

MOGENESESUS

The Oak Tree

A tale from the:
PARADIGM
VOID



A
READING and WRITING
in the **DARK**
Subscriber Exclusive!

By Iyapo Yapa

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MOENEESUS THE OAK TREE



“**W**e all have a good laugh whenever hearing humans (we call them ‘softs’ sometimes), talk about what they call ‘weeping willow’ trees. It is hilarious. We don’t mind the softs calling us by different categories based on our types... often we adopt the labels and use them ourselves if we like them. We laugh because nothing about these ‘sad’ willows could be further from the truth.

Willows have long beautiful leaves and branches that hang down nearly to the ground in some cases and those branches wave back and forth in the breeze without much effort. The softs call them ‘weeping willows’ because when it rains, the drops of water that pour from their slowly swaying down turned leaves gives the appearance of ‘tears’.

The ‘willows’ LOVE the name and the attention! Even they get a chuckle from hearing humans talk about how sad they look, when they are some of the happiest trees on the planet.

There are some who think we lead a boring existence because unlike “animals” and other “mobile” creatures on the planet we are planted in one place, and for the most

part, remain in that one place our entire lives. It appears to those who do not understand us, that we only see that which is in our immediate view and periphery.

We may see the changing of the seasons around us, from extreme to extreme depending upon on what part of the globe we live—but those who believe we are capable only of witnessing that which is in our immediate vicinity could not be further from the reality of our existence.

We have vast, complex networks through our root systems and branches that allow us to access each other to create shared experiences for us all. It could be argued that in this way we actually get around far more through our root systems than the 'mobile' creatures on the planet.

I and my brethren here in Georgia have seen the golden sunrises and sunsets over the Atlantic Ocean in Costa Rica courtesy of our cousins in Central America. We have witnessed the dancing lights of the Aurora Borealis thanks to our kin in Alaska and Norway. Through us, our cousins in the tropics have observed snowfalls and snow-covered mountains and fields, as well as the haze of mist emanating from the majestic Great Smokey Mountains.

We get to see and experience everything.

From the grass at our feet, to the squirrels who make their bed in our trunks to nestle safely for the winter. We all connect, from the animals in Kenya and the Congo who swing from our brothers to sisters to sisters and back on our fellow trees there, to the lions and the leopards who rest in the shade underneath and upon their leaves and branches for warmth and comfort; to the elephants who rub up against them to scratch an itch (something we all chuckle about from time to time). We all work together in harmony.

From the Eucalyptus to the Giant Sequoia, to the Willow, to the Baobab to the Red Adler to the Cactus, to the plants and trees in the oceans – those that softs refer to as ‘seaweed’ and ‘kelp’, and even the potted Bonsai whose roots are not connected directly to the network, but yet still find ways to contribute – we – every tree, every plant, and the lives we work synergistically with – all live together, love one another, celebrate the Creator in our own ways and depend upon each other. We are a collective group, we believe in sharing and showing love, honor, respect and support for each other always, and with each other’s help – we witness the entire world.

We as trees do not have a lot of use for language in the way you might perceive it, but sometimes we use it. There is a saying among us... all the trees on the earth:

*Our lives are long,
Our consciousness strong,
All our kind do belong,
With one voice and one song.*

And so is the life of a tree. We tend to love just about everyone and everything! So sometimes someone comes along who shows us the same kind of love, and a long lasting friendship develops.

** * **

ONE day I saw something that looked like a soft, walking toward the group of us. It was coming through the tall grass of the meadow, so I couldn't completely make it out. I had seen a few humans on occasion. I knew they came in different sizes, like us. They have different ages, like us. And they come in different colors... again... like us.

This particular human was a small one... short. He—I guessed it was a 'he'—because years ago through the root system I learned that they came in 'male and female'. Anyway... he had kind of a big head in relationship to his small spry body.

I deduced it was a boy soft. A little boy. He pranced around sort of skipping, with a kind of energy about him and good nature joy common I think to 'little boys. He was

swinging a stick at the grass and singing. All and all, he looked like a very happy little human being. After emerging from the clearing, he ran toward us, then he ran back and forth between us, singing and laughing as he did. Every now and then he would stand to the other side of one of us and peak around as if he was hiding from someone, though there was no one else around. He smiled and laughed, sometimes talking to us. There were a few times he tried to climb up into the higher parts, but his efforts consisted mostly of reaching, trying to find a place to grab hold, and a lot of hopping, without achieving a successful climb—but even as he failed to accomplish his goal, the little soft never became angry or defeated; on the contrary, he seemed to laugh at his own failed efforts, and likely had in his mind that sooner or later, when the time was right, he would indeed find a way to climb up onto one of us.

He did eventually figure it out.

Watching him made us smile in our way, jiggling our leaves and swaying. The little boy seemed to really enjoy our company. After a while he looked at us and said he had to leave because his mother would be looking for him if he was gone too long. He waved and skipped back through the field until the top of his head disappeared from our view.

** * **

NOW, we trees don't sleep, but we do rest. When the sun sets and we are no longer enjoying the nourishing rays of its light, or warm or cool rains that are equally nourishing to us, at night we look around. We discuss softs, we send images and impressions of what we have seen and learned during our day, using our root systems to others in our networks.

