



A Diary in the Age of Water

Nina Munteanu

Inanna Publications (Jul 8, 2020)

(300pp)

978-1-77133-737-3

Lyrical and dystopian, A Diary in the Age of Water is as much an ode to water as it is a cautionary tale about the dire implications of climate change.

Nina Munteanu's engrossing science fiction novel, *A Diary in the Age of Water*, explores the impacts of climate change through four generations of women.

Kyo, a four-limbed blue being, runs through the last boreal forest in the world. While she can access the past with her dreams, she cannot recall the mysterious Intervention that saved humanity from extinction during the Age of Water. Wanting to understand, Kyo reads textbooks in the Gaia virtual library. But her progress is slow before she discovers a journal, dated 2045, written by Lynna.

Lynna's evocative journal entries introduce three generations of women—Una, Lynna, and Hilde—whose unique relationships with water inform their personalities and trajectories. Though Una lives through water's abundant phase, she anticipates that water restrictions will follow water commodification and climate change, and she combines her parental and environmental activist roles into one. Lynna takes a safer approach to parenting and water when she becomes a limnologist. Like the inland bodies of water she studies, Lynna is both restless and captive, having chosen to uphold the status quo to protect her daughter, Hilde. Lynna works for CanadaCorp, from whom Canadians collect their daily water quotas. But Hilde, who anthropomorphizes and deifies water, recognizes its entrapment and is compelled to liberate it somehow, and at any cost. As the greater story unfolds through Lynna's journal entries, Kyo pieces pre-Intervention events together in her mind and learns about the origins of her kind.

Water is the dominant motif, and the world building cornerstone, in this futuristic and familiar setting, in which climate change has resulted in a new world order and a sociopolitical climate of distrust and fear. Here, China owns the US, and the US owns an unrecognizable version of Canada in which Niagara Falls and house taps are shut off. Lynna worries that her dehydrated neighbors will become informants should they discover her illegal collection of rainwater or her domestic cat, Kleos, who, along with all pets, is considered an "unaffordable water burden" and is therefore forbidden.

Scientific terms and theoretical definitions are woven into the poetic narrative in a deft manner. A thalweg, which marks the natural direction of a watercourse, becomes an analogy for how these three generations of women navigate the challenges that arise in their lifetimes. While Una always follows the thalweg, regardless of human-made obstructions, Lynna does not possess this skill, but suspects that Hilde inherited the trait.

Supporting characters, including Lynna's conspiracy theorist work colleague, Daniel, and Hilde's capricious American friend, are intriguing additions who heighten the stakes of Lynna's internal conflicts with her external world. As water scarcity increases and authorities grow more dangerous, Lynna worries that she has not properly equipped her idealistic daughter with the right tools to survive in a world of subterfuge. She resorts to reading Hilde's private journal, but her anxiety is exacerbated when she finds entries that link the wrath of Hindu gods with the ideological belief that

water is alive and beseeching to be liberated. As the environment deteriorates and tension between the mother and daughter mounts, Lynna questions her parental choice to save Hilde at the expense of the planet.

Weaving lyrical language into a dystopian landscape, *A Diary in the Age of Water* is as much an ode to water as it is a cautionary tale about the dire implications of climate change.

BIANCA BOWERS (August 19, 2020)

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