



GENESIS

YAH YAH SCHOLFIELD

In the beginning, there was the Heavens and the Earth. They made it vibrant and green, lush fields of grass and phlox and holly, an overabundance of weeping willows and sequoias. Breezes swept through the Garden and blew storms of maple samaras and sweet gum seeds; the forest floors were flush with leaves, with cockleburs, not yet concerned with the matter of human feet sensitive to their pricks. All this, glory and glorious, was made by Their hands, patiently and painstakingly. O holy hands shaping the curves of the baobab tree. O divine fingers tweaking the thorns of a euphorbia, knowing even then of its violent purposes. O holy, o divine, o powerful—the trees bowed, leaves hooded, respectful, of the glory of their creation.

And then there was light (good), and then the halving of days and nights, and then atmosphere—say you, future cosmonauts, the ozone—and then, in a stunning finale, a big orgasmic finish exploding across infinite universes, humankind.

Man. Adam was done first with clay and spit, shaped lovingly in Their image, and placed down in the Garden. They watched as he stumbled, as he learned the wonders of his hands, feet, teeth, tongue, and eyes. Watched as Adam, first man, peered in a lake and saw himself. They smiled, overjoyed at the success, and Adam smiled with Them.

And then came the helpmate. Not, at first, Eve, who was to come later on, and who was still saliva swirling in God's mouth. Only Lilith, who was dark and lithe, and who wandered the Garden with a wise but open sort of aura that demanded knowledge. She held her mouth agape, sucking down the sweet air. She went to the animals that Adam named and felt their furs, their feathers and scales. The smooth but slimy skins of frogs and the untamed teeth of lions intrigued her. Eager to learn, she held conferences with the worker ants, ministered and was ministered to by unruly, red-bottomed baboons, and watched, transfixed, as mother mammals plucked and fussed over their babes. All of this, mind you, away from the eyes of Adam. He was not so curious, content to do what he was told and not much else. His mind was flat, unwrinkled, and he thought very plain thoughts.

“Lilith, let us go to the farthest river.”

“Lilith, let us see the pear tree.”

“Lilith, let us lay idly in the grass, our minds loose and open, and consider little.”

Lilith, though new to her humanity, was bored by Adam. He liked to work endlessly, never stopping to think and to feel. He worshipped, but he did not *worship*—at least, not as Lilith had with unbound fascinations and questions and theories and a hunger for more.

She went where she was forbidden to go, but was bored by the tree and the snake. It spoke to her, hissing and shaking its rattle, and Lilith only watched it. How curious, she thought. How marvelous that its voice shimmered, brushing together like wind in the leaves. How divine that God saw fit to have the forbidden fruit be so plain! A banana! Lilith had tasted one before, found that she didn't like its yellow sweetness, and decided that she liked tart flavors like the limes or the seeds of pomegranates. Adam, thought Lilith amusedly, would enjoy the fruit, that uncreative man of hers. She left the forbidden copse, and went on to find something more entertaining.

In one of her wanderings, God found her and settled down beside her as a crow. They brought her a handful of blackberries and led her to where she could find more. It was a delightful moment; Lilith's mouth red with berry juice and God cawing pleasantly with the other crows, until Lilith looked to God and asked:

“Is there anything else?”



Away ~ Basia Goszczynska

“Anything else? What do you mean?” God cawed. They jump-walked on Their little crow's feet, head canted curiously.

“It's just that—” A pause as she collected her thoughts. “I feel like I've seen everything. I know the stars, and the animals, and I know all the plants. I know of yesterday and today, and I can imagine the shape of tomorrow if I make—what's the word? Er, yes!—*plans* to explore. It's wonderful, everything, all of it, but . . .”

“But?”

“It’s not enough,” said Lilith. She bit her lip and thought of Adam. “It’s not enough for me.”

She expected for Them to be disappointed with her, but They only cawed, hopped a little further and flew onto a high branch. At the time it was an unsatisfactory answer, but in the following days there were new things to be seen. For Lilith, there were four new species of frogs, a stream that played host to creatures that leapt from the water and splashed, and a great deal of giant turtles to be accounted for. For a short while, these things amused her. The turtles were great fun, and it was entertaining to teach Adam the game where she tried to snatch the leaping fish mid-air. But she won most of the games—Adam was not competitive, or even so much as slightly interested in sports that pitted them against one another—and the frogs lost their charm after a week. It was all busy work, Lilith complained to herself. Stuff, pointless activities to keep her mind momentarily occupied. No substance.

Angry, upset with herself more than she was with God or Adam, Lilith took herself back to the forbidden copse and stayed there. She paced, and ate her fruits, and harassed a nest of wasps until they punished her with stings. She battled with her hungry mind, and when she could take no more thinking and eating and pacing, she laid herself down on the grass and slept.

