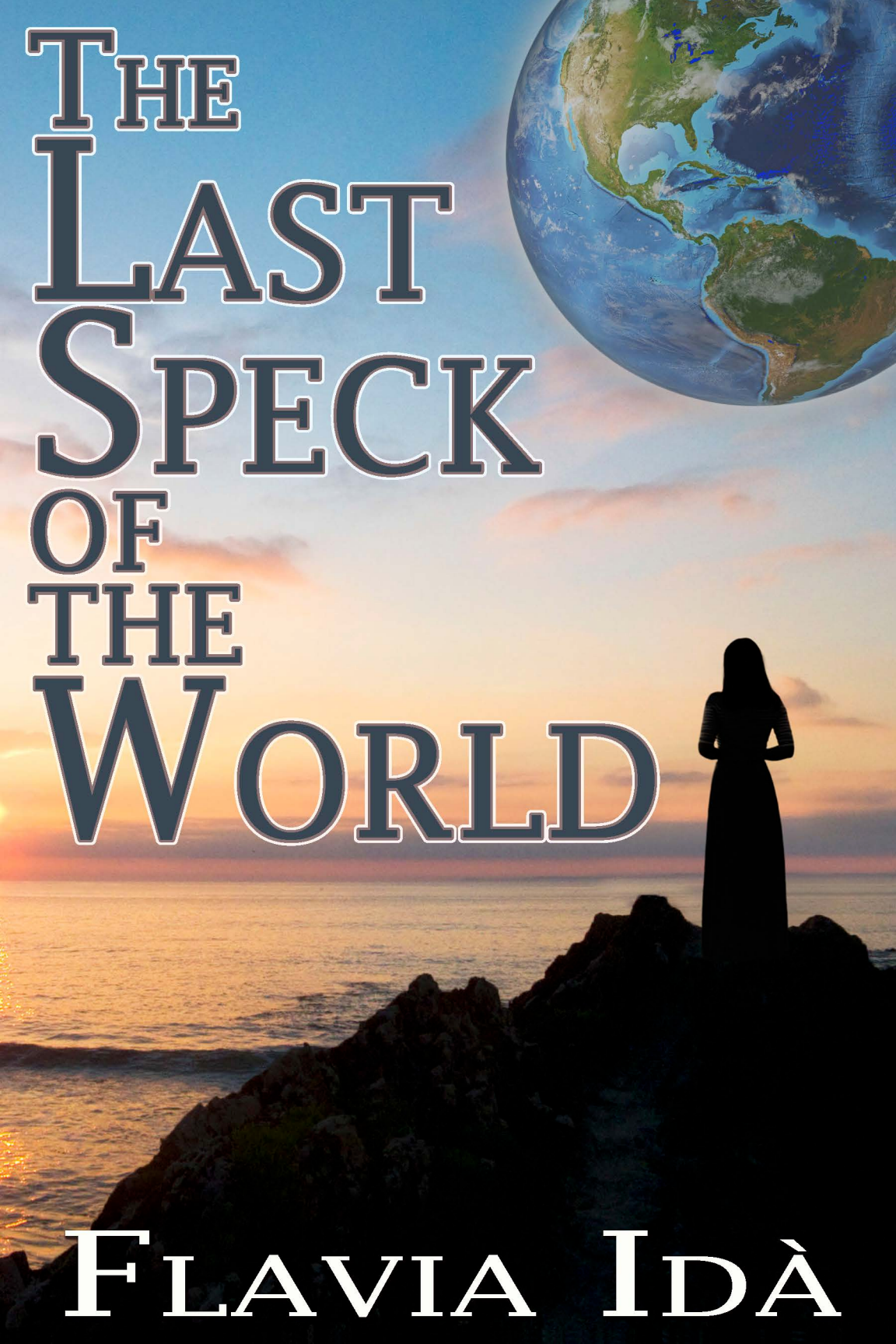


The background of the entire image is a composite. It features a woman in a long, dark, sleeveless dress standing on a dark, jagged rock formation in the foreground. She is facing away from the viewer, looking out over a calm ocean towards a sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. In the upper right corner, a large, detailed image of the Earth is superimposed, showing the Americas. The title text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# THE LAST SPECK OF THE WORLD

FLAVIA IDÀ



The  
Last Speck  
of the  
World

Flavia Idà

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SAMPLE EDITION

# ONE

**A**NOTHER NIGHT when the world seemed so beautiful she could almost be persuaded it was the work of creators. The full moon hung in the cloudless sky, dripping silver on the black expanse of the sea, and the pine trees stood tall under a crowd of stars. If the world was the work of creators, she wondered, had they created it because they were lonely?

