

## Of Lamb and Man

by Onyinyechi Ndukaire

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Most lambs were born of flesh.

But not me.

I was born with a word.

“Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals. Each according to its kind.” I didn’t know who said it, but I began to live somehow. At first, I was a microscopic cell that grew and divided; my cells formed into tissues, which then developed into organs, and systems emerged afterwards. All these vital parts of mine were sewn up together into a body clothed in white fur, and hooves that made a closing to the ends of my limbs.

When I was complete, I opened my mouth and voiced my first word, “Meh, meh.” That was when I knew that words were powerful.

I opened my eyes to the striking beauty before me: the clear, blue sky and sea. I met up with other creatures: one with a mane, the other with a shell, and one that stayed in water. We weren't sure of how we came to be; we only opened our eyes by the power of something, and we lived. The garden had no beginning or end. There were tall, buttress trees; there were short, wider trees. Grasses sprouted green in all directions, which I decided to put in my mouth. I pressed green leaves to my lower teeth and yanked them from their roots, and as I chewed, I shook my head and bleated. Nothing tasted like chlorophyll.

I walked aimlessly around the garden, drinking in its perfection. The sky above was as blue as the water below, and because this water was crystal-clear, I could see another world inside it. I walked close to the water, raised my hooves, and placed them inside. A cooling sensation traveled through my skin, cooling my blood. Though I enjoyed what the experience brought, I couldn't compare it to the feel of grass that tickled me.

I wandered around trees, too. I was stupefied at how strong their barks were, how resilient they

were as they stood high. As the trees danced, leaves fell off their branches and flew away in the wind. I was marveled by that, too. My interest caught other things: a deep, green valley, a screeching waterfall, a luminous cave with crystals, and another furry friend I'd just met. I was passing a tree when it fell from one of the branches with a thud. It sat up immediately, threw at me a wide grin that I couldn't help but return. It had patches of ash fur, tiny eyes, and curved ears. It rubbed its eyes and touched its snout, and spoke lazily, "Sorry, I was looking for the best spot to take a nap."

"A nap?" I hadn't considered resting since I knew I existed. I only perambulated.

"You know, the moment you close your eyes to sleep? The rest that comes with it? From forgetting it all?" It was drowsy all over and staggered for a while.

"Forget this beauty?" I thought that was preposterous. "Have you seen the tall mountains?"

"I see them in my sleep," it countered. As it yawned, it crashed on the bark of the tree.

“What do I call you?” I was curious about this creature that was different from me. It wanted to sleep; I wanted to watch.

“I don’t have a name, but I can be called Sleep Eye,” it said. “I love sleeping.”

I figured it was how it worked, so I picked the name of something I loved. “Mehba.” Words.

Sleep Eye raised its ash-furred limbs as it yawned. “I should’ve thought of something as cool as Mehba, but I guess I’ll stick to Sleep Eye. By the way, I’ve got to sleep, Mehba.”

I met other creatures: Shelly, Jumper, Flap, and Black Beak. They were distinct from me and each other, and I asked if they were made from a word, just like me—they were.

I followed the sound of the wind, the current of the rivers, looking for something new. Now I stood in front of a hedge that had twigs, leaves, and flowers in it. I was enthused about what lay at the other end of the thicket, so I used one of my limbs

to part an opening for myself, and when I made a route, I stepped through and out.

There was red sand all over. I saw creatures crouching over, working hard at something. I figured these creatures didn't need company, so I watched from the edge of the hedge as they worked. They were silvery and barely took shape, so it was hard to pinpoint what they looked like. The silvery wisp of air formed thirty strong fingers and three hands, then began to work. Their delicate fingers molded limbs longer than mine, an abdomen, chests, a neck, and a head. They carved eyes, a nose, nostrils, and a mouth on the face of this object. They looked at their creation for a while, then eased in satisfaction.

I watched as clay became an edifice, a state-of-the-art, a wonder, and I wondered if these potters were the creators behind the paradise around me. Three conjoined faces in hierarchy formed from the thick wisp of silvery air; all three of them craned their neck and turned to me. My fur stood in dread, and my ears shot out in fright. Their silvery lips broke into a smile, and I was anchored in place to watch the process. While they stooped down to

the statue's nose, thin streaks of air escaped their mouths into the nostrils of the statue.

Spirals of silver mist bounced out of its nostrils, wrapping the figurine's body. The three-headed creatures muttered words I couldn't hear, but the realization dawned on me that these were the same words that birthed me, and they were trying to create another masterpiece. Something different from me. Something flitting. Majestic. In their image.

“Adam,” the three-headed potter said. “Dominate the earth and subdue it.”

