

## The Sound of Silence

*Étretat, France*

*May 10, 1944.*

I hear laughter in every direction and see sunshine beaming on every surface. My eyes are coated in a honey-colored glow. The clouds drift by in their grandness, like tufts of cotton sailing in a blue lagoon. The sky is a brilliant and impossible blue. Waves lap onto the shore, bringing pink and grey sand rippling between my toes. I inhale and smell the salt that crisps my hair and clings to my bronzed skin. My senses feel heightened. In one direction I can smell bologna sandwiches and pistachio gelato. In another, the banana scent of sunscreen and tanning lotion. Red coolers, white parasols, and blue lounge chairs dot the beach. I close my eyes and lick my lips, which taste like sunshine, grapes, and a hint of cola.

What war are they talking about? There is nothing but the blissful sounds of seagulls and the ocean tide.

I am only allowed to go out for a brief time now. Papi says that it is dangerous and that I should be careful to whom I speak. Because I purely love to talk. As he always reminds me, "If people would only talk about what they understood, Earth would be a very quiet place." My grandfather is wise. He is a kind, brilliant old man, and I love him dearly. Rosalie once said that he was ancient, but I told her that he is not ancient, only aged, just as fine wine is.

When I finish reminiscing, I open my eyes and am still standing on the beach. But it is not sunny and beautiful anymore. The nostalgic sandy shores and yellow bathing suits vanish. In their place are bits of shrapnel from recent bombings, and Nazi troops parading themselves in *our* streets. The world is cold and sterile. The words I hear all day are not kind and soft-spoken. Instead, they are half-deafening threats from Germans, because of the small gold star I carry proudly on my lapel. It is time for me to go. I gather my things and set off for home. The sky is forming nasty, grey clouds. It is nearing the end of August and rain is uncommon for this time of year. Still, large droplets fall from the sky. As though the sky feels as I do and has finally burst into tears. I run over cobblestone alleys, between deserted café tables. Making it safely to my front door, I click it open.

"I'm home." I say half-heartedly.

I walk among all Papi's potted plants and between stacks of books, newspapers, and documents. At last, I walk out onto the veranda and see Papi sitting there. A glass of wine in one hand and the other clutching a letter closely. Even from behind, I can see how he holds himself is uncomfortable and stiff. He is worried. I walk toward him and kneel at his feet.

“What is the matter?” He inhales deeply, steadying his worn hands that I can see are trembling.

“We are leaving Étretat, Camila.” I flinch as if the words had hit me. Questions fill my mind, but he continues,

“We are being deported. We knew this day would come.” He is so calm and patient with it all, that he makes me angry.

“Filthy Nazis!” I pound my fist on the stone ground.

“Silence!” He glares at me. His stare is angry and determined, but behind it, there is something I have come to see more often than I wish: fear.

“Hate is what is bringing this misfortune upon us, but it should not be our hate.” I laugh in disbelief.

“They are not sending us on a vacation, Papi. They are sending us to our deaths... just as they did to Rosalie.”

“We don’t know that.”

I cannot argue with him. His intellect is far superior to mine and he will always silence me with reason. Quietly, I ask a few questions. Seeing that he is resolved to obey the order, I leave. As I walk toward my room, I remember that he is wiser and must have a better understanding of the situation. Reminding myself is not enough. I lie on my mattress, wishing it would envelop Papi and me, keeping us safe and warm till all this is over. It smells just as a mattress should smell. Although, in my mind, it is still scented with rose and lemon. I can see a vision of Rosalie and me playing with our dolls; sunlight filled the room, and at night, candles kept it lit. Tears roll down my cheeks. I squeeze my eyes shut to stop the flow. I will be strong. For Papi, for Rosalie... for me.

The following morning, my suitcases are waiting on the veranda. A blue haze covers that sandy beach and the teal lagoon looks grey. And yet, I still look through rose-colored glasses. I am still in wonder of this beautiful paradise lost. Papi’s hand reaches for my shoulder, though worn and rough it is, there never was a gentler touch. As the sun pours golden rays onto the distant cliffs, I flutter my eyes closed, taking one last mental picture. One last, salty breath. And then we leave.