


Prologue

1560 - Antwerp

 His sleeping gown scarcely touched the floor as he stepped in barefooted silence onto the Anatolian rug beside his Master's bed. Odd thoughts filled his head. How easy it would be to draw the curved dagger the old Jew had never forbidden him to bear and end his servitude.

He could not be certain if this would be an act of vengeance, or of kindness. For forty years he had served the man, yet never once been asked his given name. Still, hate had long ago melded with love – the curse of all eunuchs. Soon he would be free, with time to question. For now he would light a new taper, knowing that if the old man awoke to see another day, he would call for his quill and journal.

Lifting the worn volume from the bedside table, he drew his long fingers over the raised hubs of its spine, then laid it upon the bed. The scent of vellum, leather and the passage of human years filled the room with a dusty melancholy.

He looked at his Master's face and thought of how the color had faded over time...how the opaline pallor of his skin was barely distinguishable from the bedding in which he lay. He was near invisible.