

Ozin's Tales

Ancient History

On one visit to Ozin, I asked him about the origins of the other peoples of the Four Lands. He stoked his pipe and settled in comfortably for a long tale.

In the Four Lands," he said, "you'll find four very different societies. The Meshvid you already know a little about. The others are the Ivaldin, the Vandàli, and the Kelessi. What I am about to tell you, like so much of ancient history, is almost certainly pure myth. Yet there are probably grains of truth in it.

The first people here, at the dawn of time, were the ancestors of the people who today we call the Vandàli. They were farmers and herdsman, and most were content to be so. But some wanted a different way of living, and they brought their people to a crossroads. From that point, some chose to continue on their old path: to tend the land and grow the food which feeds us all. Some became the Kelessi, our pale siblings, who chose the path of the spirit, in closest obedience to the wishes of the Goddess. We Ivaldin chose, well, what you see: the material, the worldly, the sensual." He took a great draught of his soma.

The people were few then, and scattered, but they gathered once a year to elect a Great Leader. At that time the Leader was a venerable old man who had been elected year after year; everyone trusted his wisdom. But he would soon die, and the tribe was at a loss as to who should follow him.

He had three children: Ival, Vandàla, and Keles. All were much respected, and each had a faction of followers who wished their candidate to be the next Leader. But each of the three had her own strong ideas, and wished to lead the tribe on a very different path.

Ival, the eldest, had travelled far in the world, seeing other peoples and ways. He especially loved fine craftsmanship, building, carving, shaping — all the ways in which people altered their world, making it pleasanter, more comfortable, more beautiful. He had visited the land of the Golden People (in those days more open to strangers), and saw that they lived to create beautiful, useful things, which they traded all over the world for other beautiful, useful things. The craftsmen he talked to had exclaimed over the handiwork of his robe and travelling-sack, and were sorry to learn that the hands which had made them must be ruined in hard farm labor. 'Let those who wish to grow the food; we have people who do that for us. Those who can create such beauty should not have to do menial labor.' The Golden People lived in cities, supplied with food by folk who farmed and traded their produce for useful things. Their craftsmen organized themselves in groups, each according to his craft, supplying each other with materials and inspiration, and sending their goods over the seas in trade for things rare and precious in their own land. Ival was

dazzled by the wealth and ease of the Golden Land, and thought his own people could do as well.

Vandàla, the middle child, was a keeper of tradition. She loved to tend the earth and help things grow, to raise strong herds and strong children. She liked a quiet life of order, and did not mind hard work. The simple crafts necessary to farmers were enough for her, though she was skilled at the intricate weaving with which the members of the tribe adorned themselves.”

Keles, the youngest, was a dreamer. He, too, had travelled, but not to distant cities. He went, rather, to the mountains and forests, where he meditated and prayed, exploring the inner realm and seeking the ultimate. While sitting in an ice cave high in the mountains, he had had a vision of the Mother. She told him that the people must not waste their time on farming and building. They must move to the forest and learn to live in harmony with Her creation, depending on Her for food and protection, rather than twisting her world to suit themselves.

“There is no sense or glory in going on as we are now,” said Keles to his tribe. “We must learn to see the Mother in all things, just as they are. Forcing plants to grow in rows is not the Mother’s way. If we seek her earnestly and serve her well, the plants will give to us of their own will, for the Mother is in them, and when She is pleased with us, we will lack for nothing that we truly need.”

As proof of the Mother’s generosity, Keles offered himself. He had gone away a full year before, with no food or weapon, only the clothing he wore. He had returned lean, hard, and strong, clad in roughly tanned skins and crowned with autumn leaves. He had never starved nor hurt. When his clothing fell to rags, he found the carcass of a newly-killed deer, which the wolves left to him until he had skinned it with a sharp stone. He never thirsted but that he found a stream, never hungered but that he found fruit, or roots, or nuts. The land was bountiful and the Mother generous — what use for him, or anyone, to burn and tear and plow the tender earth, when it so willingly yielded up whatever was needed? Farming was not only purposeless; it was evil, for it distracted the people from meditating on the Mother. It was only by concentration that one could reach Her, and only by supremest devotion that one could join with Her in the bliss of Eternity, far beyond the petty, illusory pains and delights of the world.

After ardent speeches by the three, and several days of debate among their followers, the old Leader passed this judgement:

“There is no right or wrong among these three; there is only choice. We have come to the time of Choosing. We are now a large and vigorous tribe, ready to grow beyond our present ways if we wish. But we can also choose to keep the old ways, as my daughter Vandàla desires. Each of you must decide for herself where her future lies.”

The old Leader gave the tribespeople ten days to determine their future. Some

already knew their heart's desire, others could not decide. In the end, the tribe met again. Ival, Vandàla, and Keles each stood apart, and waited for their tribespeople to join them. Many went to Ival, fewer to Keles, and more than half decided to stay with Vandàla. The three young leaders were not displeased. Keles desired only those who truly could follow the difficult path of the Mother; Ival needed people to found a great city, but knew that they would need considerable help from their sisters of the land.

And so they went their separate ways. The Kelessi vanished into the Great Forest, and with the Mother's help they were blessed there. They meditated and prayed, separately and together, and sought to aid all living things. After many years they discovered magic, whereby they could protect and heal plants, animals, and people.

The Ivaldin followed the curving course of the great river Vandi until it debouched in the sea, and there they founded their city. They made beautiful, useful things, which they traded with the Vandàli for food and raw materials. Soon they were trading across the seas as well, and Ivaldi grew into a beautiful, powerful city.

The Vandàli remained close to the earth which they had tamed and nurtured, and rejoiced in the fruits of their labors.