Illuminated only by the red pulses of the beacon arcing up from her front steps, she could see the shapes of the houses rising next to hers along the bluff, no light in any window. She owned all of those houses. Were she so inclined, she could have spent every day in a different one.

Every house had its charms, every owner had made her a bequest. The owners of the house around the corner had left her a handmade quilt, those of the house next to the kindergarten a

## *The Last Speck of the World*

full spice cabinet, those of the house opposite the post office a grand piano. She could not use all the bequests, but they were all hers for the taking. She was the wealthiest woman in town.

How quiet the world had become. No more car horns, no more bird calls, no more children's laughter. No more ambulance sirens screeching day and night for miles around.

She switched on her portable music player. Lovely cascading notes, centuries old, filled every corner of the house. Sometimes she kept the music player on all the time. She had no human voices except those of the singers; without them, she would lose her mind.

In a corner of the living room sat blind and mute the television set. No more movies, no more cartoons, no more documentaries, no more nature shows, no more weather reports, no more sports events. No more news. When the world was a full nest, she'd wondered whether by hovering in space one could hear an aural corona around the planet, the incessant buzz and hum of billions of souls and billions of machines talking to each other.

On a corner of the desk sat unused the computer, once king of tools and mighty messenger of the earth. The net wide as the world had no more dots to connect. The only thing the machine was still useful for was keeping a castaway's log.

She'd never felt the desire to keep a log. Among all the endless needs of everyone who ever lived, she needed a sense of purpose. Her only purpose now was to preserve her life; chronicling day in and day out the diminished, tiresome tasks she had to perform in order to preserve her life seemed a waste of time. And who would read her log?

She was familiar with stories of castaways marooned on desert islands; everyone was. Humans, exquisitely social animals, had been fascinated by the speculation of what they would have done if they had been deprived of each other's company.

One story told of a sailor who was the sole survivor of a shipwreck; another told of a young girl who was the sole survivor of a massacre. Both had endured long enough to be rescued, after a number of years. She could have never imagined that she would be a castaway on a desert island encompassing the planet.

But if she ever decided to write a log, she knew what the first entry would sound like:

*I am female, thirty-two years of age. I live in the last speck of the world, on a bluff above a barren sea. My name is not important. There is no one to call me by my name. My race is not important. There are no longer races. My nationality is not important. There are no longer nations. It is now ten months, three weeks and five days since I was appointed custodian of the planet. All the machines are dead. All the clocks have stopped. I do not know why the plague has spared me. It has taken everyone I loved, everyone I hated and everyone I never met. Not a day goes by when I don't think about ending my life. What keeps me breathing is the hope that perhaps I am not the sole custodian of the planet.*

She went to the kitchen, lighted like every room in the house by industrial-strength, motion-activated flashlights she'd screwed to the walls under the ceiling. After she'd remained alone, she'd slipped into the habit of talking to herself.

"Hmmm, do I want to cook tonight? No, not tonight. I'll make a cup of tea and ... I'll have some cookies, yes, and some peaches."

From the cupboard she took a can of peaches, and from the cutlery drawer the most important of her kitchen utensils, the can opener. She checked the expiration date on the can: still good for ten months. On the label were two smiling farmers holding full baskets, along with the words "All Natural" and

“Pesticide Free”. Not that it made any difference anymore — no farmers, no pesticides, no problem. She hummed the jingle that had made some shoppers want to buy that brand of canned peaches and not another.

She remembered the taste of fresh peaches, their pink fuzzy skin, their sweet juice on her lips. She missed fresh foods — milk in dewy bottles, raw tuna tasting of the ocean, apple pie warm from the oven, ripe tomatoes scented with basil. She missed all fresh life.