I withdrew from the scenery and ran as my legs could take me. I ran past the hedge, the waterfall, and considered sharing my thoughts with Sleep Eye. My racing mind wondered why the creator gave just one of his creations so much power to rule the others. Was it because he made it last? Or was it in the creator's image? That was the beginning of our doom.

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Adam, with its power, gathered all of us created on the fifth day and the early parts of the sixth day. I spent the afternoon grazing when its husky voice made me spit my food. I trudged in anger, but had to obey. I joined other creatures: Flap, Black Beak, and even Sleep Eye—though he got sleepy and crashed on the floor.

Adam opened its mouth in authority. One that made my skin under my fleece curl. It said it was giving us names—new names. I bleated in retort, paced in anger, until it noticed me.

“What is the matter?” Adam asked.

“We have names already,” I bleated. “I’m Mehba.” I craned my head to Sleep Eye’s direction, pointing at it with my little horns. “And it’s Sleep Eye.”

Adam shook its head in defiance, and it crunched me, because I existed before him, yet it posed to possess that much power over me. “I have to give you new names. God asked me to do it.”

“God?”

Adam bobbed its head. “Our creator.”

My mind darted to the three-headed creatures. “But... I’m Mehba. I want to be Mehba and nothing else.”

“No. You’re a lamb, and as you grow older, you’ll become a ram.” Adam turned to Sleep Eye. “It is a koala.”

Flap became an elephant; Black Beak, a raven; and Shelly became a tortoise. I was filled with spite when the word rolled out of my lips: LAM. It didn’t sound as powerful as Mehba; it sounded lame. Then, collectively, Adam called us animals.

Other “animals” triumphed in finally having an identity. They trumpeted, squealed, screeched, neighed, and brayed in celebration, but I sulked and chewed more green grass. I refused to be called a “LAM”, and I wondered how stupid other animals were to embrace something that wasn’t theirs.

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Sleep Eye popped up from behind the tree, blinked his black eyes, startling me. “Have you heard of Eve?”

I jumped, hooves up in defense, as I bleated. “Whoa, Sleep Eye, you scared me for a moment.”

“You know I no longer go by Sleep Eye—I’m a koala now.”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m not a lamb, though. I’m Mehba. I’ll shit your ass if you ever call me ‘LAM.’”

“Um, okay,” Sleep Eye reluctantly said. It began to twist its long fingers. “I was only asking if you have heard of Eve.”

“What is that?”

“A woman, according to Adam. It looks just like Adam. Except with longer hair and enlarged breasts.”

“This ‘woman’ is trouble,” I said. “Adam is trouble, but double of it? Nah.” I bent down and continued to feed, taking my mind off humans. I didn’t want to have to do anything with them. Sleep Eye yawned while walking off, and in a split second, it climbed the nearest tree and dozed off on a tree’s branch.

While other animals hovered around Adam and Eve, I distanced myself. I found pleasure climbing rocks, eating from pastures, discovering crystals and caves, and having short conversations with Sleep Eye. I knew that the humans’ presence caused an imbalance, but I didn’t know that the distortion would come so soon.

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God commanded humans not to eat a certain fruit. I didn’t care, I didn’t want to listen. Humans were twits, so whatever they concerned themselves with was no business of mine.

Until I felt God’s presence.

“Adam, where are you?”

The silver presence fluttered in the air, and I was reminded of creation. God only spoke to Adam, and I was surprised that he revealed himself to the rest of the animals. The sky changed to a deep, raging blue; the rivers became aggressive and turbulent. God's wrath was everywhere. Oh, humans. Wind swept my fur and made my teeth bar. I sought cover under a tree, but the tree wasn't spared from this anger—the leaves fluttered hard against branches, and branches tore away from the rest of the tree. Sleep Eye crawled behind me, and its face sprang out. "Mehba, what is happening?"

That jumpscared me. I leapt out from the tree shadows. "You've got to stop popping out of nowhere."

Its innocent face melted my heart. It placed its hands on the other. "I was scared. What is happening?"

"I don't know, but it'll be a whole lot of fun to watch." The harsh winds persisted, but it didn't stop me from bending my shoulders so that my

flank rested in the soft grass. Sleep Eye looked scared, its eyes wide awake for the first time.

Something aside from the angry breeze called my attention. My ears flared up, trying to pick out this distinct, hissing sound. I looked around, keeping my eyes on the ground. A green reptile crawled from one of the trees and landed hard on the floor. It had short, muscular legs with webbed claws. Adam called it a snake or serpent, I couldn't remember.

“You...” it slithered and croaked. “You lamb!”

I narrowed my eyes. “I’m Mehba, not ‘LAM.’”