We try to sway as slowly as possible for any birds or creatures who may be sharing space with us and taking advantage of our strength and willingness to help them procreate and live in relative safety with the same freedom we enjoy.

Some of us discussed the little boy and how he seemed to like being around us, and what a kind soul he appeared to be. I think we were all hoping he would come back one day.

Imagine our delight when we saw him again the next day. He was singing and carrying what looked like the same stick from yesterday and appeared to be marching as he sang. Once again, he walked between us all and then as he strode around my trunk he stopped. He looked over to the other trees, then again at me.

The little boy stared hard at me. He then, with hands behind his back, strolled around me a few times, as if inspecting me. Finally, he stopped and tapped my trunk a few times with his right hand. 'You one fine lookin' oak tree! You got a name?' I remembered him saying.

We trees don't have individual names, we know each other collectively and individually in ways it would be very difficult to explain to those who are not trees.

So... the short answer would be, no. No, I don't have a name.

'Fine lookin' Oak tree like you... seems like it'd be a shame if you didn't have a big fine name too!', the boy said.

And there he stood, staring at me—one eye cocked, standing up with his legs crossed, one arm wrapped around him, supporting the elbow of the other, while he held his hand to his face with his index finger next to his cheek in a 'thinking' position.

These details are important because we trees find the positions human beings take to be very interesting and entertaining to watch.

The little boy, still in his thinking position, said, 'I think I'll call you Moeneesus! That sound like a good strong name for a good strong Oak tree! Do you like that name? Is it alright if I call you Moeneesus, Mr. Oak Tree?'

I thought about it.

Moeneesus... Moeneesus...

Yes... I did. I liked the name very much! Yes. Please do call me that.

Moeneesus the Oak Tree.

'Well I thank ya' Mr. Moeneesus the Oak Tree.' the little boy said.

Some of my kin around me chuckled at the little boy's answer. Not because of what he said, but because he answered at all. As I said earlier, we do from time to time develop relationships with softs, but we are never under any illusion that they can hear us the way we hear them. The connection is more spiritual if anything.

'My name is Copernicus Nathaniel Washington! I gots me three names!' He said as he threw his shoulders back and pushed out his chest. 'My folks and friends calls me Kippy.'

My pappy and mammy live back yonder cross that their field on the Washington plantation. We was slaves, but now we's free and my pappy's determined to stay on wit' Massa – naw, I don't need ta' say that no more... MISTER Washington, and an' workin' for him til' we saves up enouf ta' git our own peace o' land.'

Alright, good, that should mean we'll get to see more of this nice little boy.

'So now that we done been properly innerduced, I guess we kin' be friends, and I'd be right proud if you'd call me Kippy, Mr. Moeneesus, cause we's friends now.

Alright?!'

It was alright by me! I definitely liked this young 'Kippy' fellow. And so did my surrounding brethren.

I think I'd better clarify something.

When it comes to trees, we are a very collective lot. That is the way we experience life and the world. So we don't deal with things like 'jealousy' that the softs suffer from. When someone like Kippy comes along and makes friends with one of us... he has made friends with ALL of us, even if all of his attention becomes focused primarily on just a single one of us. In this case, that 'one' being myself.

As is with all trees, the tree directly experiencing a thing has the most intense emotional and empathetic connection to it, but the general waves and shared experiences are shared through our complex root systems. Something like this is wonderful when the experiences are good. But very painful, and sometimes even terrifying when something bad happens, like one of us being struck by lightning.

After Kippy and I became 'properly innerduced', he showed up most every day, rain or shine. He would even make his way out sometimes when it was snowing, and he'd lay on his back near my feet and make a snow angel for me to look at after he was gone. He became even more talkative and would tell me what was going on in his life and with his family. Every now and then he would still play the hiding game, even though there was no one out searching for him. Copernicus Nathaniel Washington just liked being out in the meadow and being around us.

And me in particular.

His friend.

Moeneesus.

One day as he approached, he came up what was fast becoming a path because he walked it so often, and he was singing as he typically did. But this time, I distinctly heard my name... so I listened more closely as my little friend sang:

Moeneesus, Moeneesus,

With your branches, trunk and leafsis,

Moeneesus, Moeneesus,

You's a mitey mitey tree,

Moeneesus, Moeneesus,

You's the king of all the oak folk,

Moeneesus, Moeneesus,

You's a mitey friend ta' me!

Of course, I LOVED the song! I tried hard not to let on to my brothers and sisters surrounding me how proud I was to have a name, and now a song of my own, created for me by a dear friend of mine. But of course... like I keep saying... we're all connected.

So, they knew.

One day Kippy came bolting through the clearing breathing hard and very excited. He ran straight to me yelling, 'Moeneesus! Moeneesus! My pappy done bought a farm! We's got a FARM!'

I was happy to hear the news but saddened to know that soon I was going to be losing my friend.

'But here's the BEST part Moeneesus! Pappy done bought massa... MISTER Washington's farm! Mister Washington and his wife say they tired of farmin' an' ready to retire ta' someplace else! Say they got some kin in Alabama they gonna go

live with and build somethin' there! An' he said he couldn't think a' no one better ta' work that land than my pappy!'

