

From Skyborn: A Land Reclamation Odyssey

Quelema Sparrow

Quelema has lost her soul and has been sucked through a Black Hole out into the Universe where she must search for it. In this scene, she meets her grandmother, who will be her guide, at the mouth of the River Cosmos.

Scene 2: The Mouth of the River Cosmos

Grandmother has been waiting. She sits by the side of the river.

Women's voices sing:

Fall. Fall. Fall...

She falls through the sky.

Puppet Quelema falls slowly through the void. The rope pulls taut in the theatre. She hangs from the cedar rope tied around her waist.

She dangles in the Universe.

Grandmother gets up, gently unties her and lays her by the side of the river.

Then Grandmother looks up at the rope and tugs on it. The rope tugs at the other end of the theatre. She pulls once more and the audience falls into the black hole. She places the miniature audience near the large audience so they can witness.

She sits with her granddaughter. She speaks in hənqəmiñəm.

Grandmother (to Granddaughter): Welcome home Granddaughter. Welcome to the Mouth of the River Cosmos.

Q: Granny?

Granny: Yes, it's me. Come here and give me a hug!

(*To the audience*): I'm glad you're here too. After all, what's really real without witnesses?

Q: I lost my šxʷhəli. I couldn't get it to stay.

She is full of shame.

Granny: I know.

Q: These... things—came and...

Granny: They took it—the hungry ghosts. They stole your šxʷhəli. They took it to the Land of the Dead.

Q: Hungry Ghosts?

Granny: Meddlers. Empty meddlers. They're lost.

We've got to clean you up. Prepare your body for the return of šxʷhəli. You need to welcome it home. Otherwise we'll be chasing it around the whole goddamn cosmos. And that could take, well, I'd say...pretty much... forever.

And then you'll—

Granny stops herself.

Q: What?

Granny: Pretty soon you'll become lost and confused—fearful.

You'll be roaming forever without your šxʷhəli. You'll become like them... grabbing any šxʷhəli you can find, hoping it's yours—hungry.

Q: I'll become a hungry ghost?

Granny: If we call your šxʷhəli—and you are ready, it will come back to you.

We need to hurry. Let's get started.

Grandmother places Quelemia in the Creek of the River Cosmos. As she places her in the creek her DNA appears. [Note: Spiritual cleansing in creek with cedar boughs.]

Grandmother: The fear is in your body, your mind and your heart. But your šxʷhəli knows no fear.

You're heavy with pain, Granddaughter. It's no wonder your šxʷhəli left you.

Grandmother cleanses Granddaughter with cedar boughs.

Grandmother: Feeling sick?

Quelemia suddenly throws up.

Q: I don't feel so good.

Quelemia throws up once again.

Grandmother: It will pass. Eventually.

Grandmother pulls out her DNA.

We've got to cleanse the bloodline. Wring out the DNA.

She examines her granddaughter's DNA.

Grandmother: Yup, just what I thought.

She cleanses the DNA in the creek.

Quelemia throws up again as Grandmother washes her DNA.

You're doing good my child. Your future and past thank you.

A dragonfly flies over to Quelemia.

You won't be sick forever.

The dragonfly whizzes around her. Quelemia looks up.

Q: Who are you?

Dragonfly: I'm Perception.

Q: Hello.

Dragonfly: Pleased to meet you.

Dragonfly looks to Grandmother who is cleaning Quelemia's DNA.

Dragonfly: Ugh. DNA cleansing is the worst!

Quelemia throws up.

Q: Tell me about it.

Dragonfly: Perception reporting to duty!

Q: What?

Dragonfly: I'm here to help you find your šx^whəli.

Q: Oh, thank you.

Dragonfly: We've got to find the hungry ghosts.

Grandmother: But first you need to...there it is. I see you! Sticky, sticky, sticky.

She washes out a particularly sticky part of the double helix.

She then begins to expand the DNA double helix. It grows larger.

Now we are ready for the journey.

Q: Through there?

Quelemia looks into the expanded DNA helix.

Sixteen wolves appear at the side of the river on the rocks. As they sing, Grandmother transforms into a wolf.

A canoe appears at the edge of the shore. Grandmother Wolf runs to the canoe, stops, and looks back at her granddaughter.

Then all the wolves stand up on their hind legs. They lift the canoe on their shoulders and carry it over the rocks, then gently lay the canoe in the river. They drop back down onto all fours.

Grandmother stands on her hind legs. She is now Wolf and human, her feet solid in the sand beneath her, the water up to her knees.

She places Quelemia into the canoe. [Note: Grandmother Wolf is now giant-sized compared to Quelemia, who has transformed into a small puppet in a small canoe.]

Grandmother Wolf: You must journey for...some say four days, some say four years to retrieve šx^whəli. You must bring it back from the land of the dead.

Grandmother Wolf hands Quelemia her paddle.

She places her paddle in the river. She pulls herself forward.

