

"If Only I Could " (Excerpt from the book)

They stopped at the top of the few stairs, and stared out over the street. Of course, it wasn't the first time they had been to Old Town at night, but they found themselves struck anew by the beauty spread before their eyes. Fascinated, they stared at the facades of the tenement houses, glowing in the streams of light coming from the thousands of streetlamps. Below them, even at this late hour, the streets were filled with people who all seemed to be headed toward the lights of the Square. Being careful to hold hands and avoid becoming separated in the bustle of the crowds, they plunged into the flow of traffic, allowing the wonder of the night to set their course. They found themselves immersed in music from every direction. It wasn't a single tune, but a sea of simultaneous compositions, bombarding them from various sources and wrapping around them in sweet perfection. The wide assortment of notes didn't bring discord, but blended together, building into a strangely supernatural symphony.

Amidst the rhythmic cacophony of music, Agatha and John glided into the Square, where they were able to pause, taking in the beauty of the night. Café tables twinkled with candlelight, and the buildings seemed to glow with a life of their own, imbued with a magical quality that sparkled like waves in the moonlight shadow. The clatter of thousands of people was barely audible over the rise and fall of the music floating through the Square on gentle breezes. Above the buildings, the moon hid for a moment behind a small gray cloud as if afraid to steal the show down here in the glittering city. Bewitched white horses pulled a white carriage with newlyweds snuggled into the worn leather seats behind a sleepy driver. On a little wooden box, a mime clothed in golden garb performed, bowing with a flourish and a foolish smile every time he had heard the clink of a coin land in the basket next to him. A short, blind fiddler, dressed in an old black tuxedo and pink frilled shirt, slid a bow over his violin strings in melancholic medleys. A few steps away another mime, a woman clothed in a diaphanous white gown and covered in white face paint, seemed to float a little above the ground like a ghost. Several couples in historical attire danced in steps that had been long forgotten by new generations. In another corner of the Square, three young girls held containers connected with metallic string and performed a ritual dance. Throwing chained fireballs up in the air, they drew fascinating figures with them on the dark canvas of the sky, a prayer to the ancient gods of fire. By the entrance of his favorite small café, an old bearded man sat at his table, as he had night after night, year after year. He always wore the

same hat, and held the same book on his lap, the same coffee cup waiting on the table for his next sip, while he observed the nightlife of Old Town. John swore that he could see a smile playing over the bronzed face. On the other side of the old man, a few street urchins turned up a large CD player and began to spin to the beat of their raucous music. Onlookers formed a circle, and the boys turned and twisted in wild pirouettes, standing on their heads and tossing their legs up into the air. In all of this excitement, the sound of a trumpet floated from the St. Mary's tower, blending with the sounds of the Square, but barely heard above the din. Right in the heart of the city, it could be read from their faces something had happened between them.

Cuddled together, Agatha and John observed the enchantment of the city, knowing that each night in Old Town was a celebration—romantic, mysterious, but changing in flavor with every sunset. The festival overflowed with supernatural music and magical, dreamlike lights, and the goal didn't rest in the performances or the amusement of the city's guests. The prize was called oblivion.