It was a strange and restless sleep. Lilith tossed and turned, her face contorting and twisting. A chrysalis formed around her, dull yellow and sinuous, cocooning her in its fibrous material. She remained in the chrysalis for ten days, dreaming, thinking of the stars and of the earth and of the vastness of the sea, the seemingly endless parade of time. She melted, re-formed, and melted again, a soup of her skin and thoughts swirling around her bones.

In her dreams were the most vivid of visions. There were people there, like her and Adam, in strange shelters, glossy like fish, and reflective. The people were covered by sheep’s wool and cotton, some in spider’s silk. Some people were dark, like her, and others were brown-skinned, olive toned, or very pale. They spoke in strange tongues, mouths constantly moving, and there were so many of them. Sitting down, walking, holding bizarre objects and speaking to no one, and moving quickly, without a worry or care for the body beside them.

Lilith wandered in the vision, agog but afraid. None of the humans seemed to notice her. In fact, they warped around her like she was a rock in a river. Lilith looked around herself, terror rising until she bumped into a human who looked exactly like her. She was smooth-skinned and dark, and she wore her hair in long braids down her back. She locked eyes with Lilith, blinked once very slowly, and then she parted her lips. From the gap came thousands of locusts and small red frogs. Above them, the sky turned grey as if molting. The people around the two women began to choke and scratch miserably at their throats. Only Lilith and the woman stood still, plagues pouring out of the woman’s throat still.

Unnerved but resolute, Lilith said to the woman, “Is that all?”

“Mock now,” said the woman. “Suffer later.”

Lilith startled awake. It was a strange dream indeed, strange enough for her to bring to God. They listened to her, face open and eager, and when she was through They brought her to a pasture swarming with lambs. They bade her to sit, and Lilith did, full lips pressed tight.

God hummed and said, “What an imagination you have!”

“Then it *is* just a dream?” asked Lilith. There were dark rings beneath her eyes though she’d slept for many days, and she flinched when an ewe brushed past her.

“What do *you* think it is?” asked God.

Lilith groaned and pressed the heels of her palms to her eyes. What answer did They want from her? Honesty? Pacification? Did They want her to deny her mind, and strike all night visions from her memory? She sniffed, removed the hands from her eyes and looked at God. They looked, in that moment at least, like an albino peacock, glaring white tail feathers extended in a snowy plume. They canted Their head and followed her gaze with Their red eyes, watching for her, waiting for her response.

“I think . . .”

They took a step towards Lilith, and transformed into a stark white lamb with great, winding horns. A sheep baa’d at the sight of Them, and They nuzzled its cheek kindly before sending it off with the others.

“I think it was a premonition.”

“Of tomorrow?” The ram’s voice was still God’s deep timbre, but playful, a little grating in its ram-ness. “Again, my child, your imagination runs.”

“Not this tomorrow,” huffed Lilith. She was a little proud, and did not like to be mocked. “Another tomorrow.”

“Hm. And you think I would build this world, this glorious place”—They toss their horned head to gesture to the valley—“to destroy it?”

Lilith shook her head. “I think humans will destroy it. Though I do not know how, and I don’t understand why.”

“I did not create you to become destructive.” Their voice lowered, a warning.

“No, no You didn’t. But I know that though You know us deeply, that we are our own masters. You provide, endlessly, and still we make our own way. Our minds are our own. I think of birds when You tell me to think of fish. You gave us plums to eat, but I prefer the peaches. You see?”

A second transformation on God’s part. They shed the animal skin and stood in front of Lilith bare, all light and many eyes, maddening in Their beauty. Opaline rainbows poured off of Them, and they stepped towards Lilith. They placed a hand on her shoulder and said, smiling, “Dear child, I may have damned you.”

Again, Lilith shook her head. “No! You would never.”

“Aye, not on purpose.” The being shrugged. “Still, it is done.”

“Have You seen it then? What will come?” Lilith’s voice was nervous, and she took care to not let it reach shrillness.

“Calm, child.” God squeezed her shoulder. “Rest yourself. I have seen, but I will not intervene.”

“You won’t?” Alarm eased in. Lilith wriggled away from Them. “Why not?”

Their light darkened, storm clouds swirling across Their fine face. “Do you question me, child?”

Lilith felt a pang of anger in her chest, hot and violent, twisting at her heart. She did not *want* to be angry with Them. They were, besides Adam, her only friend. Still, she could not understand how a friend would hold secrets or let such things as the things in her dream transpire. Especially, thought Lilith, if that friend is to be endlessly loving.

Raising her chin in defiance, she met a pair of God's eyes and said, "Yes, I am. I want to know why you'll do nothing."