Snake pulled out its slit tongue; its bulgy eyes traveled over my body. “Suit yourself. But when the time comes for you to save the people you hate over yourself, I hope you pick yourself. If not, sadly, we would have another interaction, and it won’t be as friendly as this.”

I opened my mouth to bleat it away, but it picked itself up and walked off on its own accord. I could've thought of what it said, but God was speaking again, and it was hard to avoid God's thunderous voice.

“Did you eat from the tree I told you not to eat?”

Oops. Of course, they did. I shook my head in disappointment and pity for God. These were the people whom he loved more than us; the people he gave so much power, so much trust.

Adam blamed Eve and God, and Eve blamed Snake—I was petrified to see it amongst their midst. Snake had no one to blame, so it said nothing. I burst into laughter at the confrontation, but Sleep Eye was sold to fear, so it jittered under my fleece.

God was vexed, and for each of them, he layered a curse: You shall eat dust all your life. You shall have issues with childbirth. You shall till the ground and return to it. You shall die, among all of my creations.

I felt a whoosh of sadness pierce into my skin, and my laughter dissolved. I hadn't thought that a day would come when I wouldn't be Mehba again, or have my fleece and horn, or not eat grass. I didn't think a day would come when I'd be just a word. Sleep Eye's glassy eyes danced around, filled with tears. "Does that mean we will not be here forever?"

I rubbed my face on its body, joining in its sorrows, but I remained speechless.

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Death didn't come immediately, but God chased us out of Eden. The gates flung open, which was distracting to me, because I'd never known there was an exit from here. My hooves were hesitant when I got to the gate. I could perceive the putrid smell outside the garden. Things died outside: food, trees, animals, and humans. The gates were barred once my legs touched the floor, and the beautiful garden disappeared from my sight. I bit back tears as I walked away. I met Flap, whose

trunk was twisted in anger. It wasn't cordial as usual, and could almost sink its tusks into my skin.

For a long time, I wandered. I didn't go with Adam and Eve (God forbid, I did; they had caused a lot of pain already), but I walked. The sky was red and angry, and all I could find were patches of grass. I wanted death to come now, because I wanted to be as invisible as a word, and not in a place outside the garden. I followed the sun till it set, wandering. My horns grew larger, and my fleece became longer and turned gray. I found my purpose useless, and for a long time, all I did was sit under an acacia tree.

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“Wake up, Mehba.” Sleep Eye came to mind—it was the only one who called me by my name, but the voice was soft in my ears, and it tingled me. I moved in my sleep, hoping to shoo the voice away. It persisted. “Mehba.”

I blinked my eyes open, but refused to stand. My hooves were tired and hardened, so I tried not to put them to use. “Who are you?”

A feathered human stood in front of me. It looked like Adam, but a better version. It glowed like the moon and had a huge, golden sword in its sword belt. It was baffling that my brain could recall the word for the sword, since I had no prior knowledge of the long, sharp steel. “I’m an angel. God sent me to you.”

That was preposterous. I picked my shoulders up and stood, giving them proper attention. I noticed its divine presence, perfect nose, and warm smile. “God? Me?” I couldn’t hide my perplexity.

“Yes. God has a purpose for you to save mankind.”

My ears fell flat, and I shook my head, rebuffing. “No, I don’t want to hear it. God loved humans and gave them so much: voice, choice, and power. They squandered all of that, and they deserve to be saved?”

The angel sat with me in the dirt and began to rub the fur between my ears. All the anger I felt

evaporated from its soothing touch, and I hated him for his kindness. “I understand you, Mehba. I understand the pain you feel.”

I shook my head. “Then if you do, you won’t ask me to save them. They should burn in sulfur for all I care. They should be damned!”

The angel chuckled. “Remember the night of the curse, your interactions with the serpent?”

I recalled the serpent's deadly slit in its eyes. “It said we would have another meeting if I pick what I hate over—wait, was that what he meant? That I may someday come to love humans over myself? No way. I'm no sacrificial Mehba, or lamb, as Adam said.”

“Oh, Mehba, your pure, sweet heart. You feel pity for them, don't you? Do you want them damned?”

My eyes traveled around, and my voice weakened into a whisper. “Sometimes.”

The angel touched the left side of my forelimb. “You have a good heart, Mehba. You can listen to it. Today, God has given you a choice to redeem humans. And if you ask me, that is the greatest power God has ever given out. Use it wisely.”

The angel stood to leave, but I stopped it, using my hoof to pin its garment to the red soil. “Why does God want to save them after cursing them?”

It shrugged, its large wings fluttering. “God is...” he exhaled. “I don’t know.”

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“We meet again, lamb.” A voice slithered behind me.

