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Here Comes the Rain

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Josefina knocked on the side of the archway. *La Cantante* hadn't bothered to put in doors when she took up residence. She had told Josefina that she did not want to appear closed off from the city. The adobe home had once been part of a great pueblo, but that had been many years ago. It was the only building still standing from those times, and the people had decided it should be the residence of the *Cantante*, whoever he or she may be. Josefina thought she would add doors when she moved in. Which might be sooner than anticipated.

One of *la Cantante's* attendants ran up to the archway, gesturing for Josefina to enter. "Buenas días, señorita," he said, unusually formal. "Come in."

Josefina instinctually scraped her shoes against the doorway, but the ground had been too dry for anything to have stuck to her sole. As she stepped across the threshold, several heads bowed to her. Never had they shown such respect. They were beginning to see her as their *Cantante*.

The only three doctors in the city, the mayor, as well as other officials were arguing in hushed voices, the servants occasionally interjecting. Josefina would not be excluded, as though she were a child. "How is she doing?" she asked loudly and clearly, knowing full-well the answer.

The small group looked uneasy, but one doctor finally spoke up: "Not good, señorita. There has been no improvement."

"What are you all whispering about?"

"*La Cantante's* condition is grave, but she is going slowly. Meanwhile, the crops are already failing. If we do not act quickly, there won't be any hope for a harvest."

“Act quickly,” Josefina repeated. They all knew what that meant. The doctor who had spoken looked a bit flustered, as if thinking of a way to make his words seem less terrible.

Josefina saved him the trouble. “May I see her?”

“Of course.” He gestured to the staircase, as if she didn’t know where it was. Nobody made a move to escort her up. Evidently, she brought discomfort to the whole room. She took her time walking up the steps. It was no business of hers if they were in a hurry for her to leave.

La Cantante’s room was not far from the landing. Again, Josefina knocked on the archway, letting her presence be known. A young servant quickly took a wet cloth from *la Cantante*’s brow, and left the room, nodding her head to Josefina formally.

“They’re much more respectful when you could be their means of livelihood in the morning, aren’t they?” *la Cantante* laughed. She lay in her bed, where she had been for weeks. Her voice was rough. It sounded so gravelly now that it was almost unbearable.

Josefina swept into a low curtsey, bowing her head. “*Sí, Cantante.*” She headed for the large basin of water by the bedside table. “You sound hoarse. Have you had any water today?”

“More than air. You might as well get used to this sound, Josefina. It is my voice now.” Her laugh broke into a fit of coughs. It was hard to believe that she had once sung down storms from the heavens.

“That’s not true, *Cantante.* Medicine is already on its way. I am sure you will sing again.” Josefina was not sure. The sun had already dried up some of the fields. They had mere days before the rest of the crops were beyond saving. The city needed rain. Now. But the medicine was still far away.

“I admire your hope. But I am old, Josefina. Medicine or no, my recovery will take time.” *Too much time*, she didn’t say.

Josefina did not reply. She took a cup and held it to the rim of the water basin. She let out a few low notes, and the water trickled into the cup on its own.

La Cantante smiled. “Clever trick. I don’t suppose you can call the clouds?”

“Believe me, I have tried. But I am not *la Cantante*.” Josefina gave the elderly woman her cup.

“Yet,” *la Cantante* corrected. “What was that, anyway? It sounded familiar.” She took a few small sips of water before handing the cup back to Josefina.

“*El León Poderoso.*”

“Ah, *sí*. I love that lullaby.” She began to sing it, but began coughing after one note. Her voice couldn’t move a drop. Josefina looked from the old, dying woman to the window. The sun blazed down on the dry earth, giving no rest to the paling plants. The city would be a desert in only months if it carried on like this. “Would you sing it to me?”

Josefina smiled at *la Cantante*, and sang:

*“El león todopoderoso ruge una canción feroz y aterradora,
Asusta a las demas creaturas, salvo por una que aun su grito no demora;
A traves del viento, de la lluvia, y tormentas desde hace mucho tiempo,
Incluso por el león, la muerte siempre llega en algún momento.”*

As the words flowed from her, the water from the basin on the bedside table swirled up into the air, as if dancing to her tune. It torpedoed up before bursting like a flower, eddying this way and that, all the while *la Cantante*’s gaze fixed on it, before falling back where it came from as the song ended.

La Cantante sighed. “I miss that,” she whispered, gazing at where the water now lay dormant in its basin. She spoke again before Josefina could give her some false reassurance. “I think I will rest now.”

Josefina nodded and left her. She went downstairs, but instead of passing by the group of officials again, she headed for the veranda. The whole house was very open, but even so, she needed some fresh air.

Outside was beautiful. There was a paved stone walkway leading to a small garden. Despite the lack of rain, the plants were still watered by hand. Even so, the sun’s heat grew more and more intense every day. The once muddy ground was already starting to crack. The sky was cloudless in every direction. Without a healthy *Cantante*, it would never rain.

Josefina went to a little fountain in the middle of the garden and hummed a simple hymn. The water rippled as if her voice grazed its surface. Controlling water with one’s voice wasn’t an exact science. It was an art form--one she couldn’t master. Not yet. Practicing over and over, day by day, and never improving; it drove her nearly mad.

She remembered when she was small, singing to herself while doing her chores, and the soapy water dancing for her. When her parents had seen it, they took her to sing for the mayor and *la Cantante* herself. Watching the old woman had been incredible. She could make the rain flow wherever and however she wanted with just her voice. People revered her.

