

THE LAST OVALIAN

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Esta, old and dying, stood at the gate. She had lived from the beginning to the end. She had come from the place of perpetual bliss to this planet of death, but she had not come freely. She sank to the ground, her wizened old fingers clutching the dirt, as she summoned the great wings of thought. *Come, take me back to Ova*, she willed. As her head fell to rest upon the brown parchment remains of the garden's dying trees, Esta remembered. Ova was gone.

Ova, the place of eternal spring, of continuous fertility, of perfect harmony. The place of the unified mind, where thought traveled on the breeze, and perception dawned with the light. Ova, the garden spot of life, where the feminine and masculine were naturally equal. Ova, that uncontaminated region of highest enlightenment, the place of boundless potential, was gone.

The Ovalians, in their intrinsic goodness, overlooked the possibility of a lower form of reality. Vileness, existing so far beneath their most elemental supposition, went undetected in its approach, its concept foreign to their imaginations. Consequently, the heavy foot of aggression fell upon the planet. Malevolence entered the virgin portals of Ova without warning from out of nowhere. Its carriers, calling themselves Ascendants, embodied an authoritarian form of masculinity not present in the Ovalian males.

They came bringing their clamoring words of proclamation, their law and order, their supremacy, into the place where language had needed no voice. Where lawlessness and disorder were extraneous entities, and supremacy, senseless. They came, they said, because Anon, their ruler, sent them. What they did not say, the Ovalians knew: Anon had smelled Ova's fragrant lushness, looked upon her perfection and desired her.

Anon contemplated an experiment, pondered the self-serving advantages of transplanting a paradise like Ova into the soil of an uncultivated planet, which he had already explored. Being a strategist, he devised and implemented a plan calling for the transportation of the best of Ova to Earth, his newly acquired possession. A primitive place in the early stages of evolution, and sparsely inhabited by a species too unintelligent for Anon's desired venture, Earth needed the purity of Ovalian innocence, and the beautiful floral and animal life not seen elsewhere in the universe.

Anon left the control of the conquered Ova to his Ascendants who, with the sounds of their thundering voices, with their brutal weapons of hate and fear, silenced the thoughts of the vanquished Ovalians. The women, closer to the pulse of Ova than their male counterparts, resisted the invading Ascendants, blocked out the torrent of spoken words invented for the disruption of concentrated thought. Ova's men, whose intuitions were less developed, were awarded power. Their obedience elevated them to prestigious positions and soon, egos inflated, they assumed the traits of their enslavers.

In time, Anon called for the subjugation of all women on Ova, for the abrogation of feminine mysticism. Before long, Ovalian males called themselves Ascendants, absorbing the beliefs, the weaknesses of their conquerors. When Ova ceased to be productive, her resources depleted, the Ascendants deserted her, leaving her doors wide-open on their

way out. The hostile elements of the universe besieged the ravaged wasteland, and eventually consumed the planet. By that time, Ova was no more than a shrunken, misshapen fig, sucked dry, her seed devoured.

The portion of Ova that Anon removed to Earth, he placed in an ideal location he named Nede. This choice piece of Ova arrived on Earth with the woman named Esta, the possessor of the one thing Anon underestimated in his grand scheme—her powerful Ovalian psyche.

In Nede, Esta heard the dying thoughts of her Ovalian sisters, and when her perceptions ceased, she knew Ova was gone. Loneliness settled upon Esta's heart, and her mind swirled in a fog of confusion. Then, she felt life stirring. She repelled the thought, despite its reality, that the seed growing inside her could be that of one of the invading Ascendants. She hoped against hope that her child had come from an Ovalian male.

After Esta gave birth, Anon himself visited the mother and her infant regularly, chastising Esta continually for not giving voice to the child. Sucking at her breast, the baby's thoughts blended with Esta's, and they communicated. The child knew she thought of him as Eloë.