I was happy beyond words! I had never thought to ask any of the trees closer to the property how big of a farm it was. Turns out it was a very modest farm and the owner originally had two families they had enslaved on it—Kippy and his parents being one of them. After they got their freedom one family moved on and Kippy's family decided to stay until he felt they were at least minimally stable. It looked like his father had made the right decision.

So, Kippy continued to visit and talk to me. He would tell me how the farm was doing. He always seemed to be one of the happiest little fellows I'd ever seen.

There were only two times I had ever seen Kippy cry.

The first time was when his mother went to be with the Creator when she came down with pneumonia one particularly harsh winter. The day Kippy came to me it was a little cold, and there was still some snow holding on to a few hours more of existence in shaded areas underneath myself and a few of my brethren. I could see Kippy long before he reached me because the field was no longer green, lush and overgrown since it was winter. He was wearing a little dark plaid coat, and underneath, he was dressed in black, with a white shirt, necktie and a little black hat that looked like it was more for show than keeping his head warm.

He walked through the clearing and straight to me, then put his arms around me and wept. I had never seen or felt him do this before, nor had I ever felt the kind of pain and sorrow he was experiencing at that moment. Through my root system, me and my brothers and sisters mourned with him. After a while, he put his back against my trunk, and slid down to the ground as he was prone to do. It didn't matter to him that he had just sat onto a slowly melting pile of snow, and that he was wearing something that seemed to be his 'good clothes'.

He sat telling me about his mother. How much he loved her. How much he was going to miss her. How great of a mother she was. He talked about her cooking. Her biscuits, fried chicken and apple pies. He talked about the stories she would read to him after he was in bed, and some of the stories she would make up out of her head that were far better and more exciting than anything she ever read from a book. Kippy said she was the greatest mom in the world.

I met her a few times.

I think Kippy was right.

I remember Kippy sitting at my foot until he cried himself to sleep. It was getting dark and colder, and I started to become very worried. But before long I could see someone coming through the meadow in the dusk. It was Kippy's father. He stepped

into the clearing and walked over to us, "Hey Moeneesus." he sighed as he walked up, then stepped over to Kippy and knelt to lift his son from the cold ground. He turned and walked slowly, carrying Kippy with him and they both disappeared into the meadow and the haze.

** * **

AFTER the passing of his mother, there was only him and his father to work the farm and pick up the considerable slack due to the loss. The farm continued to do well according to reports from brothers and sisters closer to the property and a few who were even becoming members of a peach grove Kippy's father had planted. It seems from what was said, the loss of the wife and mother caused the father and son to work harder, likely in attempts to keep their mind off her.

I don't know exactly how long it was between the different times I saw Kippy. Trees don't experience time the way softs do. But when next I saw Kippy, he looked a little different. Taller, more mature. His head seemed more in proportion to his body now. The stick he once carried looked to be replaced by a book of some kind and a small cloth sack. He looked a little different, but still had that huge smile that made all of us trees feel good inside all the way down to our roots. Kippy strolled up through what was now almost a proper walkway in the meadow made through his back-and-forth trips to see me and the family. He waved and smiled at us. He greeted all my brethren and then looked directly to me. "How you doin' Moeneesus?!"

Still lookin' big and mighty as I last remember... naw! Even more!' he said as he walked up to me and patted my trunk. 'It's really good to see you, my friend.' he said.

I felt the same.

Kippy turned around and looked up toward the sky and at the sun, then looked outward at the rest of the meadow that is the home of me and my brothers and sisters.

'Ya' know, Moeneesus. I'd forgotten how beautiful and peaceful it is up here.' he said.

It was a warm day. Not too hot, not too cool, just right for sitting around and just catching up on some thinking, or relaxing. Kippy must have felt a little warm though because he twisted around looking for where he could find the most shade. 'Ah, this looks good.', he said as he found a spot that was shaded the way he wanted. He put his back against my trunk and slid down until he was sitting with his legs crossed.

Kippy then laid the piece of cloth he had been carrying on the ground to uncover what looked to be a wooden plate covering another wooden plate, along with a couple apples. He lifted the top plate to reveal a sandwich he was making sure was still intact. After unwrapping them, he picked up one of the apples, covered the rest of his snack back up, rubbed the apple on his shirt and then raised it up to his mouth

and took a big bite. As he chewed on the apple, he opened the book he was carrying and started reading. Suddenly he closed the book and turned around with the cover facing me.

'Right now daddy's done hired a couple hands ta' work the farm with 'em while I go ta' school. This here's a book on farmin' an' agriculture. I'm learnin' about it at the Negro college in Templeton. I'm also learnin' bizness administration. After I graduate, I'm gonna come back here and help daddy work the farm... help it grow an' be more efficient. Then one day maybe I can take over an' keep it in the family - you know - somethin' we can keep passin' down.' Who knows Moeneesus, maybe one day I'll have my own young'uns down there on the farm and I'll bring 'em up here and introduce ya'.

The idea of meeting Kippy's 'young'uns' sounded very appealing to me, and I started looking forward to it from that very day.

Kippy hadn't just gotten a little bigger, he was now turning into an enterprising young man.

** * **

IT had been some time since I last saw Kippy.

There was nothing unusual about that though. He is a human being after all and must move around and be mobile. And besides, like I said, time passes differently for trees, so, I always patiently awaited his visits.