Grandmother Wolf begins to dance. [Note: Grandmother Wolf holds the small puppet Quelemia in the canoe as she dances in the river.]

Quelemia pulls the canoe once more.

Q: Her feet move in the sand. I hear the tiny pieces of sand scratch together against her toes.

Grandmother continues to dance as the small puppet Quelemia paddles.

As she paddles she turns to the side. Quelemia sees the pack of wolves running alongside the river. They run faster alongside her. [Visuals: The pack of wolves are running, Grandmother is dancing with the canoe in the river with Quelemia, the small puppet.]

Grandmother: Go faster.

Grandmother and Quelemia: Go faster. Go faster.

Sweat starts to drip down Quelemia's forehead. She wipes it off. She leans slightly to the side, the canoe begins to tip. She panics. [Visuals: Grandmother maneuvers the tip of the small puppet canoe.]

Grandmother: Easy does it.

The canoe steadies.

Grandmother guides the canoe.

Grandmother: Alright then. Here we go. O'wet. O'wet. O'wet.

We hear the sound of many paddles in the water. The sound increases. Glide, dig, pull. Glide, dig, pull. The sound of paddles in water in perfect rhythm.

Wolves have appeared in the canoe. Quelemia realizes the wolves are pulling the canoe in unison. She is not alone.

Wolves: O'wet. O'wet. O'wet.

They enter the DNA (micro-verse) through the River Cosmos and expand out into the Galaxy (universe). As Grandmother guides the canoe through the River Cosmos she talks to the audience and her granddaughter.

Grandmother (*to the audience*): Didn't think we'd leave you behind, did ya?
You've important work to do.

After all, how can you witness if you can't even see?

(*To the audience*): You need a few teachings too, and I'll give them to you. This is the River Cosmos. The stall'əw in the stars, the life giver, cleansing-creek supplier! Mother of all waters!

(*To Granddaughter*): There are many star systems in our Galaxy.

We have the sphere of the Ancestors...our giants.

In the sphere there are giant, old stars...orange and blue giants.

There's my Constellation.

She points to her constellation in the Ancestor System. It's the Giant Wolf Constellation. It glows brighter as Granny speaks.

And here is the Star System of our Teachings, the sɣ'əyəm.

There's the s'ɪ:ɪqəy, the two-headed serpent.

The two-headed serpent moves in the Star System of Teachings.

And χe:l's, the transformer...

The constellation of χe:l's comes alive.

χe:l's is our transformer in the sky. Transformer paddles the waterways teaching those who will listen—and those who refuse the teachings—they turn to stone.

Q: What Teachings?

Grandmother: Any and all teachings...it all depends on what needs to be learned.

All the constellations flash in the cosmos like fireworks as χe:l's begins to follow the canoe.

Grandmother: Now, off to the Stars of the Living.

Grandmother makes a hard right turn in the canoe. And they head off to the Stars of the Living.

Here we are...the Stars of the Living.

They arrive to a star system with many nebulas and baby stars forming.

Grandmother: Oh, these constellations aren't quite formed yet. They keep changing things around... Lots of construction and renos going on—it's hard to keep up. I always find myself a bit turned around in the living constellations. One minute a star is here, and then the next minute, poof, it's gone!

They continue along the River Cosmos in the Stars of the Living.

Grandmother Wolf: Now, we need to find your star.

Q: I have a star?

Grandmother Wolf: Ahhhh...well...it's almost a star. It's very new. A little unformed...but yes, we all have a star. Some of us have many stars. Ah, but you're just getting started...star-ted. Ha, ha, ha, ha...*Granny laughs*. Get it? Star-ted!

She laughs a little harder at her joke.

That's a good one.

They paddle in the cosmos trying to locate Quelemlia's star.

Grandmother Wolf: That's why these little stars are so hard to find. Not much more than gas, thoughts, ideas, memories and possibilities at this point. It must be around here somewhere...maybe it's worse than I thought.

Q: What is?

Grandmother: Everything's a little haywire and topsy-turvy.

Q: Did I lose my star too?

Grandmother: No, no...we'll find it.

Grandmother looks worried.

We just need to know what to look for...

She pulls out her binoculars.

Ah, there. There it is...

A giant Willow Tree appears.

Q: Where?

Grandmother: There!

She points to the giant Willow Tree. They paddle closer.

Q: The Willow Tree?

Grandmother: Here we are.

Q: My mom planted this Willow Tree...

This is my star?

Grandmother: Yes.

Skyborn: A Land Reclamation Odyssey, produced by Savage Society, was presented by The Cultch (Historic Theatre) and PuSh International Performing Arts Festival from January 23–February 1, 2020 on the unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səłilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. *Skyborn* will continue at the Richmond Gateway Theatre from March 19–28, 2020.

Thank you to the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) Language and Culture Department for their assistance with the hənqəmiñəm spelling and orthography in this script.