When Eloë began to walk, Anon came daily to Nede, and walked beside the boy, talking to him, giving him words. Esta had to delve deeper into Eloë's thoughts in order to gain his attention. One day, Eloë would not respond when Esta summoned, for he could no longer hear her thoughts.

Esta blocked out Anon's words, but she read his mind as he talked with Eloë, who he called Prog. "Prog," Anon told Esta's son, "I am your father, I made you from the dirt. Like clay, I molded you with my own hands, and I breathed my breath into you. I, Anon, gave you life," Anon told Esta's son. "Earth is yours to rule, under my instruction and authority, of course. Obey me and you will never die." Then Anon showed the boy all the animals that had come from Ova. "Every living thing here is under your dominion, Prog."

Anon overpowered Esta one day and took her to the far side of Nede, away from her son. After he had violated her, Anon imprisoned Esta inside a growth of impenetrable vines and shrubbery. "Woman of Ova, I banish you forever from my son, Prog, the Ascendant *par excellence*. Your high-minded thoughts will perish with you, for my word is the Supreme Law of the Universe. My word will give expression to all acceptable thoughts, leaving the unacceptable forever voiceless. My supremacy cannot be questioned. You, woman, shall serve me in silence. Your presence will never be known beyond this wooden barrier of vegetation again."

Prog grew. One day when Anon came to visit, Prog said, "Anon, I am lonely." Prog had forgotten Esta. He knew only Anon.

"What? My son is lonely in the midst of all this?" Anon directed the young boy's eyes to view all of Nede. Prog knew of nothing beyond his vision, nothing of the rest of Earth. Nothing of the cities the inhabitants of the primitive planet were already conceiving. "See all the creatures? Name them if you are lonely. Call them by name and they will be your companions."

Time passed, and Prog grew bored with the animals. He had long ago lost the ability to read their thoughts although his own remained open to every creature in Nede. Their knowing stares, and condescending attitudes, angered Prog. "Who do they think

they are?" he asked Anon one day. "Am I not Prog, King of Earth? I will not have them looking at me with pity."

"How do you wish them to look at you, Prog?" Anon asked.

"With fear. I think they should fear me. How else can I rule them if not with fear?"

"You are absolutely right, my son." Anon could hardly contain his pride. "Now how do you suppose one might go about instilling fear in these dumb creatures?"

"I could kill them," Prog replied.

"Now, why would you want to kill them?"

"For you, Father. I could kill them for you. Besides, there are too many of them."

Prog was visibly impressed with the keenness of his idea.

"Magnificent," Anon replied. "Go on."

"Not all at once, obviously." Prog's mind worked quickly to formulate his thoughts into words. "No, if they are to fear me, they must never know when I am coming for them, so," he paused, scanning his mental files for just the right solution, "I must come for them one at a time. Yes, that's it!" Prog's face beamed as he searched Anon's for approval.

Anon smiled upon Prog. "You know, Prog, I've been thinking. Perhaps you should build an altar, a place to honor me with a gift, just a little token of your gratitude. What do you think, Son?"

"I have the perfect idea," Prog replied. "Each week, after I've built your altar, I will bring an animal to be sacrificed. Each week I will show you my gratitude, and instill fear in the animals at the same time." Prog's thought processes stimulated him to the point of humor. He added, his face radiant with merriment, "kill two birds with one stone, you might say."

"Clever boy!" Anon's laughter reached Esta on the far side of Nede.

Prog busied himself with the altar, hardly noticing the animals had vanished. In his preoccupation, he failed to detect the absence of their watchful eyes. When the time for the first sacrifice arrived, Prog had to hunt for an offering.

After a few months, Prog grew bored with the weekly hunting, for the animals certainly feared him. He approached Anon again. "Father, I sure am lonely," the boy complained.

Again, Anon visited Esta, who had given birth to a girl-child she thought of as Lura. Esta had known that, in time, he would come for her daughter, and she waited helplessly. Anon took Esta's daughter and named her Lea. He presented her to Prog one morning just as the young boy awoke for the day.