However, when next I saw him again, he was a bit older. He had hair growing above his lips and looked to be growing some around his cheeks and chin. But he was still my friend Kippy, and I could tell by the look on his face that this wasn't going to be one of our happy visits.

Kippy walked up to me, hands in his pockets, then removed one and patted my trunk as he always did, and said, 'Hello, Moeneesus.' then he looked to my family and nodded his head, 'Family.' he said.

He was once again dressed in black, with a white shirt and black tie, but no hat this time. He came to his familiar position, sliding his back down my trunk and sitting at my foot. He sat for a long while, simply looking across the meadow. Then he began to cry. I suspected what had happened, I just waited for him to say it.

His father had passed away unexpectedly in the night about a week ago, and they had just buried him today. Kippy was now alone to take care of the farm. He talked about it with me. He talked a lot about his father, who he saw as one of the finest men he had ever known. He spoke at length about his virtues, and as with his mother, how deeply he loved him and was going to miss him. He spoke again about

his mother. Then he talked about the farm and whether he was going to give it up. If he did, he would have to move away, and he really didn't want to leave the town he knew, or me, his friend. But if he kept the farm, he would have to hire help.

I figure that he thought those were questions he could tackle tomorrow. I could sense that his thoughts had gone back to his father, and once again he looked far off into the meadow... and once again he wept.

The death of Kippy's father was the second time I saw him cry.

** * **

TWO summers later, I spotted Kippy coming up the path... now well-worn and making it far easier to see him approach. He was bouncing almost as he did the first time I saw him as a little boy! It made me happy to see him bouncing that way, and I could tell, even from a distance that he was smiling.

But he wasn't alone.

There was someone with him and they were holding hands. They were BOTH skipping and smiling!

When they reached the clearing, they came together toward us and Kippy waved at my brethren on the other side of me, and yelled, "Hello family!" Then he and the other person, who I recognized to be a young woman, came and stood in front of me.

She was shorter than him, and her brown skin was way darker. She had a beautiful face with beautiful eyes and a smile to match.

Don't think it odd we trees recognize beautiful softs when we see them. Do you not see us, photograph and paint us because you recognize the beauty of us?

'June, this is Moeneesus the Oak Tree! Moeneesus... June!' Kippy said very formally.

'Hello Moeneesus. I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance. I've heard a LOT about you! It is so good to finally meet you.' she said smiling widely.

Well, I didn't know anything about you beautiful June, but anyone who can make my friend Kippy smile the way you do is definitely a friend of mine!

Kippy and June talked to me for the longest time, telling me about how they met, how they fell in love, their engagement and wedding plans, and all the plans they had made together for their family and for their farm. It was all very exciting, and I couldn't have been happier for them. All the trees in the meadow shared their joy

and couldn't wait for them to get a family started so that soon some of their boys and girls would one day climb upon our branches.

It was starting to get late, and I could tell that Kippy and his future wife wanted to ask me something. I had never known him to be shy about any kind of request, but I had little choice but to wait for the couple to find the courage.

He and June held hands and looked at me. Finally, Kippy said, 'Moeneesus, you are my oldest and dearest friend. You have been here for me through all the bad and all the good, and this here is part of the good.' he looked at his bride to be, and then back to me, 'this is the best! So, if you don't mind... is it alright if I carve a heart and mine and June's initials into your trunk, please?'

Now here's something pretty much no one knows but we trees. Trees are empathic by nature. We can tell the difference between someone cutting us down for the purposes of building what will become a loving home, or for the furniture within, or even the wood with which to heat it. Likewise, we can tell when our bodies are being used for the purposes of greedy speculation or mass production of goods that feed into a system that is altogether corrupt and based on materialism.

In the second instance, we feel the pain and suffer trauma at the teeth of the saw that is striking us down. It is painful and feels like a violation of our essence when we know our life is being taken for a purpose for which we do not stand, nor desire

to participate. Equally, as in the first case the cutting or chopping down of us does not bring terror or trauma. Many have described it through our root systems, and it is almost blissful. When we know that what we are being used for is out of love and genuine utility at the hands of craftsmen who care about us... for our kind, it is our version of Nirvana.

Your kind call it 'heaven' or 'paradise'.

So, when Kippy and his pretty June asked my permission to carve a heart into my trunk with their initials in it, I was both honored and eager for them to do it. As Kippy took his pocketknife and etched his love declaration, it tickled a little, but it also created a warmth throughout that I think even some of my brothers and sisters could feel through their roots. When he was done, they both thanked me, then stood under my leaves and shade and kissed.

Two months later, they again kissed under my leaves and shade as they were married.

** * **

KIPPY and June's daughter Elizabeth more than took over for where her busy father had left off. She was always coming and visiting me and the family. Sometimes she would bring her Aunt Hattie with her and both of them would climb up on me and

then sit around talking. Aunt Hattie didn't talk to me the way Kippy, June and Elizabeth did, but everyone isn't in tune with us trees in that way... and that's alright. We aren't necessarily in tune with everyone we come into contact with either. That said, Hattie seemed to be a playful woman for her age, and she loved that niece of hers to pieces.

Yes. I liked Aunt Hattie.

* * *

FOR as peaceful and peace seeking as we may be, even trees have a mortal enemy.

Fire.

We do not like fire. And fire doesn't like us.

