

Pietro loved Jacques.

As family, as a brother, as someone he took in and taught how to navigate the world because he too knew the pains of being born for one purpose and one purpose only.

Pietro laughed and danced and bonded with Jacques - secrets and games that only they knew because they were bonded forever as brothers in Lord and brothers through the blood of the covenant. He treasured their bond and he shared his favorite books, art, and songs with Jacques. The most he'd ever indulged himself in the wonders of the world had been through this friendship.

He'd thought of him as the closest thing to a child, nephew, or such that he ever had. He knew that such a thing would never be an option for him; it was not in God's plan for him. But he loved Jacques like it was a part of the plan anyway. He thought that maybe, Jacques was meant to be a gift of mercy because he never would know the true experience.

Pietro, a man so devoted to the Lord that he thought of nothing else for his existence, had held and treasured someone nearly more than he treasured the Lord.

Nearly.

Oh, how many painful daggers hid in the space between nearly and completely.

Pietro nearly loved Jacques more than he loved The Roman Catholic Church.

He remembered when it all crumbled. He knew when he made the decision to shake France's hand and when his words so sweetly won him a prize he was sure God above would praise. He was doing the works and the good. A humble disciple doing his duty.

"Of course, the boy has to go." Francois told him and Pietro laughed, thinking it a joke. But when that eyebrow raised and those lips pursed he realized only then how great the cost of pride was.

"The boy." Francois repeated, tongue clicking and fingers tapping against a wooden chair he stood over, "He needs to go. We've already made arrangements to press His Holiness. We trust that we can have you there to assure him this decision is necessary. After all, we cannot trust him." His throat went dry, his stomach dropping, and Pietro stared in disbelief.

This was not what he wanted.

It was supposed to be the other way around.

But when Francois' eyes bore into his, Pietro knew that he shook hands with the Devil and his temptations, pride, ambition, and drive had gotten the best of him.

Still, he remained optimistic. He prayed the Lord would guide him and that Jacques would understand. His rosary clutched in his palms and prayers to the Lord murmured under his breath. Pietro stayed on his knees every night as the decisions were made. Praying for some relief that would show him the Lord was only demanding faith and sacrifice that would not sever him from the only bond he'd ever truly thought he might not have the strength to break.

He was wrong.

So incredibly wrong.

In the end, God's plan was asking him to make a sacrifice greater than he could bear. His most treasured friend, the one he'd grown attached to unlike any other bond, had no place in the Divine plan.

That was how he ended up holding a sword against him. Lips pursed as he saw the heartbreak and betrayal in the eyes of his dear friend.

"It is as the Lord commands." he said with a bitter smile - still waiting for a sign. Desperately waiting for God to come down as he had to Abraham and tell him that his devotion was seen, that his love was known. Mighty God who tested Abraham with his son Isaac - surely he would not truly ask him to sacrifice Jacques?

Surely.

Jacques looked up at him, and there was horror at the betrayal written in his eyes.

“I have done all that you have ever asked! You were a brother to me!”

Pietro’s eyes fell, agony flickering in them for just a moment, “I am sorry, but my heart belongs to the Lord.”

Something broke out on Jacques’ face. Something tore apart there and Pietro was certain it was the years of love and care that they’d build crumbling to dust.

“What of-” he stuttered, “Does a century mean nothing to you? Do I mean nothing to you? Was I not a son or a brother?”

Pietro’s hand shook only for a moment but he kept his gaze firm.

“You were everything to me. Agape.” he nodded, “But this is for the greater good.” “Tell me what sins I committed then!” Jacques pleaded, “I have done all you have ever asked and more. All that the church asked! Tell me what crimes I committed!” Pietro only said one thing before he brought the sword down.

*“I’m afraid I loved you too much.”*

To want and to love anything that could compete with devotion to the Lord was a sin and Pietro realized that day that his love for Jacques had been growing so large it nearly triumphed over his love for the Lord Almighty.

He was not supposed to love anyone so.

He was not Abraham and Jacques was not Isaac.

He was a man with a job and if he aimed to survive and continue being a servant, he could not afford such petty distractions.

Burying it deep, hiding it where it could not be found, layered and covered in years worth of emotions that were so repressed - he ensured he would never think of these emotions again.

Pietro closed his heart and served the Lord.

He was created for it and after such a sacrifice - he was too afraid to know what should occur if he ever thought of serving any other purpose than what he was intended for.

But really, it was not so hard to do. After all, the last of his humanity went with the sword in Jacques.

Pietro, man of God, servant to Heaven, no longer knew what it felt like to love.