I bleated and jumped in response. I was in utter shock that another living being was in the space I’d crafted for myself for so long. Here, it was just the acacia and me. But now, two creatures frowned at me: one bearing a semblance to humans, save for a bifurcated tongue; the other person was

Snake from the garden. It recoiled and brought out its tongue. It didn't have the little foot it had back in the garden; its belly was what moved on the ground. "Are you scared, lamb? I told you we would meet again."

I was still hyperventilating, hence my rapid breathing. "I—" I said through breaths, "there is no reason for you to be here." I cast a glance at the human-like creature. Sensing danger, I scampered.

There was an underlying feeling in me that they were up to no good. I put my hooves to move, marching them hard against the rocky ground. I didn't dare look back to see if they were following me. I ran until I felt my legs in knots, then I fell hard on the floor. I felt a bang on my head. Concussions came soon after, and my eyes gave in to the darkness.

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Light pierced my eyes the moment I opened them. The back of my hair throbbed, and sticky red blood clung to my white fur. I pushed my shoulder up and tried to stand on my feet, but my bones were

cranky. I was still in shock at my environment and what brought me here. It was eerily quiet. I was locked in a wooden cage with no outlet, and my stomach grumbled. I closed my heavy eyelids and dreamt of Sleep Eye.

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It was the thwack against the wooden cage, coupled with the hiss of a snake, that woke me up. I was strengthened by my fear, which made me jerk from the floor and push back. Snake was in front of me, piercing its needle-shaped pupils in mine. Its tongue rolled out of its thin mouth. “You’re awake.”

*Shit, I remember now.*

One hoof after the other, I walked closer to Snake. “Let me out of here, please. I said nothing to the angel. All I want is to live under my acacia tree for the rest of my life. I don’t plan to redeem the humans who made me live there in the first place.”

“Oh, no,” Snake said, “Adam and Eve are dead. You did not like them, we know, but you also don’t think their offspring should suffer their

crimes. Sooner or later, you'll give yourself as a sacrifice on a pyre.”

“That’s bullshit. Humans are humans. I can’t save any of them.”

“Hmm,” Snake analyzed. It opened its mouth to speak, but was interrupted by the creature it called the devil. It placed its hands on the cage and looked at me. “The sacrificial lamb,” it said.

I should’ve retorted, but I didn’t. I was too afraid of what it could do. “Whatever Snake told you is a lie, a misconception.”

The devil let out a laugh that hung in the air. “Lamb, my friend, there is no misconception. How can Snake lie to me when both of us are one?” The Devil stretched out its hand, and Snake curled itself around its wrist. “Come on, we have some venomous work to do.”

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*“He shall hit your head, and you shall strike his heel.”*

Devil and Snake cackled in harmony as they both recited the curse. The Devil raised its head to me. “Lamb, what do you know about dying?”

I gulped. “I saw a dead animal with its insides ruptured out.” I’d succumbed to Devil and Snake, and focused more on eating any green leaf they set out for me. If they were to kill me, I’d rather die on a belly full of juicy, green leaves. I chewed on one now.

The devil stood up from where it stood, and Snake crawled behind it. “How do you feel about dying by a venom?”

“Venom,” I repeated, casting my eyes on the floor.

“Yes, yes.” The devil began to pace, straightening its long hair. “You see, on the night of the curse, God said a particular thing that has rung in my mind ever since.”

I made no sound. The devil glanced at me, but turned its face away. “God asked me (Snake) to

bite the heel of a man. I've been working on that idea, thinking of how to enforce it. Adam struck the heads of snakes, just as his three sons did: Seth, Cain, and Abel. But not once have we bitten their feet, all because we've been planning for this day to come. I pulled Snake aside and asked it one question: 'Why do we have to bite humans when we can destroy their savior?'"

Snake slithered and smiled, thrilled to finish up the sentence. "I told it that we could bite you. Once our venom gets to your heart, you'll cease to exist, and humans will forever be doomed."

The devil kicked off. "And from there, we started our research on how to make us venomous. We saw how God made humans and animals, we studied how your cells work, and how to stop your heart from beating. It took a while, or we would have come for you sooner, but there's nothing better than the present. We've produced potions and chemicals to kill you. It'll be foreign to your body, trap your blood vessels, burst your lungs, and curl your intestines."

“But I don't want to save humans! Why suffer the brunt of their curse? You were the one who was cursed!” Anger found its way into my voice amongst the fear I felt. “I just want to lie under a tree. And die with leaves.”

