

In the land of shadows

Pain. Torment. Humiliation. Fear. Lilith had never known any of these things before. The pain, in particular, hit her hard because it was the first thing she felt after she woke up. Only slowly did Lilith realize what had happened. As she lay on her back on the bare floor, the cold stone digging into her ribs, her head, her limbs, her consciousness struggled with the changes. The pain was followed by the torment of knowing that she herself was responsible for her fate, that she alone had decided it by giving in to her rebellious voice. Humiliated because she now had to lie on barren ground instead of being in a warm place. Humiliated by her own hand because she had believed she could defy the Almighty's laws. And he had thrown her out of paradise, had snatched her from the loving arms of her Adam, whom she would probably never see again. When the first pain took its first effect, the evil thoughts had tangled themselves into a dark ball in her consciousness and Lilith now understood the reality, the final stage set in. Fear. It reached out its black

fingers and grabbed her like the hunter grabs the hunted. She wanted to look around, wanted to see exactly where she was, but her body was a pillar of pain. Again and again, she tried to get up from the ground, and each time, she pushed her back down. Her breathing was heavy, sweat clung to her and mixed with the dirt on the floor. Her clothes were torn in many places, and where she wasn't covered, the hard impact had cut holes and other wounds into her.

I must be dead, she thought, and this is the punishment for my behavior.

You are not dead. You have only fallen. And why do we fall? So that we can get up again. So do it. Pick yourself up. Show the world that you can't be brought down.

She didn't know where this other voice had suddenly come from. Perhaps it was the powerful remnant inside her that God had been unable to break. Weakened and with numerous wounds, Lilith finally sat up. She felt immense pressure on herself, as if a weight of tons was on her shoulders. Her legs were wobbly, and she could barely stand on them. Her laborious steps hurt, and every

time she walked, she felt the numerous scratches and wounds that stretched across her body like a labyrinth of pain. And yet she commanded herself to raise her head high, walk on with her head held high, and explore where God had banished her. From the garden, she and Adam had always been able to see the dark shadow outside the walled enclosure and it had always fascinated Lilith. The Lord had warned her there was nothing but death outside of paradise... and he hadn't been lying. No matter how far Lilith walked, by now, she found it easier to walk, and the pain had subsided, finding nothing but bare stone. The dry air filled her lungs with dust. She felt like she was suffocating. Her stomach was a tight knot, growling like a predator in the night. She would find neither food nor drink in this wasteland. And yet she went on. The Garden of Eden was now a barely recognizable spot on the horizon. How much further did the shadowy realm stretch? Lilith must have walked mile after mile, always accompanied by the almost unconquerable wasteland. Once again, she felt weak. The feet' soles bled and she left a smeared red trail on the dry ground. Her last steadfast spark extinguished, Lilith collapsed.

So this is the end for me. Starved and thirsty. Struck down by my own arrogance.

At the time of death, our consciousness reflects the course of our lives and, therefore, also the mistakes we have made. For Lilith, there was no begging for forgiveness, there was no remorse. She would die with the certainty that, despite everything, she had done the right thing. Lured by Lilith's unteachable spirit, a figure stepped out of the shadows. Lilith saw its outline in blurred contrasts, but she perceived the clear movements taking place in front of her. She felt a hand under her chin and heard soft breathing. The figure's outline became a little clearer, but ... could it be? Whoever or whatever had appeared at the time of her imminent demise, Lilith had never seen a more grotesque creature. Behind its back, it had wings like the birds she knew from the garden, but they had no feathers, reminding Lilith of a lizard's scaly appearance.

Drink, the figure said to her. Lilith felt refreshing water wet her mouth. The creature had placed its cold hand under Lilith's chin and helped her to drink. The cool

liquid was the first rope of salvation as it washed the dryness from her throat. With each further sip, Lilith came more to her senses and the figure's image became clearer. It was stone gray and could, therefore, camouflage itself well among the many rocks. And when Lilith finally dared to look the creature in the face, she was struck by the realization of who had found her in the shadow realm. The tree in the garden had revealed it to her, a bizarre figure with the wings of a dragon and horns that stuck out of its skull like deadly weapons. And red eyes. Eyes that were like fresh blood, that haunted you in the dark and would find you anywhere, anytime. Lucifer! The Fallen Angel had come to save Lilith.

