

Text Excerpt: *Esperanza Rising*

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"Our land is alive, Esperanza," said Papa, taking her small hand as they walked through the gentle slopes of the vineyard. Leafy green vines draped the arbors and the grapes were ready to drop. Esperanza was six and loved to walk with her papa through the winding rows, gazing up at him and watching his eyes dance with love for the land.

"This whole valley breathes and lives," he said, sweeping his arm toward the distant mountains that guarded them. "It gives us the grapes and then they welcome us." He gently touched a wild tendril that reached into the row, as if it had been waiting to shake his hand. He picked up a handful of earth and studied it. "Did you know that when you lie down on the land, you can feel it breathe? That you can feel its heart beating?"

"Poppy, I want to feel it," she said. "Come." They walked to the end of the row, where the incline of the land formed a grassy swell.

Papa lay down on his stomach and looked up at her, patting the ground next to him. Esperanza smoothed her dress and knelt down. Then, like a caterpillar, she slowly inched flat next to him, their faces looking at each other. The warm sun pressed on one of Esperanza's cheeks and the warm earth on the other.

She giggled.

"Shhh," he said. "You can only feel the earth's heartbeat when you are still and quiet." She swallowed her laughter and after a moment said, "I can't hear it, Poppy,"

"Aguantate tantito y la fruta caera en tu mano," he said. "Wait a little while and the fruit will fall in your hand. You must be patient, Esperanza."

She waited and lay silent, watching Papa's eyes. And then she felt it. Softly at first. A gentle thumping. Then stronger. A resounding thud, thud, thud against her body.

She could hear it, too. The beat rushing in her ears. Shoomp, shoomp, shoomp.

She stared at Papa, not wanting to say a word. Not wanting to lose the sound. Not wanting to forget the feel of the heart of the valley.

She pressed closer to the ground, until her body was breathing with the earth's. And with Papa's. The three hearts beating together.

She smiled at Papa, not needing to talk, her eyes saying everything.

And his smile answered hers. Telling her that he knew she had felt it.