Her cutlery and cups were plastic, her plates and bowls were paper. Water was too precious to waste on washing metal, china and glass. Instead, she cleaned her cooking pots by wiping them with paper towels. She used only the kettle, a pot and a pan.

One thing she didn’t mind washing was her favorite mug, made of sparkling white porcelain and graced with the gold logo of her alma mater. She’d never been one to get attached to material things, but if she lost the mug she’d be as close to grief as one can be after losing everything else.

The kettle was whistling. She poured hot water into the mug with the teabag in it, put the mug, a spoon, the cookies and the peaches on a tray, and went to sit on the patio.

The moon had dipped in those ten minutes or so. It was no longer above the pine trees but behind them, a bright faraway dot crisscrossed with the mingled black outlines of the branches. If she had spent those ten minutes looking only at the moon, she would have seen it move with her naked eye. My God, she thought, does the earth spin that fast? One could go mad thinking about it.

The tea was fragrant, the peaches not too tin-tasting, the cookies not too stale. She ate and drank slowly, savoring the night breeze, listening to the windchimes and to the sea that never sleeps. Then she went back inside and closed the patio door. She didn’t have to worry about dangers from humans or

animals, not even a mosquito bite, but the habit still made her feel safer.

She dumped the empty aluminum can, the plastic fork, the paper bowl and the cellophane wrappers into a single trash bag, and put the bag in a trash can by the front door. There was no longer any need for her to sort trash for recycling, but she still used only compostable bags. She hated having to throw away what remained in cans and jars when she didn't finish the contents, but she had no choice; she could neither refrigerate the leftovers nor feed them to animals.

Tomorrow she would cook — perhaps the basmati with saffron her neighbor never got to make. Saffron had been the most expensive spice on the planet; she bought it only as a special treat. Now she could have all the saffron she wanted, but she still used it seldom, so it would not lose its specialness.

Time for bed. Like so many of her days now, she'd spent the day bicycling, walking, pushing, lifting and carrying heavy provisions. The provisions she would need to get tomorrow were lighter, but would require more bicycling and more walking.

In the bathroom, the bathtub she could no longer use was stacked with jugs of bottled water for flushing the toilet, the purest water that ever flushed a toilet. Some of it came from mountain springs halfway across the world.

She cleaned herself with hospital cloths, then toweled off. Bath towels were the one household item made of cloth she still used. She reasoned they were for the drying of a clean face and clean body, so they never got dirty enough to need washing too often.

She opened her medicine cabinet, studiously avoiding the mirror; she wasn't sure she wanted to see the results of having to cut her own hair. In the medicine cabinet she kept a tube of lipstick and a small container of mascara. She no longer used

makeup, but she didn't want to throw away the two last items she'd bought.

Only three tablets of the sleep drug left. She'd have to get another month's supply tomorrow without fault. After water and food, the drug was her third highest priority. She'd never needed it before; now she couldn't do without it.

She was grateful for the drug in the same measure as she detested it. Every time she took it, she was reminded that for all intents and purposes she had become an addict. She wouldn't call it medication; no doctor had prescribed it for her. It had been prescribed by whatever it was that had stopped the world and wiped out her peace of mind.

She swallowed the tablet with a sip of water. The drug worked quickly. It spared her the harrowing limbo between the time her mind could no longer stay busy with today and the time it could not yet get busy with tomorrow; the time that ambushed her with the thought of all the things she could not change. She switched off her music player and was soon fast asleep.

Outside, the beacon kept pulsing, as it had done without interruption for ten months, three weeks and five days.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Flavia Idà was born and raised in Italy. She studied the classics and modern literature at the University of Naples. Flavia is also a language teacher, translator, and freelance journalist with pieces published in English and Italian. She lives in Pacifica, California. Find out more about Flavia's works and world at *Flavia's Voice* ([flaviasvoice.com](http://flaviasvoice.com))

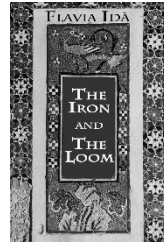
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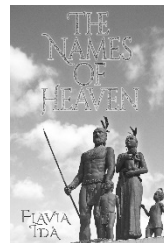
*How many times, she wondered, had she woven together cloth that his sword had then torn apart along with the flesh underneath?*



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