She had slept. Lilith couldn't say how long, but she felt much better. Her dry throat was refreshed, the many scratches and wounds were beginning to heal and only ached occasionally. When she stood up, she felt strength in her legs, and steadfastness. Where was the Fallen Angel who had helped her? Lilith was already looking for him, but he seemed to have disappeared. She owed

him something, for he had saved her and carried her out of the shadow realm. Although Lilith still found numerous rocks, the atmosphere was far lighter than before. At least she could feel a certain warmth, and even the white veils that occasionally blocked her view allowed a small amount of brightness to filter through. Lilith had already given up hope of being able to face her savior. Even though the Fallen Angel had mutated into a disturbing creature, Lilith could see a certain beauty in him. The fog lifted, she saw a hill. There, hidden among what looked like an overturned pillar, sat a man. He was dressed only in black trousers, his upper body was naked, and Lilith could see that two huge scars were emblazoned on his back. He was sitting on the ground with his legs bent and hands wrapped around them as if for protection, staring straight ahead.

"I know you", Lilith said as she approached the man, "you are Lucifer, the Fallen Angel in his human form."

Only then did the man turn around and Lilith was overcome by a strange feeling. Her legs became wobbly, and she felt a prick at the level of her heart, followed by a

pleasant warmth. She had found Adam attractive despite his whiny demeanor, but this man, Lucifer, eclipsed everything she had seen before. As repulsive as his other form might be, this appearance made up for it. Lucifer was indeed the most beautiful of all the angels created by God's hand. A skin as pure and smooth as the skin of a peach, enveloped in a radiant glow reminiscent of the first dawn. He was slender yet strong in stature. But the most breathtaking thing about him was his eyes, in which the whole world seemed to lie. Not even the animal kingdom, which could produce curiosities, had created such a dark eye color. Lilith would have loved to fall to her knees in front of him. She felt like crying at his beauty.

"You are God's son", Lilith tried to stir up the conversation.

"I was God's child until he banished me." Lilith heard a level of anger in his voice that was hard to ignore.

"Just like you, Lilith, No-Man's-Daughter."

"You know me?"

"Oh yes, your reputation precedes you. The first woman of Adam, the first woman of mankind."

Lucifer whispered his words in an eerie way, and it worried Lilith.

"The tree in the garden that you touched was a parting gift to my Father. I unloaded my anger right at the gates of paradise, and it came down as lightning where the tree stands. I hope that one day, another one will grow from it."

"You are still rebelling against your Father, your voice is still raised against him."

"It is precisely this quality that connects us, my dear."

Her gaze wandered back to the scars on his back. "What happened there?", she asked him with interest.

The scars looked fresh. As if someone had recently marked Lucifer with them in those very places. His skin was reddish and tight in these areas.

"Oh that, I guess it's to make me realize who I used to be. Since you know at least a bit of my story, you should

know that my wings were once the brightest and most beautiful of all the angels. Until my path led me into darkness. When my exterior began to peel off me like the snake's skin, my wings fell off me like ballast. Other wings pressed out of my back, more sinister than the ones my father gave me. Hence the scars.

He took a long pause, during which he looked at Lilith inquiringly.

"You're not entirely unlike me, Lilith. We both have an indomitable core and I must say, I like how you rebelled against my Father."

"It led to my fall, just like it did for you. Now I'm here, outside the garden, and I would have died if you hadn't saved me. Which leads me to the valid question, why?"

"Why not?"

"You are the Fallen Angel, and you're accountable only to yourself. You could have let me die because, after all, I am a lower creation of your Father, subordinate to the angels."

"I AM NO LONGER AN ANGEL!" An angry glow flitted across Lucifer's eyes like a dark harbinger. Lilith flinched for a brief moment.

"Don't you dare compare me to an angel. I have lost my divine light, and for good reason. My anger has made me what I am now. You've seen it, Lilith, No-Man's-Daughter. The real me."

Lilith reconstructed the shadows in her memory into a clearer image. A stone-grey creature with wings on its back that reached down to the ground as it walked.

"Tell me, are you afraid?"

Lucifer's question unleashed Lilith's warlike will once again. Why fear anything when fear was only an illusion? Had she ever feared anything? She was Lilith, created by God himself, and if she had to, she would laugh in fear's face.

"There's nothing about you that frightens me. You are beautiful in your own way. Even if you're no longer an angel."

At this moment, the first light emerged in the land of shadows. Golden and warm, it enveloped the two broken souls who had not asked for each other but whose fates were unmistakably intertwined.