

Abby M.

A Family I Know Isn't Really Mine

In my early childhood, only three things were truly clear to me: my name is Samara Xinhai, I am the daughter of the Dictator of the Assembly, and I will be a great diplomat someday.

Anything else was just a background detail. Like when I watched an Assembly meeting, the argument was meaningless to my tiny mind. All that mattered was that someday I would speak in it. Or when I learned to fight, it didn't matter which of my countless siblings was my opponent that day; just that soon I would be fighting real enemies, who sought to destroy the peace. Sometimes I miss the simplicity that little girl felt.

That all changed one day, when I was practicing Kyk with Yang, one of the brothers I was closer to. We endlessly clicked our tongues at each other in an attempt to imitate the language of the rock-dwelling creatures. We'd been partnered up to simply talk to each other for half an hour. The only rule was that we couldn't speak in Centralian.

"I wonder what we'll learn when we pass our tests next week," I said. *"Don't we get to pick our next subjects?"*

"Yeah," he agreed. *"I'm thinking of Zoan for my next language."*

"Zoan?" I repeated. *"Everyone says there's nothing on Zo but ancient memories best forgotten. I'd rather go with Kalinian. That would be useful."*

"Kalinian is a dead language!" Yang argued. *"What's the point in learning it?"*

"Some Kalinians still speak it," I replied. *"And it's only dead because of Centralian influence."* That was why a lot of languages were dead, although not all.

"Don't let any of the adults hear you say that," Yang whispered.

"It's true," I said.

"I know that," he replied. *"But the officials don't like hearing anything bad about Centralia."*

I decided to change the subject. *"Apparently I'm the youngest student to reach this level so far,"* I told him. *"I wonder if that gets some kind of recognition. Maybe Mother will have enough time to come and congratulate me. She's always so busy."*

"Wait," Yang laughed. *"You think that is why she doesn't care for us?"* He asked sadly.

“What other reason could she have?” I had replied. So innocent, I now thought. That little girl had been so blissfully oblivious before this moment.

“I’m surprised you haven’t figured it out yet,” he told me. *“Us, all of our mother’s children, are all orphans taken from the people the Unity killed. She only considers us future employees.”*

“WHAT?” I almost started crying. Yang was many things, but he was not a liar. He was incapable of telling anything but the truth.

“Mother really doesn’t care about us?” I said quietly.

He nodded sadly.

“What about our real families?” I asked. *“Who were they?”*

“I have no idea,” Yang looked down. *“Maybe it’s better this way. We can’t miss a family we never knew, right?”*

“But how do I stay loyal to a family I know isn’t really mine?”