

Xanerva's Song

Each morning, Xanerva Piosenka rises punctually with the two suns, Mama and Papa. There is a rhythm to her day, and the coupled suns form the steady drumbeat that holds it together. First Mama, slightly smaller but beaming with brilliant yellow, lifts her head over the horizon. Twelve seconds later, Papa, old, orange, and worn, announces his presence in the sky, and Xanerva opens her eyes and climbs out of bed. She washes and dresses while the suns free themselves from the shadowy peaks of the mountains in the East. As they climb towards midday, Xanerva too puts herself to work. She tends to her small farm, feeding Louisa and Chmura, pulling weeds, and picking apples from the orchard. She writes letters to the other elders of the town, predicting another plentiful harvest. She walks to the Garcia's and the Norvbieska's and the Hu's, delivering small parcels of dandelion crystals and home-baked muffins, presenting each with a blessing of protection and good fortune. She wishes away the encroaching ice from the North and the stifling heat of the South. She ruffles children's hair and tells stories to their parents. Stories of their parents and their parents' parents. Xanerva has known them all.

Xanerva arrives back at her farm each day as Mama and Papa reach their peak in the sky, peering down over her tiny home like faces over a bassinet. As the suns descend, Xanerva rests. And sings. She sings the songs of the storms, songs her mother taught her years and years ago. Xanerva barely remembers life in The Old Kingdom, but she remembers her mother's songs. And she remembers The Storm. She remembers knyfe-sharp rain and bone-shaking flashes of light. She remembers trees moaning and

splintering, feet drowning in sloshing water. At the end, the earth churning. Fire, death, and tears mixing with the rain. She remembers faces looking down on her, laying her on her back. Tears mixing with the rain. Soaked hay under her skirts. Men shouting, whips cracking, and horses whinnying. Wheels turning, bouncing along. Up. Down. Up. Down. Tears mixing with the rain. The ground alive, rumbling, swallowing. The sky alight, the air singed with smoke and electricity. Panic and fear suspended in between each flash. Tears mixing with the rain. Faces drifting away. Up. Down. Up. Down. Drifting further and further away. The rain slowly ceasing. The sky finished with its sorrow, spent of all its tears.

Xanerva's mother loved the rain. Each storm brought a new song, a different rhythm. Every cloud was a composer. Every crash of lightning, a chorus. She truly heard the music in them; they sung down to her with the falling rain. Some were disjointed: staccato percussion crashing against the city walls. Bass drums on the windows. Snares on the pavement. Cymbals reverberating in her head. Others were jazz, warm, smooth love letters to the dirt. Trumpets and kisses sliding down her cheek, slipping into the rivers. Lulling her to sleep as she worked. She listened to the music of the storms, singing back to the Heavens, and, when Xanerva came along, to her daughter at night. She stood still in the street as the rain soaked her dresses and matted her hair. Neighbors stared as her husband quietly walked outside and wrapped her in a coat. And held her hand as she whispered love songs. They thought her strange, eccentric. Xanerva thought she was wonderful.

Each storm was a friend come with a new gift, a moment of beauty in a gray world. Her very own touch of magic. Until the storms grew violent. There was music in these storms as well, but it was angry, destructive. It sang of death and blight, threats and warnings. And they delivered on these promises. When Xanerva's mother tried to sing back, they only grew more terrible. These were not the storms, the voices, she knew. These storms sang not to give but to drive away. But Xanerva's mother wouldn't leave. And her husband wouldn't leave her. She sang to the storms until her last breath, hoping, pleading for them to stop, begging them to remember. To remember her voice. To remember her love.

Each day as the suns fade from the sky, Xanerva sings the songs of the storms. She sings and rain comes, gentle and sweet once again, blanketing her crops, bringing life to her valley. She sings the suns to sleep, as they dip back under the horizon. First Mama then Papa. One worn and orange, one blistering bright. One twelve seconds after the other. Two suns amid the evening rain. One Xanerva singing to the world. Tears mixing with her songs.