We don't like it close to us.

We don't even like it far from us in the distance where we can only see the smoke of it over the top of the heads of our brethren. For we know if we see smoke, fire may soon follow.

One night we could see it in the distance.

For those of us familiar with fire, we thought the blaze we were now seeing was moving in a strange manner. It looked like it was far away at first, very faint, but we were being warned by trees along the way that something was coming. We all prepared the only way we could as trees. We spoke to our Creator. The fires got closer but looked as if they were moving in some unnatural pattern, perhaps a zig zag.

It was all very strange looking.

Eventually, the fires seemed to stop moving... far off, beyond the line of the meadow, in the direction Kippy would always go home to his family's farm. It wasn't long before we saw more fire! This time rising high up to the sky, lighting it up, but not like day, for there was a rolling blackness we recognized as thick smoke. After that fire, another fire raised to the sky mimicking almost the intensity of the first. Then finally, for we trees, the most terrifying sight of all... open blazes across the land! Through our root systems we could feel the pain horror and trauma of it, but we still had no idea what was actually happening. Suddenly, we saw small balls of what looked like organized flames coming up the hill and through the meadow.

What was happening now?!

"Was the fire coming to get us too?!"

As we all looked on... talking to the Creator, we started seeing the forms and faces of softs, lit by sticks they were holding, that burned with fire. Some of them were on horses, some of them were on foot, but all of them were pink... all of them were pale.

All of them except one.

I looked in horror as I saw my beloved friend Kippy being dragged behind a horse. Kippy was beaten and bloody. His hands were tied behind his back and though the meadow was grassy for the most part, there were still large rocks on which he painfully collided with, as those who had tied him and were dragging him cared nothing about.

As the soft on the horse rode toward me, two other pale softs stood under one of my branches that was to the left of them and tossed a rope over it.

NO! What are you using my branches for?!

The man on the horse rode over to the rope, that was tied in a ring at the end, and maneuvered his horse around. He dismounted the horse, then several men grabbed my beaten tied friend and forced him onto the back of the horse. Kippy had been beaten so badly he was unable to sit up straight. It didn't matter to them, they placed

the rope ring around his head and tightened it, then used my own trunk to tie off the end of the rope.

The pale softs were yelling and screaming. The one who had been on the horse looked at Kippy and yelled, 'Won't no ejicated nigger never be better'n a white man boy! NEVER!', the pale entity... this, KLETCTUE standing next to the horse then slapping the horse on its rear, causing it to run from underneath Kippy!

Kippy was left swinging back and forth, grotesquely in the air, one of MY branches supporting him!

NO!!!!

I could hear Kippy gasping for breath, and I saw him violently shaking from the pain and terror of what he was experiencing! What was happening?! Why was any of this happening?! Why had these entities forced me to take part in this abomination?! Why have you done this to this man?!

WHY?!

I was told later my screams through the root system caused several of my brothers and sisters to actually vibrate enough to shake a multitude of leaves from their own branches.

Kippy gasped as he swung back and forth.

At one point spinning.

As the crowd of kletctue looked on and cheered. One walked over to him, and with something he was holding that looked like a long stick with a wide end, hit Kippy viciously in the side with that wide end, causing him to spin around faster.

Eventually, Kippy's body movements stopped altogether, though he continued slowly swinging back and forth. Several of the entities... still laughing, aimed their sticks at Kippy and with a loud sound, but not directly touching him, somehow caused more damage to his lifeless body. A few walked by and spat on him. Then, finally they all seemed to become relatively quiet. They looked at him one last time as he hung lifeless from one of my branches. Then turned around and walked out of the meadow and back in the direction of the fires they had set.

Imps returning to the fiery pit from whence they came.

* * *

IN the morning and over the next days and weeks, words and emotions of sympathy and condolences flooded in from around the world as other trees commiserated with the tree who had famously become known among them as 'Moeneesus'.

I asked any who might know, 'Why? What had happened?'

'Jealousy and hate.' came the simple answer.

Earlier I told you that trees do not really experience things like jealousy and hate, so we don't have any way to connect or relate to it in any way that could really help us understand what it truly is or does. But to those closest to the house, and through the root systems to our brothers and sisters in town, it appears that there were some who were not happy that Kippy and his family had a successful farm and that it was growing. Each year, it seemed Kippy's family was somehow expanding and laying a foundation for the generations of their family to come.

There were people who did not like that. They didn't like the fact that the family was happy successful and growing. They didn't like the fact that my friend Kippy had gone to college and learned how to become a better farmer and a businessman.

I later learned that they burned down Kippy's home, his barn and silo, stole his livestock and set fire to the grove, thus also murdering some of my young brothers and sisters, causing them also to parish in terror and trauma that through our root systems, we all now share.

These were their criteria for murdering him. A loving gentle man who meant harm to no one and only sought to improve his own life, the lives of his family, and anyone with whom he came into contact.

Even pale softs.

And using me to execute my best friend as they laughed and danced by fire light that gave them the look of being imps in hell.

I can remember when I would hear word that one of my brother or sister Oaks, Poplar or other assorted trees had been violated in this way. Some repeatedly, others with multiple outer shells that once held spirits, souls, emotions and intellects of innocent Black people, hanging and swinging from them at the same time.

