

Kyo runs through the dying forest of the north.

The last boreal forest in the world.

The air hangs with the pungent scent of cordaites—once-extinct relatives of the great conifers. These tough woody plants are interlopers, reintroduced from the north. They came with the swamps, along with the giant beaver and horsetail.

Tugged by the wind, Kyo's hair flows behind her like a dark turbulent river as she leaps over rough ground, skirt flying. Her four dark blue arms stretch out for balance as she plays obstacle course with thick ferns and giant horsetails. The occasional thirty-metre tall scale-covered cycadeoid pushes beyond the hardwood canopy, announcing the future. Kyo spots more spore-bearing calamites rising beneath the cycadeoids, whorls of compound leaves circling ambitious grey trunks. Many of these "interlopers" were here in some form three hundred million years ago, in the coal-age swamps of what used to be Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario. It is a confusing tangle. As though the forest itself is still making up its mind.

Already high in the sky, the sun is a large blushing orb that bathes everything in hues of pink. Nam calls it Gaia's heart-light, a poem to heaven. Nam told her that the light was very different during the Age of Water when the sun was sharper and shone brashly in a brilliant cerulean blue sky. Kyo imagines her sky the startling blue colour of Nam's winking eyes. Nam, like Kyo's other mentors, only has two arms and flesh the colour of the sand—not the electric blue of her own skin. Despite their difference, she thinks of Nam like a mother and secretly wishes she looked like her older mentor.

Kyo stops for a moment to gather her breath and listen to the forest. Cardinals, robins and thrushes warble and flute loudly, as if complaining about destiny. Yet, they are the interlopers. According to Myo, they have taken permanent residence in the north, even as over half of the Water Age bird species have perished. With no farther north to go, northern birds perished as the climate warmed in the Age of Water. Kyo remembers Ho telling her that the Piping plover used to lay its eggs directly on the sand of the northern beaches. The beaches are no more, long gone to sea level rise, erosion and storm surges; the plovers that nested on them are also no more. But other birds are coming...

The bird symphony flows through Kyo, pulsing with the Earth's heartbeat. She catches the absolute pitch of a starling, tuned to 432 Hz. Green, silver, yellow and russet play a shadow dance in a wild filigree of texture and sound as she aligns herself with Nature's intimate frequency. Renge taught her that light, sound and matter express at different frequencies, some only heard by the heart. All movement follows its own path, expressing its relationship with the world. Even things that aren't moving have a potential for rhythm, an internal clock that beats its message.

Kyo runs on, gathering coherent waves of vibration, intent, and motion into one continuous and harmonious rhythm. She understands that rhythm embraces a fractal continuum from microscopic to cosmic proportions. Cell division aligns with the planet's circadian rhythms; bees synchronize their flight with the phase of the moon; planets and stars exert gravity and frequency on each other, resonating with the harmonic tones of the music of the spheres. Her world flows in constant oscillation from high to low, particle to wave, dark to light, separating and uniting, creating and destroying, and back again. All through water.

It is then that she feels her sisters the most, the other Kyos—other blue beings like her—scattered over the world in small enclaves like hers. Each whispers a harmonic tone in a soft symphony of wisdom—frequencies from all over the world, carried in the coherent domain of water vapour to resonate through her interstitial water.

They are waiting for her.

She shares their eagerness for the Exodus, but she also harbours a secret yearning for the past—as though some hidden part of her has lodged there, like a tendril of a vine reaching across

time, seeking resolution—redemption, even. What is holding her back in this drowning forest? It isn't the trees...

...*There is always sadness in the end of things; but endings are also beginnings*, Kyo in Siberia whispers across the northern atmospheric river.

...*We do not feel this Canadian sadness*, Kyos from Scandinavia chorus in. *Perhaps that part of us still clings to the mundane comfort of familiarity, given that the maple still stands strong in northern Canada.*

But Kyo knows that is not true; the sugar maple already shows signs of transition. Many are yellowing at the tips of their leaves. The native legend is realizing itself.

Kyo understands that she is holding them all back with this selfish sentiment and preoccupation with a past and a people she has only dreamed of. How is it that she alone stands apart from the rest? It is not her lack of adventure or faith. She embraces her future. Nam calls her Sprite; an endearment, she knows, but one based on Kyo's unruly curiosity and yearning for adventure. If her mentor knew of Kyo's perverse and guilty obsession, she might call her something else. And certainly not with a wink.

Kyo stops at a small flowing creek, crouching to study the tracks in the muddy banks: giant paw marks and a wide-swathed tail track of a three-metre long beaver, relative to the ancient *Castoroides ohioensis*. If Renge was here she would peep with fear; but Kyo has no fear for the huge rodent—even with its giant incisors. She focuses on the eddies that form around the rocks. Renge shared that water's vitality relies on its rhythmic movement along surfaces and its shifting phases in a kind of unruly yet self-organizing dance of synchronicity. It does this by embracing paradox.

Kyo involuntarily swallows down the truth. She knows that her reluctance to leave has to do with the villainous Water Twins who destroyed humanity with a hatred for their own kind. She feels an unruly longing—as though some umbilical were tugging her back to them. The Water Twins were the first ones, the only ones from the Water Age who had the power to instruct water—long before the new children of the forest. The Twins unleashed a wrathful Gaia with their alien technology, frequency generators and shamanic potions. Kyo has dreamt most of it. Myo and Ho confirmed her vivid dreams with their historical documents. Why is she being plagued by accurate dreams of a time she has never experienced?

Kyo is convinced that the Water Twins somehow spawned the children of the forest—like her. If not for the Twins, she might be normal, like the others. It is an outrageous supposition, yet she cannot shake it. The Twins destroyed the world, after all. Like Shiva and Kali. The Twins didn't look like the children of the forest, who came much later, after humanity had been all but extinguished. It is impossible that the Twins would be connected to her.

Yet, that is exactly how Kyo feels. She desperately wants to believe that the Water Twins somehow did the right thing in causing the storms and emasculating humanity on the planet; she keeps dreaming it like she is there with the humans, suffering as they suffered, until only a handful of females remained. Myo, who is far too forgiving, once suggested that the Twins did it to heal both planet and all life, like removing a festering limb to heal the body; but how can you heal with hatred and destruction? And why is it so important to Kyo?

Kyo stands up with a shrug. No matter; today is the day she has been both dreading and anticipating for so long—the day she will finally learn some ecological history and make her personal atonement to Gaia who prepares for a new age while she—Kyo—transcends a new existence to make the Exodus.