"Here, Son, I give you a mate." Anon placed the young girl beside the boy. "I have made you this woman, Prog, while you slept. She belongs to you. She will be your companion."

The girl grew and forgot Esta. Anon walked with Prog and Lea, instructing them in their behavior. "Some things between the two of you are prohibited," he explained, "just as some parts of Nede are forbidden. Prog, your body must never touch Lea's, from the waist down," Anon warned. He knew the consequences if the woman realized her feminine powers. Anon instilled a steadfast belief within the pair that all life came from him alone, from Anon.

"Prog," Anon continued. "Just as I established boundaries in your hunting, I establish boundaries in your relationship with Lea. And just as I forbade you to question

the boundaries in hunting, I forbid you to question now. It is not for you, mere humans, to know the mind of Anon."

Anon knew that if the devout worship he craved was to continue, he must forbid all physical pleasures. Carnality would surely invite the stirrings of the Ovalian memories flowing dormant within their veins. He knew, with equal certainty that Prog and Lea must never venture to the far side, into the presence of Esta.

Everything was going according to his plan, the one devised before the invasion of Ova. His objective for a population of Anon-fearing, Anon-dependent, Anon-possessed subjects was being realized. "But in your worship of me," Anon explained further, "Prog's voice will be your voice, Lea. Obey him in all things. Never forget, everything comes to you through him, from me." Anon planned to visit Esta again. He needed another child, a son for Prog.

One day Prog and Lea wandered to the far side of Nede, and approached Anon's boundary in search of something different to eat. They had grown tired of the same old nuts and berries, the same old apples and oranges, the same old grapes. "Wait, Lea, we've gone too far. Anon will be angry."

"Oh, Prog, he'll never know," Lea begged, her brown eyes looking at Prog in a way that affected him oddly. "I see some really interesting looking fruit on that tree over there. See, the one by the river." Lea knew she was acting strangely, but did not know why. She moved close to Prog, reaching out to touch his chest with her hand. She had touched him many times, but had never experienced the sensations she felt then. Prog had never looked at Lea in the way he looked at her then, either.

"Woman," Prog tried to keep his voice firm, "come, we're leaving this place now." He hurried away, toward safer, more familiar ground.

"Well, I'm going, whether you come or not," Lea asserted.

"Anon!" Prog called out loudly, tossing his head about, searching. "Anon, this woman you gave me is disobeying me."

Anon responded immediately, glowering down upon the woman. "Get yourself back to your garden at once," Anon ordered. "You silly woman, don't you know Death hangs from that very tree, the one you find so interesting." Then, looking at Prog in the way of the strictest disciplinarian, Anon said, "Son, take this woman and deal with her properly. Make sure she never entices you to this side of Nede again. If she does, you both will die, as surely as those animals you bring to my altar!" Anon stormed away, leaving Prog to deal with Lea.

Prog stared coldly at her, as though he found her contemptible. As he turned to walk away, he clasped her small brown wrist roughly, dragging her easily to the other side of Nede. He said nothing to her until they had reached the comfort of home. He flung her to the grass, and in a tone she had never heard him use, he shouted, "Don't you ever do that again!" Then he picked up his stone and went hunting.

Lea could not forget the day they had gone to the edge. The sight of that fruit hanging from the tree on the other side of the river, only the top of it visible over the snarled and tangled wood of the viney hedge, kept her awake nights. Remembering it, she wanted to touch Prog again, to feel his warm skin beneath her palms. She started, of all things, to think about his lower body, the unnamed area below his waist.

Prog renewed his interest in hunting, going more frequently than ever before, staying away longer. One day, while Prog hunted something to sacrifice, Lea decided to

return alone to the edge of Nede. She knew that he would never go near the spot again anyway. Lea quieted her fears with the knowledge that Anon would never have known about the other time, had Prog not summoned him.

She left early the next morning. She had noticed that, lately, when Prog was away on his hunting forays, their spot became alive with animals. The trees sang and fluttered with every colored bird in Nede. Eyes watched Lea, and when she looked at them, they did not run. Just now, a deer had come close enough to nuzzle her. Lea began warning them when Prog prepared for another hunt. A cognizant current flowed between Lea and the animals, and she pondered its meaning.