Among trees, just as it is with names, we do not have many words. Our perceptions are based upon connection, empathy and experiences.

But for them.

For the entities who commit these abominations.

These entities who laughed, cheered and screamed at the terror, pain and suffering they were bringing to innocent men, women and children. What to call them? They must be given a name. What do we call those who burned some of the innocents upon the trunks of my brethren and then fought over pieces of the bodies to keep as 'souvenirs'?

Their men, women, and children standing proudly and smiling for photographs to be kept for posterity, keepsakes or to be used as post cards.

Though trees have no structured vocabulary as you would consider it, should these entities... these harbingers, lovers and worshippers of death, pain and terror go without a name?

No.

In our language we did not have a name for these entities at first, but soon we did, because we had too. Among our people they are called 'kletctue'.

In your language the closest translation would be 'demons'.

Though 'demons' is infinitely more innocuous than what our name actually means by comparison.

The demons take ropes and throw them over our branches, and then hang others who at least seem to be of their own kind.

As with ALL things, the demons do not ask permission. They do not ask whether it is alright for them to be using our persons or energy. For if they did... they are already aware, the answer would be...

NO!

And so, they hang them anyway.

These humans.

These people who had done nothing to anyone. These people who sought only to be free and to exist. Even as we trees seek only to also be free and exist.

They do so, bringing pain, heartache, terror and trauma to them, anyone who loves and cares for them, and any connected to them through shared experience.

Likewise, they bring pain and trauma to us. It is a trauma from which the tree who

experiences it directly never recovers. We all feel the distant pain of it and sympathize... but the majority of us think it could never happen to us for it is too surreal – too much of a nightmare.

I never thought it would happen to me, and especially with a dear friend whom I loved.

** * **

MUCH later that day, a group of Black men and women came walking slowly through the clearing. The backdrop they were up against was still filled with smoke in the air and the smell of burned wood and kindling, and through the root systems was nothing but a mood of tragedy and misery.

Several men walked up, and a few women, one of whom I recognized as June, I hadn't seen her for a very long time, she was far larger and rounder around the stomach than I remembered her. Kind of the way she looked a while before I met Elizabeth, but I recognized that it was June, Kippy's wife. I did not see their daughter, but I hadn't expected to. What had happened up here was something no child should ever have to see.

Upon reaching the clearing she took one look at the almost unrecognizable remains of her husband, and she let out a short shriek, that barely made it past her lips

before she fell to the ground unconscious. The women with her quickly knelt and attended to her. As the men, a couple with tears in their eyes, walked directly over to where Kippy hung. One large man putting both arms around Kippy's beaten, bloody, lifeless body. The other cutting the rope that suspended him.

** * **

AFTER the destruction of "Washington Farm and Peach Grove", the theft of any property not destroyed by fire, and lynching of the owner, husband and father—a group of family and friends led by June Washington, along with other Black towns people who did not personally know the family, but heard about the incident, went to the authority's demanding justice. The group of livid Black people were told that there was nothing that could be done because every white person in town had an alibi for the night of the 'alleged' incident. The 'authorities' further responded that the fire was likely caused by a kerosene lamp that was left burning and may have been knocked over by someone in the home or the barn, or kicked over by a horse, and started the blaze that the wind finally sent out of control.

And what of the man lynched from an Oak tree in the meadow up from their property?!

It was obvious.

When Mr. Washington saw that he had lost everything in the fire... his entire farm and livelihood because of an act of carelessness on his part, he was so riddled with guilt and hopelessness, he went up to the field and committed suicide.

(By hanging himself with his hands tied behind his back, then shooting himself several times after he was dead).

Happened all the time.

When the crowd outside the sheriff's office became aroused, realizing nothing was going to be done about this abomination, the 'law officer', sternly cautioned them, as several deputies moved into place putting their hands on their firearms and rifles. He told them if there was any kind of trouble... any at ALL, he was going to arrest ALL of them and charge them with disorderly conduct, inciting a riot, disturbing the peace and unlawful assembly. And he assured them he could make the charges stick and get the book thrown at each and every one of them and they'd be punished to the fullest extent of their law.

* * *

ELEANOR Woodson and her husband Jake told June, her sister Hattie who had come to live with them, and Elizabeth, that they could stay there as long as they needed, until they could figure out what they wanted to do. Since they no longer had a home,

being that the mob had burned it and the barn down. They still had a substantial amount of money in the bank from profits made from the farm, so they decided to contact their brother in Michigan for advice.

But before anything else, they needed to make funeral arrangements.

“First off, we need to chop this damn tree down.” Jake Woodson who was one of Kippy’s closest friends said.

“No!” June said sharply, “That’s Moeneesus. That old oak is one of my husband’s friends. Just cut off the branch those devils hung my husband on and burn it. I’ll contact the Pastor, and we’ll prepare to bury Kippy out there under Moeneesus and around the rest of the trees he cared so much about.”

“Yes ma’am.” Woodson said, “I’ll get the boys together and we’ll take care of everything.”

** * **

AND so it went.

The men came and cut off the branch used to murder my friend. Something that to this day I am grateful for and will forever remain indebted to them.

They dug the grave between us trees, but closest to my foot in what some would consider the back of me... though in reality, we trees have no back... wherever one stands in relationship to us, is our front.

