

**Laurel Ekström**

**Dead Ice – a tale of climate denial and feminine wisdom in the late Pleistocene**

Gro sat outwardly still by the fire. The pop of wood and bone, and distant plunging of water from the great ice lake, muted the voices around her. Her dark eyes reflected flames. Her whole being burned with the events of the past few days.

They had, as every year, crossed the dark swirling waters where the massive current from the great ice sea emptied into the great salt sea. The exertion of paddling while avoiding being capsized or being swept out to sea still weighed on the group, though they had all crossed safely. Gro felt certain that the current had grown wider and stronger. She shuddered, though she was warm in her furs, at the thought of crossing it again on their return south.

She recalled their three-day trek to the top of the ridge, where they could see all the way to the billowing mists where the great cascade roared. She had turned and gazed up the wide valley, her eyes following the scattered birch forests and dead ice giants, searching any change in the mountains of eternal ice just visible in the distance.

She thought about their homecoming a few days later, to the dear little meadow and resting place beside the freshwater lake, sheltered from every wind. With its sandy shore and gentle stream full of clams and fish and woodland full of berries, mushrooms, reindeer and moose, they were never hungry. It was the only place they stayed for longer than a few days.

The southwest end of the lake was dwarfed by a dead ice giant, higher than 20 tall birches lying end to end and at least 100 wide. It pressed against steep stony cliffs. And it glowed and cast its long shadow across the lake at sundown.

Just three weightless moons here. In 42 suns it would be the longest day. Then, in 42 suns again, they would turn and retrace their steps. Back to the ridge. Back across the dark swirling waters. Always moving away from winter, until the shortest days were survived, and they trekked back again. As they had, for as long as anyone can remember.

But what if they stayed? Her grandmother told old stories about a time, when all ice was water and summer was lifetimes long. The ice had crept quietly upon their ancestors and frozen time for generations. Grandmother had taught her, that the ice was like a wave on the salt sea – advancing and receding – but so slowly that it seemed not to be moving at all.

“Just old stories,” her brother Hak had said, waving her away. Waving their mother and grandmother away. Waving the wisdom of centuries away. The others seemed to agree with him. Or at least, no one protested.

That morning, they had all walked together, as every year, along the path toward the northern ice wall that was marked by stacks of stones. 84 stacks, one for every year since the marking began when Grandmother was small. They had passed the last rock stack and continued for the usual 600 paces. Hak had balanced his two large rocks there. The others had stacked theirs on top. But not Gro. She sensed small changes around them and felt the pull of the ice, as though it was receding with such increasing speed as to catch at her and tug her on. She had paced on, her rocks pulling heavily on her arms, and kept count – 700, 800, 900, 1000. The voices had grown small behind her. At 1,400 paces she had stopped and signaled back to the group in the high piercing call they used to communicate over long distances. But they had not come to her. She had balanced her two rocks there. Then, she turned to follow the group back to their camp at a distance, which, for once, she didn’t care to close.

Even if Hak and the others would not acknowledge it, the ice was receding faster, and change was coming. Would there be another lifetime of summer? Or something new?

The twilight shifted to blue. All eyes lifted to the sky. The moon and stars began their vigil. They took shelter.

Gro rested in layers of furs, no longer conflicted. She felt the truth. She would witness it. A new path and a new word spiraled within her. Not go, go, go, but stay, stay, stay.