They paid no heed to what I said. “We studied your DNA and what was needed in your body to function. When God inflicted all creatures with death, it made our work easier. There were proteins, deadly ones, that could stop you in a heartbeat. And this can only come from Snake, so we infused the venom in its gut and saliva, some in its fangs. One bite from it, you will be gone.”

Snake opened its mouth now, raising its pointed teeth at me. Adrenaline coursed through my spine, crushing them. My hooves melted in fear, and I moved back. “Please,” I begged. “Don't do this.”

Snake slithered forward as the devil cackled, chanting, “Oh, the lamb has been slain, oh, the lamb has been poisoned.” Snake hissed, secreting the poison from its saliva. I closed my eyes and bit my tongue. I felt Snake curl my legs, I felt its fang threatening to end me. I felt death traveling through

my veins, heading for my heart. Suint ran through my white fur as I panted. It was the end.

That was when I heard a bang.

The devil and Snake both hissed at the disturbance. Snake pulled off from me, rushing off to meet its partner. They turned to the sound of the impact, then frowned deeply.

“You...” the devil said with seethe.

“Leave Mehba out of it.” It was when the intruder spoke that I realized who it was—the angel.

“Why, he’s the primary focus,” Snake hissed. “I told him we would meet already.”

“He’s not yours to take,” The angel warned. “God wants him already.”

“And why does it always have to be what God wants? Our ‘father’ is a narcissist, which was why I rebelled in the first place.”

The angel placed its hand on the hilt of its longsword, threatening to take it out. “I am just a

messenger, and I have been asked to rescue Mehba. Whatever you have with God, settle it with God, but I'm not leaving without Mehba."

Devil's eyebrows came together as he snapped his fingers. "Let's see."

There was a clang of steel in the air afterwards. Both the devil and the angel clashed their swords in the humid air, and swishing sounds emanated from the steel kissing the air. I buried my head away from the fight, suddenly interested in my green leaves. I closed my ears with my hoof, trying to deaden the sound. For how long I was in that position, I had no clue. The fur on my body stood in fear, and I shivered like I was baptized in ice.

I raised my head only when I felt the cage I was entrapped in jiggled. I'd already soiled my fur with urine, filled with fear. "Mehba, come on, it's me."

My irregular steps made it uneasy to walk. My limbs were jarred; my hooves, numb. "What happened to them?"

“They disappeared. Let's get you out of here,” The angel said.

One hoof followed the other as I trudged it. I cornered it and asked, “Is Snake gone forever?”

The angel shook its head gloomily. “That's unlikely, but there's a lot I need to tell you. Come on.”

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“Adam and Eve are dead,” the angel said.

“Snake mentioned it.”

“You know what that means?”

I shook my head. The angel sat on a stump of a tree, and it renewed my memory of Eden, where Sleep Eye crashed every minute. I rested on the warm grass, allowing the sun to penetrate my skin. “That God decided to let them suffer their fate?”

The angel curled its lips into a quiet smile. “Not exactly,” he spoke softly, “it means you’ve lived for over a thousand years. You’re one thousand, six hundred and fifty-six years.”

I lowered my head, confused at what it meant. “Is that normal?”

“Adam lived for nine hundred and thirty, and his son after him lived less. If you ask me, I think it is not normal; you’re special. God kept you.” The angel smiled warmly, then adjusted its butt on the hard log.

A fresh tide of rage washed over me, contracting my voice box. My bleat was high-pitched, filled with fury. The angel who wasn’t expecting the voluminous anger flinched. “So I was kept alive to be slaughtered? What is the point, angel, what is the point? I might’ve just died. You would’ve let Snake sink its teeth into my skin. Then, I wouldn’t have to bother about anything in this world.”

“Things happen in a specific sequence, Mehba. There is a pattern.”

“I don't care about patterns, don't you see? The world was beautiful in Eden, and the humans flunked it! Well, then, let's all live in imperfections. They've left the earth, and so should I.”

The angel took to its feet and walked a few steps away from where we stood. All of a sudden, it gazed at the clouds, mesmerized by their perfect hue of blue. “Mehba, God wants to destroy humans. They have... disappointed him. He's sending a flood to wipe away the whole world to start anew; the rain that will fall for forty days and nights, without taking a second's break, but he's given humans a last chance. There's a man, Noah, tasked to build an ark. Animals will be saved, along with any human who listens. Noah will receive you gladly. I advise you to go to the ark.”

The news felt foreign to my small skull. Adam was gone, and there was a man named Noah. An ark? Rain? “Can you make this clear to me? I'm... confused.”

