

Xenoglossia

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A short story I wrote a while back which kind of came to my mind soon after learning what "Xenoglossia" meant (it means the contentious and rare phenomena of suddenly being able to speak a language that one has had no previous experience in).

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Shi-an/59741/Xenoglossia>

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Xenoglossia

A red sky. Not red because of the sun, red because it mirrors the hearts of the people beneath it, and reflects the ground below. A dark plain stretches forward, shadows cast by an unknown source shrouding it like the lid of a coffin as it closes on a corpse. The surface is dusty, sand-like, the edges of the field whisk away from the force of a slight breeze blowing sporadically, brushing past the rubble and into oblivion. There is no more fire.

A crunching sound. Crows back to clean up after the fiasco turn their heads sharply; they watch, wariness biting at their necks. Another crunch. The crows are off, a din of flaps and screeching, then silence. Dead silence. A silence so strong one would cover their ears just to block out the deafening nothingness.

Another sound, this time not a crunch but a thud, like flesh hitting against flesh. There is a straggler. His gait is crippled, his throat is raw, his mind is blank.

There are baggy clothes on him. His hair is dark and coarse. Above it a round drab helmet. A long stick is slung over his shoulder, he carries it like a backpack. His clothes are drenched in the colour of the ground and the sky. The rest is olive. Nothing glitters upon his chest.

There is a clank as the sole of his boot hits something metallic. He stumbles, but does not look down. His left hand grasps something hairy, his right hand dips into something slimy. He pauses for a moment, his eyes wander between both hands, he thinks nothing, picks himself up, moves on.

Everything is red. Exception lies only in the charred frames of what were once habitats, lining the path like a guard of shame. Over and over and over, he continues on, past the skeletal figures on either side, each step like treading through quicksand.

The birds have not come back. Life itself has stopped. The silence is dispersed only by the sound of his boots rubbing against fabric, and the stick on his shoulder tapping lightly against him. Everything else is still. Everything else is gone. Everything else is never coming back.

He comes to where the crows were gathered some minutes ago. It is especially red. It smells like raw meat. He slowly crouches to his knees, his back stings but it works. His legs creak. Something crimson falls off his forehead.

He notices a worn piece of paper, small and thin. He reaches out, takes it from the pocket. It is a photo. Three people, man, woman, boy. The boy is grinning, holding a medal. The man has a cap on, and fresh clothes not drenched in the colour of the sky. The woman is smiling; holding the man with a gentle hand.

He puts the photo back, gets up. Is about to move, when he hears a faint sound. It is soft and melodic,

yet bitterly pensive at the same time. He pricks up his ears. They do not work as well anymore. He lumbers towards the source, holding his stomach as red liquid trickles slowly from it like rainwater through the ceiling of a shanty house.

A minefield of soot and dust. Proof that it was not just firewood is scarce. He moves towards the music; off in the far-right corner where it is echoing with a hollow sound. A small body is there; it is mostly gone, but some parts of the front are only slightly cooked. He looks at the armpits. No hair. He shakes the thought away, and searches for the sound. It is coming from its head. He opens the jaw, lifts out a small box, wipes the saliva off. He was trying to protect it, he thinks to himself.

The man opens up the box; a small screen brims with light. Ideographs slide across it. There are several buttons; he picks the largest one and presses it. Instantly a melody resonates through the speakers on either side of the box; a grand piano, its bass notes strong and firm, its high notes sweet yet pensive. The sounds reverberates like an angel's voice; the notes ring in perfect harmony, he is enveloped in its beauty. From the verse a firmer, more poignant melody marks the chorus, labouring on with passion yet at the same time slightly diffident, before reverting to a melancholy interlude, then back to the pensive verse. He figures now that it is $\frac{3}{4}$ time, and a song of the past with lyrics which have long been forgotten just like the language it was sung in. Yet, he can feel its emotions, he can understand its depth. Something about the tone, the pitch, the pauses and the harmonies, all collaborating to send a single message which shoots directly into his heart and triggers something within. Two tears falls down his cheeks as he looks up at the red sky. He can understand what they were saying. Divided by differing tongues, and more so that impenetrable barrier, time, so that any contact between them should wither and fade into obscurity like a ball aimed across an ocean, they still can exchange conceptions. No, he does not understand what sort of life they lead, where they lived, what they did, why they chose to write this song, just as they know naught about him. Yet there is something there; something tacit yet cognisable, a lingering sensation which binds the two who should be asunder, making his thoughts intertwine with theirs to create a new harmony. Though their circumstances are different, they have seen the same things, felt the same things, thought the same thoughts, and reverberating across the widest barriers, he listens to what the song says to him.