They buried him.

Me and my brothers and sisters mourned with those present as they spoke about his life. The kindness, gentleness and goodness of his spirit. The many friendships he had made and cultivated. The beautiful family he had by no choice of his own, left behind. They spoke about what a good husband and father he was.

They said all the things that many say over the body of someone who is no longer here, and which may or may not be true.

But for Copernicus Nathaniel Washington—my dear friend Kippy.

It was all true ... and then some.

When all was said and the service was nearly over, June stood up and the group walked with her to the foot of Kippy's grave. June said, 'This is something Kippy used to always say to me and Elizabeth. He said, it meant that we were family, that we will always be connected.' She looked at the headstone they had prepared for her and in the silence of the lightly breezy summer day she read:

*Our lives are long,
Our consciousness strong,
All our kind do belong,
With one voice and one song.*

I and all my brothers and sisters immediately felt a wave of warmth within us!

We trees do indeed develop bonds with certain people... certain souls. But we know that the bonds are mostly based upon empathy and emotion, we don't really think softs can hear or understand us in the same ways we can understand them. They are spiritual bonds as I said earlier.

But here ... here—

For all these years... how deeply did Kippy truly understand?!

** * **

LITTLE Elizabeth stood facing me. I hadn't seen her for a week or so, since her father was laid to rest at my feet. She craned her neck to the side for a moment, so that she could see around me to her mother who was still standing at the place

where they buried her father. He was laid to rest surrounded by all of us, but closest to my feet on the other side of me from where Elizabeth stood.

'My mamma and my aunt Hattie said we gonna move away from here and go up north. They said they have a brother in a place called Mishegin where him an' his wife can put us up and they can get work. They say he got a daughter too 'bout my age. It's a little scary, but they say they can't stay around here no more cause... you know... cause a' what happened to daddy. '

Elizabeth stared at me for a while. She looked at the stump that was now in place of the branch on which the demons had used me to murder her father... my friend. She stared at me for a long time. As I looked at her, feeling ashamed, but not understanding why—I looked more closely at her face than I ever had before, and at her eyes.

I saw Kippy – the little boy who gave me a name.

I know he had grown into a man. A fine man. But the life of a tree is a long one, so to me he was still the young one I had come to know and love, he would have remained so in my consciousness had he lived to be a hundred or more.

Elizabeth came close and wrapped her tiny arms around my trunk. There was no way of course that she could have fully put her arms around me, but that didn't matter. I felt her embrace around my trunk as if her arms had gone around twice.

Softs do not think that we feel things, not emotion, pain, or physical interaction, but we do. And I could feel the warmth of the embrace of my friend's daughter, and I could feel her tears as they wet my bark, right in the carving Kippy had made when he so excitedly introduced me to June, the woman whom he would soon marry.

Elizabeth's mother.

Her tears filled the grooves and slowly rolled down my trunk to the grass below. The grass, joining in the mourning.

After letting go far sooner than I would like for her to have, she took a couple steps back and looked up at me.

When Elizabeth looked up at me. She looked so much like him. Her eyes still filled with tears. She stepped quickly back over to me and put her arms around me again. This would be her final visit; I could not let her leave empty handed.

Our Creator provides all we need ... we trees give thanks often, nearly all the time, and we seldom make requests, because we have want for nothing. That said ... I had

need to make a request now. I asked our Creator for a gift to bestow to Kippy's daughter.

Immediately, a strong gust came from the East. It jostled the branches and limbs of myself and a few brothers and sisters around me... but of all of us, for all the shaking and wavering. From only one tree, from one branch, from one limb, and one limb of that limb, fell a single leaf. Elizabeth watched the lone leaf as it fluttered, twisted, turned and almost danced in the air until it floated softly into her awaiting cupped hands.

I thanked our Creator.

Elizabeth looked up and thanked me.

'I know it's not your fault!' she said, 'I don't blame you... I'll never blame you. You were one of my daddy's best friends. I hate what those evil people did to my daddy, I HATE it! But I don't hate you... and I'm sorry for what they forced you to do. I'm so sorry they made you do it and now you have to remember it.'

She then stepped back again, farther than the last as June walked over from the spot at which her husband... my friend Kippy, lay, to stand beside her daughter.

She looked at me much in the way her daughter had, then gently ran her hand across the carving her husband made all those years ago when they first told me about their love and their plans. Tears appeared in her eyes and ran down her cheeks as she looked up at me, and then raised her head to see my highest branches and leaves. No doubt imagining the times her husband, as a little boy, would climb up as high as he could. Then having a seat... Kippy would be swinging one leg lazily in the air as he ate an apple or a plumb and looked over the Creator's creation for as far as his eye could see. She also looked to the other side... to the spot of my missing branch. The one on which they murdered my friend, her husband, Elizabeth's father.

The spot of my shame.

June leaned to me closely and kissed the carving on my trunk. She looked at me a final time and said, "Take care Moeneesus the Oak Tree... and whatever you do... remember, you did nothing wrong. Kippy's here with you now, so the two of you can talk to your heart's content. Don't you ever forget Moeneesus... Kippy loved you. He still loves you. And we love you too."