The angel crouched until it reached me at eye level. Its hands found a way to my thick fur and

began to rub my head, which made my brain twirl. “Mehba, I don't know more than you do. I'm but a messenger, and God asked me to come to you and let you know. He has given you free will. You decide. ‘Should I go to Noah or die in a flood?’ If you choose the former, God will direct your steps. Trust your heart in the path to go, and you will be with Noah in two days.” The angel stood up, gave me a certified nod, and trod out of the place where we conversed. As it left, I looked into the expanse of land and how it stretched until it met the sky. The only thing that breathed aside me were the trees and two colorful butterflies that flew past. The sun above me anchored me to take North, then a right turn. I began to walk on a voyage to meet Noah, because even if I didn't want to save humans, I couldn't imagine myself drowning in an endless ocean made to wipe them out.

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Noah was a tall man whose gray hair was like my fleece. It was unshaven and less comely than Adam. Older, even. It was lanky and was supported by a long cane, with a voice loud as a megaphone, and spittle raining from its mouth as it

screamed its lungs out. “The Lord will flood the world very soon! Come into the ark, my people! Be saved!”

As it spoke, my eyes met a large wooden box that stretched over four hundred feet. It was as tall as a sycamore tree, and the wood was polished, having a hazelnut color. The door was pulled apart, and animals in pairs trooped in. Three men stood by him, guarding the animals in the right direction.

“Please, my people, be saved!”

“Shut up, old man!” One young man hollered. No one paid attention, I noticed. People displaced him as a crazy, old man, and I was about to think the same. I joined the queue of animals lining up to get into the ark. I moved between two giraffes and two alpacas, and looking at the queue, I was the one without a companion. A younger version of Noah, with red skin and curly hair, kept all of us in decorum. It gave me a pointed look, noting the absence of a partner. “Who's with this one?” It grunted to itself.

“I am alone,” I replied, but it couldn’t decipher my words. When did humans stop understanding our language? How much has changed since I left Eden?

It pulled me away from the queue and kept insinuating that animals must be in pairs. That act reminded me of human dominion over me, the curve at the corner of Adam’s lips when I refused to be a lamb, and the unsettling feeling of bitterness traveled down my hoof. I sank my hoof into the soil, rebuffing it like I did its ancestors. It wasn’t having it with me, and retorted by pulling me by my horn. “You don’t get it,” it said with gritted teeth, “it should be as God said it. Two of every animal!”

“But God wanted me here,” I bleated. “He asked me to come find Noah.” Other animals looked at me with pity, like I’d lost a lottery at the last minute. Noah appeared, stopping what had ensued between us. “What is going on here?” Its voice was strained from the friction it caused in its vocal cords, and the bags under its eyes showed it slept little and worried more.

“Father, this sheep doesn't want to budge; it's probably a stray without a partner.”

Noah looked at me with its cloudy eyes, they were warm and moist. For a second, it contemplated carrying out its son's acts, but tapped its rod three times into the soil. “Well, leave it. We've been begging the humans to get into the ark; it might as well take one of their spaces. I don't think God would mind.”

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The rains began three days after I got into the ark. It made heavy, thumping sounds against the acacia wood. From the window, I could see the vile force in every droplet. Humans scattered in all directions, looking for shelter. For once, I felt pity for them. Inside the ark was cozy—lanterns lit in all directions; other creatures smiled at one another as they chatted. Here, I was reminded of Eden and its serenity, except we were entrapped in a wooden box that began to move as soon as the rain started to flood the ground.

I kept my distance from everything. I circled in a corner and munched hay, which lacked chlorophyll but tasted sweet. It was surprising on the twentieth day, Noah came to me with its cranky knees. I waited for it to pass, but it parked its cane by the wall, grunted, and plopped onto the hard floor, cracking its joints as it landed. “God revealed you to me in a trance,” was the first thing it said. “At first, I thought I was the one to save mankind. I built this big tank, hoping that people would see the truth and come in, but now they drown in not just the water, but their sin.”

“They deserve it. The world was once beautiful.” The lantern in the corner flickered, attempting to go out.

“So I heard,” Noah shrugged. “Someday I’d like to hear it from you.”

“You can understand my language,” I noted. “I tried explaining to your son that God wanted me on this ark; he couldn’t hear me.”

“I also didn’t understand you, not until today. After Eden, animals became separated from

humans. Animals hunt man; man hunts animals, and bigger animals hunt smaller ones. The world has become chaotic. God wanted to end it all, said it was a mistake... us.”

I chuckled. “I couldn’t agree more. When an angel visited me, it told me I was to save humans. I couldn’t help but laugh; humans are ungrateful, entitled creatures. Why would I help them? After I’d lost all I had?”

“Yes, I agree—we don’t deserve help. But God didn’t think so. He saw I was worthy, then decided to keep me. If there are still good humans out there, will you risk their lives for the bad ones?” It looked around. “Even with this ark, we need more saving. Yes, Mehba, I agree—we are ungrateful.”

