him into a realm where light dared not tread. The air thickens with an electric tension, and he could feel the weight of the darkness pressing against his skin, as if it were alive, observing him with a curiosity that was both unnerving and captivating. The boundary between reality and the unknown blurs, leaving him suspended in a haunting stillness, where every heartbeat sounds like a distant drum, resonating with the primal fear that the dark has awakened within him.

In an instant, the familiar surroundings of the library envelop Beethoven once more, pulling him from the depths of unconsciousness. As he stirs, a wave of disorientation washes over him, clouding his thoughts and senses. His gaze flickers to the desk, where he catches sight of grotesque, shadowy figures - twisted little creatures that seem to writhe and shift in the dim light. Panic surges through him, and with a desperate cry, he sweeps his arm across the desk, sending manuscripts tumbling to the floor in a chaotic flurry. The papers scatter like fallen leaves, and the eerie demons scuttle away, their tiny forms darting up the towering bookcases, disappearing into the dark recesses above.

The sudden movement sends Beethoven crashing from his chair, the hard floor meeting him with an unforgiving thud. Dazed and disoriented, he struggles to regain his footing, his body feels heavy and unresponsive, as if weighed down by an unseen force. The remnants of fear still cling to him, and he can feel his heart racing in his chest, a frantic drumbeat echoing in the silence of the library. He attempts to push himself up, but his limbs betray him, trembling with weakness. The once-familiar space now feels alien, a labyrinth of shadows and whispers that taunt him from the corners of his mind.

As he lies there, the remnants of his panic begin to fade, replaced by a creeping sense of vulnerability. The library, a sanctuary of knowledge and creativity, now looms over him like a dark spectre, its towering shelves filled with secrets and forgotten tales. Beethoven's breath comes in shallow gasps as he tries to gather his thoughts, the fragments of the strange encounter still lingering in the air. He knows he must rise, to reclaim his place among the pages and the music that once flowed so freely from his soul. Yet, he feels the weight of his own fragility, a stark reminder of the battle he faces not just against the shadows, but with his own body.

Karl's hands reach out to him. "Uncle Ludwig, uncle, are you alright?"

Beethoven gazes intensely into the eyes of his nephew, a whirlwind of emotion swirling in him. His eyes flit restlessly around the room, scanning every corner as if seeking something elusive. The shadows cast by the fading light of day seem to dance in rhythm with his racing thoughts. Each glance reveals a flicker of desperation, a silent plea for understanding or perhaps a connection that feels just out of reach. The walls, adorned with remnants of the past, echo the weight of his genius and the burden of his solitude. The world outside fades away, leaving only the two of them in a charged silence, where unspoken words hang heavily in the air, waiting to be released.

"A dream...a glorious dream...God's promise fulfilled," Beethoven says, his breathing heavy and laboured.

“Uncle?”

Beethoven stares with great intent into Karl’s eyes, “Many things are worse than defeat. Compromise with evil is one of them.”

“Are you alright? Are you hurt?” Karl speaks slowly and with genuine concern.

Beethoven gradually manages to rein in his anxiety, the tension in his body easing as he finds his footing with the steady support of Karl. His nephew, ever attentive, swiftly retrieves the chair that had toppled over during the commotion, its wooden legs scraping softly against the floor. With a gentle yet firm hand, he guides his uncle back to a seated position, ensuring that Beethoven is comfortable and secure. The unease in the room, begins to settle as the familiar surroundings offer a sense of solace. Karl’s presence is a calming anchor, allowing Beethoven to take a deep breath and regain his composure, the weight of his worries slowly lifting as he focuses on the reassuring rhythm of his nephew’s movements.

“Would you like some water?” Karl enquires.

Beethoven gives a subtle nod. As Karl turns to leave, a sense of urgency fills the air, prompting Beethoven to reach out and firmly grasp Karl’s shoulder. The touch is both a physical connection and a silent plea, urging Karl to pause. The room, filled with the lingering echoes of his vision, seems to hold its breath, as if waiting for the next words to emerge from Beethoven’s lips.

“The only way to escape evil, Karl, is to pursue good. You understand?” Beethoven asks earnestly.

Karl gazes at his uncle, carefully considering his words, before finally nodding in agreement.

“Good,” Ludwig says.

Beethoven releases his grip, allowing Karl to step away into the dimly lit space. As Karl retreats, a sense of unease lingers in the air, punctuated by the faint creaking of the old building. Above, in the shadowy rafters, enigmatic figures loom, their forms indistinct and shrouded in darkness. These creatures, whether they are mere figments of imagination or something more sinister, watch with an unsettling stillness, their presence adding an eerie tension to the atmosphere. The interplay of light and shadow creates a haunting tableau, where the line between reality and the supernatural blurs, leaving an impression that lingers long after Karl has vanished from sight.