Elizabeth looked at me knowing this would be the last time. She held her gaze for a couple minutes, then she raised the leaf, still in cupped hands, making certain I could see she had it, and said, 'I won't lose it, and I won't forget you. Bye'. She and her mother turned and started walking away. I watched the two of them.

Kippy should have been with them, holding the hands of his wife and daughter.

I again suddenly felt ashamed and guilty. If only the branch they used had not been so strong. If only it had given way. How could I have let this happen?!

After taking about ten steps down the path, little Elizabeth stopped causing her mother to pause also. Elizabeth spun around to scold me. She looked at me, wagging her finger and firmly but lovingly said, 'You just stop that right now Moeneesus! Like mommy said, you can't blame yourself. Don't you ever blame yourself again! It wasn't your fault and you didn't do nothing wrong!' her voice softened, 'One day I'm gonna come back ta see Daddy and you, ok?. I promise. Til then, watch over my daddy please. And you take care of yourself too Moeneesus.'

Elizabeth too?!

Elizabeth turned around and once again took her mother by the hand. She and June walked down the familiar path on which the husband... the father... my dearest friend... had strode oh so many times, and as with Kippy, Elizabeth disappeared into the field, but not before I heard her and her mother singing... voices slowly fading by the moment:

*Moeneesus, Moeneesus,
With your branches, trunk and leafsis,
Moeneesus, Moeneesus,
You's a mitey mitey tree,*

*Moeneesus, Moeneesus,
You's the king of all the oak folk,
Moeneesus, Moeneesus,
You's a mitey friend ta' me!*

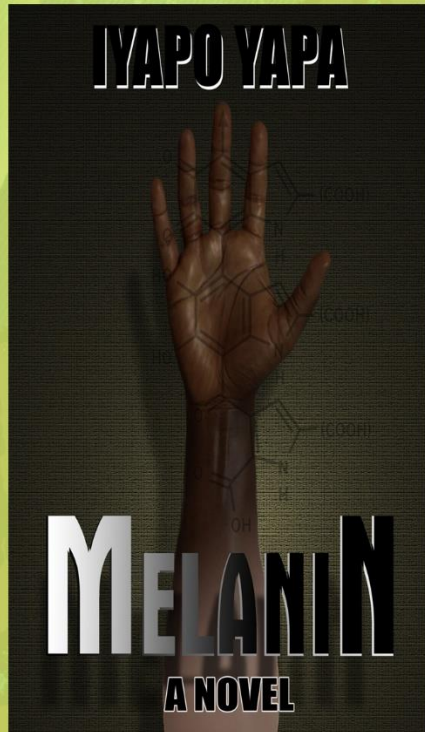
From that day to this, never again did I blame myself or allow the guilt for the monstrous actions of the kletctue to be a part of my consciousness, or that of my brothers and sisters. I still felt a deep sense of loss when it came to the presence of the humans I had grown to know as friends and family, but I would ever be equally warmed and comforted by the memories of Kippy, and the love of his family, and especially, young Elizabeth, who could hear me. I would ever hold fast the hope that I would one day see her again—and perhaps her own children.

** * **

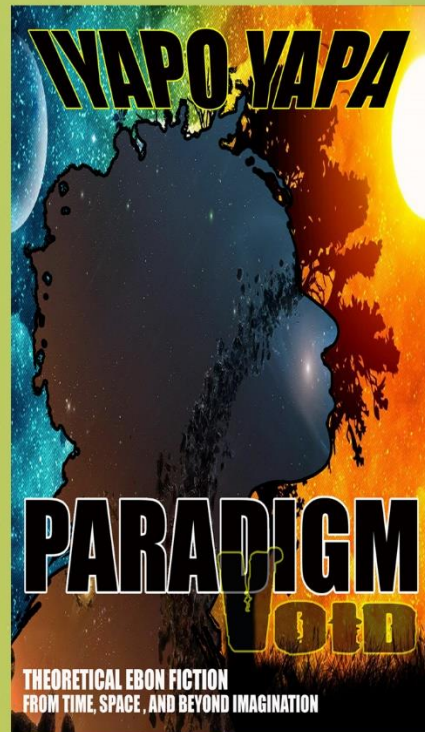
HUMANS call them 'weeping willows' because when it rains, the drops of water that pour from their slowly swaying, down turned leaves gives them the appearance of 'tears'. But it is we... the Oaks, and the Poplars throughout the world, and especially

in the United States, and most especially the Southern part of the country, who are the ones who weep.

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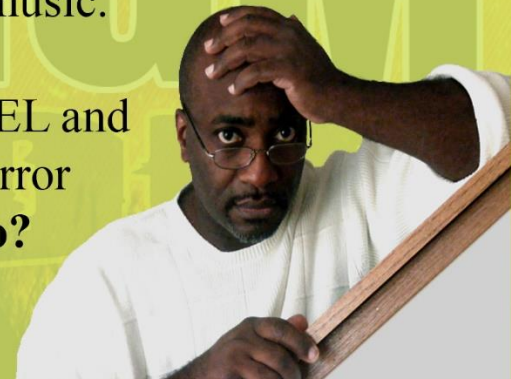


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Iyapo Yapa is a cartoonist, illustrator, graphic artist who has always worked in the graphic art field, but has finally made the leap to his TRUE passion - WRITING. When not writing, Iyapo can be found designing something or other, drawing cartoon characters or composing music.

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