I widened my mouth and was about to ask how it knew my name, but it rubbed my fleece, stood up in between grunts, picked up its cane, and walked out, leaving me to ponder further.

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The next time I saw Noah was at the end of the flood. As the gates flung open, the creatures gushed out like water breaking out of a dam. After being locked up in an ark for so long, it was ethereal to feel the sun's warmth or the feeling of sand on my hooves. When everyone scampered in their designated directions, I saw Noah seated under the shelter of a tree. I crawled towards it and crouched beside it, resting my flank.

“It's over now,” Noah said, looking down at me. “Where will you be going?”

“Anywhere the grass is green,” I replied, stretching my limbs.

“Good luck, Mehba. My generation waits on you.”

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Another three hundred and fifty years had passed, and I was beginning to detest my immortality. I experienced the natality and mortality of generations of creatures; trees germinated and rotted in my presence, and I grew weary of

watching the sun rise and set. Immortality wasn't relishing, especially when I fell in love and watched the love of my life grow old and die while I remained static. Doe was her name, and she struck me because she didn't conform to the usual name, but had one for herself. She was young, her beady, black eyes filled with adventure, and her hooves polished and curved perfectly. She was a white sheep, and her fur glistened against the sun whenever she grazed.

For the whole of my existence, I'd never felt so many emotions. When Doe died, I was reminded how twelve years could be so short, how it wafted like a scent to me. In her last years, she couldn't function like a ewe. She kept stumbling on her wool, bumping into things she couldn't see, and couldn't properly chew grass. She'd lost two teeth, and I'd done the chewing for her. Being with Doe made me feel the vulnerability of being alive. On a sunny day, we were on a plateau, watching the earth below. Her ears drooped, her flesh sagged over her fleece, and her vision was worse than ever. Her legs were bent forward as she took a rest. Of all the stories I'd told her of my existence, she fancied the story of The Creation. For the two hundredth time, I

recounted the silvery being that breathed life through Adam and Eden until their fall. I spoke of Sleep Eye, remembering how carefree it was, until Doe fell.

I felt the Earth shake as she tumbled over. The trees danced to mourn with me, and a sudden breeze traveled by like it was her soul that left her body. She lay by her side, lifeless. Her hooves had cracks, her fur sagged into dull folds, and her limbs twisted like branches. I circled her, hoping for a soft bleat or breath. I bleated her name softly until my vocal cords broke into a helpless shout. I deluded myself that she was only asleep, so I placed my limb on her and waited. At sunset, I called her again, placing my hooves against her cold body and spooking death away, but its grip on her was hard, and I was losing. That night, I slept beside her lifeless body, hoping that some of my life would seep into her. I was stiff, unbelieving.

When I found the courage to get up, Doe was decomposing. Her fleece was turning to strands of hair that pulled out, and flies gathered around her to celebrate her death. Soon, the vultures gathered and began to pluck her flesh. My stomach churned

at the sight, as they went with bits of her, and I was left with nothing. I paced around, muffling the grief that enveloped me, until I collapsed and wailed loudly. I bent over her smelly body and rubbed my face on hers, remembering when her lips broke into a soft bleat the first time we copulated. I took one last glance at her, turned away, and disappeared from the plateau, hoping to leave my pain behind. I fell back into my wandering habit, walking around the face of the Earth, waiting for my death. Now, I was beginning to see the beauty of man's curse.

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It had been another twenty years since Doe's death, and I wasn't relieved of the grief. The pain shot through my joints as I walked, sat in between my teeth as I grazed, and slept with me as I dreamed. In my dreams, I was reminded of her beauty—of her spotless fleece and sparkly eyes. Whenever I woke up, I was awash with the memory that she was gone, and I wished for eternal sleep.

“Were you going to wait until I woke up?” I asked the figure beside me.

My visions were still blurry, but I didn't need a clear vision to tell me that it was the angel who'd tormented my existence. "Are you here to warn me about another flood? I honestly don't mind dying now. There's nothing to live for."

The angel smirked and touched the horns on my head. "Doe? You've finally encountered love, I see."

"Love is painful."

"God agrees," the angel adjusted on the hard stone he sat on. "Now you get why he cannot turn his back against the Earth forever. He loves his people so much that he would do anything for them."

"If I could die to save Doe, I would." I looked away, tears gathering in my eyes.

"I understand, Mehba, and I've come to tell you that it is time."

"Time for?"

“For you to leave the Earth. You live with so much pain. It's too much for a sheep to carry.”

“You can say that again,” I bleated.