Now they revered Josefina too. She was no longer the girl who could shift water, but not create it. Now she was their new hope. How they had looked at her as she conducted the long trips to and from the river in an attempt to water the fields. Ever since *la Cantante* had fallen ill and the drought had started, Josefina was no longer just an apprentice, no longer a child. She was the would-be queen.

The lazy grin on her face faded. Her eyes focused out of her memories. It was her job to protect these people. *Her* people. They were close to starving. The crops needed water. A *Cantante* had to take control of the skies and save them. The medicine would never get here in time. There was only one thing to do. As the doctor had said, she had to act quickly.

Her jaw tightened, but still, tears slipped from her eyes. With a single, quivering note, they dripped into the fountain and dispersed, adding a touch of salt to the perfectly clear water.

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Josefina expected to wake up to a solemn day, to walk to the staircase with a line of mourners on either side nodding gravely at her. She imagined silent reverence as she mounted each step, to do what she alone was brave enough to do for the greater good of their city. Her city.

She had fallen asleep in one of the guest rooms, anguish having stolen all of her energy. However, she woke not to the somber mood she had anticipated, but to a sudden commotion. She listened for a moment, disbelieving. Exiting her room, she accosted the first servant she saw, the same one who had greeted her the day before. “What is going on?”

“Josefina, you’re awake,” he said. So informal all of a sudden, she noticed. “We’ve just heard from the outskirts of the city. Ramón has returned. He will be here momentarily.”

Josefina froze. Ramón had come back already? “And he is successful?”

“We can only assume that is why he would return so quickly. He must have struck good fortune.” The man rushed off for some reason about which Josefina neither knew nor cared to know.

She was having difficulty absorbing all that was happening. People were rushing to and fro, preparing for Ramón's arrival. Josefina did not think anyone had suspected the medicine would come in time. She surely hadn't.

She was happy. Of course she was happy. *La Cantante* was saved. She would heal, and bring the storm everyone had been so patiently waiting for. Everything would go back to the way it was. Josefina was relieved, because no one would be depending on her anymore. No one depended on an apprentice.

Josefina caught the arm of a servant starting up the stairs. "Where are you going?" she demanded.

The girl looked a bit scared of Josefina's unexpected brashness. "I am to wake *la Cantante*, Josefina."

"Let us give her a few more moments of rest." Josefina smiled at her, loosening her grip. "I will deliver the medicine when it arrives."

The servant nodded. "Sí. Good idea."

Josefina let out a small breath as the stairs became vacant once again. She all but guarded them until she heard the sound of hooves on cobblestones. Ramón ran into the atrium not a minute later. He was out of breath, holding a rare herb in his hand. One of the doctors quickly took it, and before long it had been properly brewed into a tea. He took a step up the stairs with the cup.

"Wait," said Josefina.

"What?" The doctor looked impatient. In fact, everyone in the room was staring at her due to her disruption. She was just in the way.

Josefina stood a little taller. “I would like to give it to her, if you don’t mind. It seems fitting, don’t you think?”

The doctor looked reluctant, but nodded. Josefina smiled, taking the cup and turning.

When she reached the top landing, she paused, staring at the reddish, steaming tea she held. The medicine that would save *la Cantante*. The medicine that would separate Josefina from her full powers, from her city, from her people.

She stopped again at the archway, looking at the sleeping *Cantante*. She remembered the first lesson she had ever received from the woman. Josefina had completely soaked *la Cantante*’s skirts with her raw, untrained voice, but *la Cantante* had never chastised her for it. Even so, the tea’s promise to heal did not fill her with joy.

In fact, she couldn’t help but think how tragic it was that *la Cantante* had passed away in the night.

Josefina made her way to the bedside table, setting the tea out of the way. She cupped her hands in the water basin and began to hum a familiar lullaby, sending ripples through the liquid, as if to wake it. She brought her little handful of water over to *la Cantante*, kneeling by her. “*Lo siento, Cantante,*” she whispered.

She sang the lullaby softly, but clearly. The water rose from her hands like snakes and began tunneling into *la Cantante*’s mouth and nostrils. The old woman’s eyes shot open, but she could not speak through the water. She sputtered and choked, she flailed, but Josefina was calm. She just stared into *la Cantante*’s panicked eyes, softly singing “*El León Poderoso*”:

*“The almighty lion roars a fierce song,
He scares all creatures, each and every but one;
Through wind, through rain, through storms of long,*

Even for the mighty lion, death comes.”

Beatriz fell limp. *La Cantante* closed the old woman’s eyes and arranged her body to look natural. Then she touched her own throat, getting excited. Instead of announcing Beatriz’s death, she smashed the cup of tea to the floor with a choked scream.

Everyone rushed in at once, crowding around Beatriz disbelievingly, the doctors checking her heartbeat and trying to pump the life back into her.

With all the fuss, it was easy for *la Cantante* to slip away to the balcony overlooking a great deal of the city. She looked at the dry ground and the blazing sun, the dying crops in the distance. Wetting her lips, she opened her mouth and let one loud, operatic note echo through the sky.

Clouds were already forming. She continued almost effortlessly, the newfound power behind her voice pushing through to a whole new octave she had never reached before. Soon thunder started answering her song. Even through the thick rain, *la Cantante* saw every citizen open their doors, unable to believe their eyes. She was their *Cantante* now. She let herself relish her new voice and the feel of the rain.

She held her hands out to the city, letting the rain wash away her sins.

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