

The Sun Guardian

By Lily Westerfield, age 14

A long time ago, when everything was fresh and young, lived a small village. Out of all the creatures--humans, beasts, monsters--they were the most silent. They never liked to draw attention to themselves even to the point of staying quiet when terrible things went on. And it would have stayed that way if one hadn't stepped up.

Cerise ran his hands through his fiery red hair. It was a chilly day, but not unwelcome as he stepped into the workshop. A pulse of agitation surged in his veins.

"Ey, ey, boy! Get in 'ere!" Ecrú shouted. "Work on the wagons!" Cerise nodded and brandished a hammer with diligence. He gazed out at the sky while he worked. It was dim, despite being well into the daylight hours. Cerise leaned forward.

That is strange, he thought. *Why...?* As the hours wore on, it only got darker. "Ecrú?" he called.

"Hrm?" the plump man heaved his way towards him.

"Doesn't it seem a little dark to you? It's almost lunchtime."

Ecrú shrugged. "If it don't mess with yer workin', it don't matter to me." He shoved a candle on the table.

"But--but don't you think it could be bad? What if--"

The man whirled on Cerise. "What if, what if, what if! Always you and the *questions!* If it don't mess with yer workin', *it don't matter to me!*"

That shut up the young man effectively. He completed the rest of his tasks in a sulking manner. And yet, he still observed the now-dark sky with worry and fear. It was as if the sun had hidden or run away. The mystery of it settled deep in his stomach like cold, hard ice.

Walking home, he stumbled upon Mauve, a sharp-witted girl a couple years below him. She precariously balanced an alarming amount of assignments and books. "Oh, hello Cerise. How are you?" Her eyes seemed far away.

"Do you know what's going on?" he asked. Mauve's light auburn hair shined in the dark.

"No, I really don't. A solar eclipse isn't due for another hundred years...I don't think clouds could do this..." she teetered off the conversation.

"Could it be bad? What if--"

"Honestly, Cerise," Mauve sighed, "*I'm* the most inquiring girl in my grade, and you question things more than I do. If it's bad, we'll find out."

He turned on his heel and marched in the opposite direction. *It doesn't work that way*, he screamed to himself. *If something is dangerous, then we have to make it safe!* Cerise trekked into the forest on the far side of the village.

The air seemed to have no life to it; the wind was gone, only eerie stillness was left. His hands brushed the branches for stability. Cerise didn't know where he was. Everything seemed to close in on him, the anxiety, the shadows, the missing links of knowledge.

Cerise's breath came short and shallow as he tore through unseen thickets in pursuit of light. He felt like he was drowning in darkness. Then, a sparkle of something silvery-white flashed in the gloom. A twirl of deep blue stood out like a flame. He moved near it in a trance.

A beautiful woman held a glowing ivory sphere between her youthful hands. A cloak adorned her shoulders. She ran a finger along the surface, and the sky deepened its color. Cerise gasped. “Azure,” he breathed softly.

The Night Goddess snapped her head around at the sound of her name. The anger in Azure’s gaze was terrifying. Cerise stumbled back. He sprinted through the trees to what he hoped was the town.

“Azure!” he declared. A woman gave him a confused look. “Azure, she’s stopping the day! She’s going to make it night forever!” Cerise didn’t know how he knew that, but it felt right.

“Boy,” Ecrú snarled, “Shut yer mouth! Calm down, it’s nothin’ to worry about!” Fury raged in him. Cerise opened his mouth to yell at him, but a swirl of mist appeared in the streetlamps.

“The young man is right. Night will reign forever, you worthless creatures” Azure cackled. One woman fell to her knees and cried out. But no one made a move against her. No one except Cerise.

He rammed his shoulder into the deity without mercy. She fell to the ground with a growl. “Wretched thing!” Her eyes burned with humiliation. Azure extended her palm and blew a puff of ebony smoke that curled around his body.

Everywhere it touched, it burned like impassioned fire. His tortured screams echoed. Cerise felt himself shrinking, feathers sprouting, mouth hardening. Finally, he stood before the twisted divine as a lowly fowl.

But the look on her face was not laughter, but alarm. His plumage was slightly golden, glimmering softly like the sun. *The sun*, Cerise realized. *This is a gift from Aurum, the Goddess of the Sun.*

He let out a mighty cry--or as mighty as a small bird can be--and a torrent of warmth and light and *sunshine* engulfed Azure in a splendid storm. He could hear her defeated cries as it dispersed, with her missing from the fray.

Without a word, Cerise departed from the town. He was no longer human, but a bird, one who could beat a goddess. Right then, he promised that he would protect them from Azure, for she would return every night to strive to steal the day. Even though they would never thank him, he decided his voice must be used if they were too weak to use their own.

From then on, Cerise started the day with a taunting crow to drive Azure from the sky, and periodically called out to keep her far from the world until it was her turn to roam the clouds. He taught this to his sons, who passed it down to theirs and it became a part of the species over time.

So when you hear a rooster crow, think of Cerise, who used his voice to protect others.