*Summary:*

*Henri, A cardinal in Paris is wandering in the forest, scavenging the ground for things to help build his life when he comes across a little sparrow named Luc. Henri learns that Luc has fled his town after it was ransacked by the hawks, he was the only one to escape. He starts to bring him back home, to help him but the same birds that had ruined Luc’s town are now patrolling the edges of the town where Henri needs to get back in. With no other options, Henri sacrifices himself to whatever the Hawks have planned in hopes it will allow Luc some time to escape.*

Cardinal-

When I wake up, there’s a sense of something being not right, but nothing’s been right since the other birds came, and they changed the town. Some of us had to change, to separate us from the rest. Why did they clip some of our wings? Why are the others allowed to fly freely? I can’t change it now. I’ve got to get up, and, and… what do I have to do now? I can’t go to the high trees and collect for the nests. I can’t go to the river and collect water or berries, it’d take nearly all day. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do now, what should I do? My thoughts are interrupted by the sound of some of the others, I don’t know why anyone else is awake. I’m always the only person up now, going to search the ground for leftover supplies  or anything that’s fallen from the trees. When I look behind me I can’t see anybody, but I know that they must be out there. “Hey… Who’s there?” I call but whoever is out there doesn’t seem to be forthcoming about  coming out to meet me. It’s making me nervous, not being able to see who’s there. “Hey, please come out. I won’t hurt you.” I plead with the faceless creature just out of my sight. I’m about to give up when I hear a soft shuffle of the leaves, and see a small swallow step timidly out of the brush. He can’t be more than a few months old, a few of the downy feathers of infancy still clinging to his small wings.

“Hello little one, are you alright?” I ask, taking a cautious step towards the bird. He looks up at me with weary eyes before responding quietly, his small voice quivering with each word.

“They.. They took them. They took everybody, I-I thought that they…” He can’t finish the sentence before collapsing to the ground with sobs that shake the whole of his small little body. I rush over to try and comfort him, instincts taking over before I can think about it.

“Oh, you poor dear. What happened? Who is ‘They’”? I ask while trying to calm him down, smoothing the ruffled feathers on his shivering body.  he slowly lifts his head up to look at me, hi eyes searching mine for something before he answers, more steadily this time.”

“Them. The Hawks. They came they took all of them, they burned everything. I got out, I ran… I ran and ran until I got here… Where is here?” He spills all of this out like it will kill him if it stays inside. I try to process this as his face looks at mine pleadingly.

“Here is Paris. You’ll be safe here, at least for a while. I promise.” I say definitively. My confidence in this seems to calm him some, and the shaking subsides to a small tremor. I stand up and look down at him, waiting for him to follow, but he looks up at me inquisitively.

“What’s the matter?” I ask at his questioning look.

“What are you?” He asks, “I mean, I’ve never seen anybody that color. It’s so pretty.”

“I’m a cardinal.” I answer. I’m not surprised by his question, since I came here there’s always been questions. There don’t seem to be any other birds like me since my family left. There are others with colors like mine, but none as full or bright. I shake my head and bring myself back to reality, to the little swallow now looking up at me with hope, having decided to trust me wholly.

“Come on, let’s get you back and cleaned up.” I look at his frail body, striped with hunger and fatigue, “What’s your name?” I ask.

“Luc, and you?” he responds

“Henri. Let’s go Luc.” I say, guiding him to the path that will lead to my small home. We are nearly there when I see them. They are guarding the fence near my house. Big dark birds, holding what I can only imagine to be weapons meant to stop any of their opposers. I am instantly filled with a sense of dread as I realize they must be the same people that terrorized Luc’s village. They must be continuing on down the line. I pull Luc quietly behind a nearby tree, out of sight.

“What’s going on?” he asks worriedly, his eyes darting about fearfully.

“I think those hawks that came to your town, I think they’re here. I think they’re going to do what they did to your town her.” I don’t know why I said this. I should be comforting the child, not instilling terror. I mentally smack myself, hard.

“No, no. You’re going to be alright. I promise.” I say as soothingly as I can. “Can you fly?” I ask.

“Not too well, but I can.” He says shakily.

“Well then, you better learn pretty quickly. You should get up as high as you can in this tree. I’m going to go look and see what’s going on, alright?” I say.

“Okay.”

I watch him for a moment, making sure that he does make it into the tree. As I move forward slowly, my eyes focused on the large brown and white speckled hawks pacing near the edge of the city. I have no idea what I should be doing right now, do I approach them and hope they let me through? If I do get in, will they let me back out to help Luc? I am so consumed by these questions that I am nearly to the fence when I realize how close I am to the guards. I take a few furtive steps back, but get caught up in the brush and end up falling flat on the ground. The guards look up from their posts at the sound of my crashing through the forest. They start to come towards me, my attempts to flee stopped by my foot tangled in vines.

“Hey, you there! Why aren’t you with the others?” The first one shouts, his black eyes narrowing in on mine.

“I-I…” I stammer, trying to come up with something they’ll believe.

“Probably trying to escape. We stopped the others  but he must’ve gotten through.” Says the second guard to the other. They continue to move toward me and my movements become more frantic, my head involuntarily snapping back to the tree where Luc is hidden.

“I was looking for roots and things to add to my new nest.” I lie, “I got clipped and can’t fly up to the closer trees any more.”  The larger of the two looks at me, as if trying to figure something out. I am almost certain they know I’m lying.

“Alright, come on then.” The second one says. Stepping forward and righting me, the vines somehow falling away like they are as terrified as I am. I step forward, trying to remain calm as they lead me back into the city. I take another step and realize I am walking towards my end and it doesn’t matter. I turn around and yell, “Fly! Fly Away Luc!” I am still yelling when he hits me, with something I can’t see, and black out.