“Your last mission is at Mount Moriah. You'll die at Moriah, and your immortal body will be united with Doe's forever. Away from the heat of the Earth.”

My mind couldn't process all of that. I blinked three times and wiggled my ears before I could fully understand. What I'd wanted was now at my doorstep, at Mount Moriah. All I needed to do was climb and reach it. “Will I also meet Sleep Eye?” I asked the angel.

The angel chuckled. “Just wait and see.”

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The journey to Mount Moriah was a turbulent one. I didn't know where Moriah was, but I was directed by a force I couldn't explain, just like Noah's ark. My legs were put to use somehow, and I was transported to the base of a mountain. The sun

was way above my head, and my fur was itchy from the heat. I eyed the topography of the mountain and could foretell the outcome of my hooves at the end of it all.

*Your end is coming, no need to worry.*

I started to climb, filled with a supernatural strength I couldn't explain. My hooves doubled in steps, filled with a motive. From when the angel told me about the visit, I'd pondered what waited for me at the top, the method by which my immortal self was going to end. For all my years in existence, I'd seen death take a million turns, and I smiled, knowing it now had my time. However, the journey was cut short halfway to the top.

The sky was turning pitch black after five hours. My flank, knee, pastern, and the rest of my body underwent a twisting numbness that I had to break off and pant. A patch of green grass lay in the corner, making my stomach growl and my intestines curl. I scoot over and yanked off the bits I enjoyed, shaking my head at the crunching taste of the grass. Chlorophyll burst in my tongue, and it registered

that it was the only thing that wasn't taken away from me after Eden. Would Death take it away...?

The hissing sound I heard made my appetite evaporate. The last cud remained in my mouth, and I had to gulp so I wouldn't spit it out. Snake slithered from the grass and played with its slit tongue, curling its thin mouth at me. "A green snake in green grass, I know you weren't expecting it."

It was true. Of all my perceptions of death, I didn't imagine I'd die in the hands of an animal without hands. "You knew this would happen."

"I knew you'd be insane to want to save the humans, even after rebuffing them."

"That's where my salvation lies... my freedom. I'm not just saving the humans, I'm saving myself. If you understand love, you'll get what I mean."

Snake rolled its eyes. "Stupid sheep." It dived right at me, attempting to sink its fangs into my fur. I ducked a couple of times, swinging my body. It coiled around my leg, and I attempted to

shake it off, but it tightened its body around me. I raised my other hoof and drove it into its head, smacking it hard. It let go, recoiling almost immediately. I swung my head and struck it with my horn, driving pain into its skull. It fell hard on the rock, and I pinned it with my hoof, blocking its airway. Life swung out of it, and with one last hoof blow, its bones cracked, and as it thrashed, its body lay rubbery and still. I was panting and collapsed beside it, triumphant that before my death, I had defeated the only enemy I had. I looked at its body, in the form it had taken in death. It was still Snake, only without breaths—just words. I stood up and stepped past it. Nothing was stopping me now.

A thicket of bush did, though. I knew if anything was to get to me, it would be courtesy of my horn. It was now long and twisted, hardened by calcium. Since it was dark, I couldn't navigate my way further and was caught up in the branches of the shrubs. I pulled away, trying to free myself. I had to get to the top of the mountain for my redemption. While I tugged hard, I heard rustling behind me. As it drew nearer, I realized it was footsteps navigating their way around. An old man stepped into the clearing, sniffling and breathing

hard. I could imagine its cloudy eyes, red-rimmed from the emotions it felt. I gained solace in its company and was reassured that it was my end that was waiting for me. It held me, brushing its calloused hands against my fur. It took off the branches gently. “God brought you, right?” The old man sobbed into my fleece, caressing me. “Imagine having something you waited for so long only to lose it again? That’s my Isaac! God asked me to kill him. But before I struck the knife, he told me to get you. It was your destiny to die for Isaac. You saved a generation.” It broke down, wailing louder than before.

I said nothing. I didn’t bleat, I didn’t fight. I just went with it, knowing the sudden peace I felt, knowing Isaac would live, and its father would be spared the grief. It didn’t know Adam, yet it suffered for its sins. We were both victims of the fall. It led me to a pyre, built with bricks and wood. A younger version of the old man had a piece of rag around its neck, face etched in confusion. “Papa?” it called, “Is this the ram God said he’ll provide?”

“Yes, Issac!” the older man whispered, a beam of joy bursting from its bones. “God did bring

the ram!” No sooner than I heard that than a knife struck my heart. Blood gurgled from my flesh and stained my fur. My eyes wobbled and fought hard to close. I tumbled over, just like Doe, and finally, I could feel death's warm embrace.

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