She approached the viney hedge cautiously, for Anon said that Death hung from the tree beyond it. She searched around for an opening. The vines were too tightly woven, enmeshed like a wooden net. Suddenly, her mind reeled for she thought she heard something. A voice without words called her.

Lura. Lura. Lea circled the hedge, the sound in her head growing louder as she neared the far side. Then, through the knitted timber, Lea's eyes detected a shadowy form. She squinted for better focus, and suddenly the image of a woman entered Lea's vision. Her skin was not young and smooth like Lea's. Gray streaked her hair, but she held a baby to her breast.

Esta, Esta. Lea's thoughts swirled uncontrollably, beyond language, beyond understanding, and the old woman's face turned toward Lea's. Their dark eyes met, the old woman's sad, full of understanding, Lea's puzzled, confused, questioning. Then, their minds embraced, although their bodies could not touch.

Esta, still clutching the baby to her breast, moved closer to Lea, and gazed through the tangles. She probed Lea's Ovalian intuition, and the young woman's thoughts became flooded with memories, with answers, with complete awareness. In the blink of an eye, Lea knew everything.

Although Lea could not visit Esta often, their thoughts remained in constant communion—Esta's instructing, Lea's accepting. One night Lea reached for Prog while he lay sleeping. He had just returned, being absent for the longest period yet. On the verge of his waking, he turned to Lea, nuzzling the top of her head with his chin, as though it was the most natural thing to do. Then, before the man was awake enough to stop it, the forbidden between them touched and, just as Anon feared, Nede was lost.

Of course, Anon found out about it when the baby inside Lea began to grow, rounding her belly. Prog, in his dread, sought to hide the obvious from Anon. The man and the woman became less and less available to Anon, hiding from him when he visited.

Outraged one day when he could not find them, Anon cursed them. Trapping them on his next visit, he banished them forever from his sight. From Nede. Anon thrust them headlong into the outside world, barring them forever from the garden. Naming Lea the mother of the unspeakable sin, Anon condemned all women. Prog, in turn, directed his fury at Esta, blaming her for his destruction, for corrupting Lea. He accused her of robbing him of his Anon-given power. Under her influence, Prog charged, his supremacy had been lost. He branded her evil, the satanic Serpentina, destroyer of Nede.

Outcasts, the man and woman trod down a strange, perilous path, the one Anon warned would lead eventually to eternal death. Prog looked back wistfully toward Nede. He yearned for the comfort of Anon's approval, for the authority Anon had given him.

Prog, the Ascendant, believed with every fiber of his being in his father's words, in Anon's authority and power.

Anon, furious that his plan had been foiled and outraged by Prog's and Lea's disobedience, discarded the Garden of Nede, snatching his infant offspring from Esta before the boy was even weaned. In his untimely departure, as is the nature of all Ascendants when interest is lost, Anon left Nede vulnerable and unprotected, her gate wide-open. He embarked on a new crusade, in search of another frontier, another Nede.

The hostile elements of the Earth rushed into the short-lived utopian place, devouring its fruit, its flourishing vegetation and its exotic animal life, in a surge of unparalleled rapaciousness. In the aftermath of the garden's destruction, the viney hedge at the far end of Nede eroded and crumbled.

Esta, her head resting on the brown parchment remains of the garden's dying trees, clutched her breast. She freed her thoughts with every spark of mental telepathy left. She hurled her silent message into the universe, hoping the warning would encounter reception somewhere. *Beware. Beware.*

Eloe. Lura. My unnamed One. Never forget! Always remember Ova. Remember me, the old woman implored. She clung gently to life, waiting for a response, craving the sensation, the penetrating answer from another knowing mind, the confirmation that at least her daughter remembered. But nothing stirred. She waited. When she could endure the silence no more, the last Ovalian passed away.