God hummed, lightening again. They placed a hand on Lilith's cheek, holy light burning into her flesh but not harming her. It was warm, and she could feel herself relaxing. "You will see. Not now, for you are still too young to know, but you *will* see." They looked off into the valley, Their eyes distant. "This is just the first time of many."

The answer confused Lilith. First time of many? What could They have meant? She sighed, reasoned she would get no better answer from Them, and left the valley. All dreams *were* in some shape or form communication with Them. Would They have shown her this dream to enlighten her? To terrify? And if it was a prophecy as Lilith imagined it was, why then must *she* hold it? Her mind was for wondering, pondering. There was no room in it for potential horrors, for first times or second times or third times.

She was confused. She went back to her chrysalis form. Alone, Lilith thought, and along came two more visions. The first terrified her even more than that original dream. She saw the garden distorted and destroyed, a thick smog blocking out the sky and strange funnels burping out a nauseating smell. The thin, shimmering clouds that shielded the sun dispersed, and the plants burned, shriveling up and laying in ashes. The trees, o holy giants, dropped their noble heads and brought their limbs into their trunks. The birds fell from the sky, and the fish rose, glassy-eyed, to the top of the boiling waters. Lilith looked into the terrible sky. Though it was burning, there was no sweat on her skin. Nay, instead her skin buckled and bled from the heat, and red dust collected in the crevices of her knuckles. She tried swallowing but there was no spit. She crumbled, and her body, her spirit, was whisked away by a burst of hot wind.

She gave this dream to God—"Please, O Lord, take it from me."—but the second she kept for herself. The second vision was of the other Lilith. She was wrapped in sheep's wool, features crumpled in fear but head raised in determination. She stood at the shore of a vile beach, murky water lapping at her toes. She was up to her knees in water, and then her midsection. She swallowed mouthfuls of the tainted water, and Lilith felt the toxins pouring down her own throat.

Lilith met the woman beneath the water. Her eyes found the clothed twin, and she felt a twinge of panic.

Bubbling, voice full of brine, the clothed woman said, "Again. And again and again and again, until we've done it right. Right?"

Her tongue was foreign but it made perfect sense in Lilith's ears. And though she knew she was still in her chrysalis, swimming in a soup of herself, she understood the woman and her meaning.

"They said it was the first of many."

The clothed woman nodded. "There will be more and more still. We will meet again, but we should hope for the day we don't."

The woman drifted towards Lilith and wrapped her arms around her. Lilith took in a breath, surprised by this new skin against hers. The woman smiled. "Until then. Goodbye, Lilith."

When she woke, the world was dark. There were stars in the sky, and their shapes were familiar to Lilith. She, like them, was the same, but changed somehow. She felt her skin. No water, naturally, but she felt it sloshing in her belly and muffling her ears.

After the second vision, she was different. She was herself as always, but her shoulders sank with the knowledge of the future. She looked at God, and knew that They knew, though They gave her no relief. Her only instruction was to say nothing of it to Adam, to wait and be patient and hold on. Her insides burned. Lilith ached and fought sleep. Became irritable and cold for it. She took her secrets to the carpenter bees and to the mammoths and to the wild dogs. She whispered prophecies into the holes of trees, and buried them beneath rocks. She murmured, bit down on her wagging tongue, but nothing could lift the weight off of her.

Ah, but she could not help herself, and she gave Adam small portions of the future. Though Lilith never told him the truth outright, she told him in her small, secret ways. She told him that they were nude, that there was more to the world than the moment they existed in. Lilith told Adam—whispering, a snake’s hiss in the shell of his ear— to consider the Earth and the lushness of it, the glory of it, to do nothing to destroy the fineness of the soil.

“Treasure this,” Lilith sighed to Adam. She closed her eyes, pressed her forehead to his. “Treasure this moment. And remember, if They make you forget.”

Soon after, Lilith was banished. God waited for her, stern and imposing in the shape of a lion, and led her from the Garden.

“Will I die?”

They raised their furry brows and then lowered them. “You know of death?”

“You gave it to me.”

There was no death for Lilith. She was placed in Limbo—not quite empty enough for Heaven, not quite abysmal enough for Hell—and left there to watch the happenings of the world. It was the kindest thing They could’ve done, Lilith realized. There, unbothered, she could think without bounds, her mind understanding everything and observing all. From her semi-celestial seat, she saw Eve, the witless thing that replaced her. She was like Adam—no curiosity, no hunger. If mewling Eve dreamed and was formed in chrysalises and spoke candidly with birds, she showed no sign of it. When she went into that forbidden place, she was fooled by the snake and, in turn, fooled Adam. And both of them, thoughtless creatures forced to think, to *know*, were sent out of the lushness of the Garden. Away, away, Adam and Eve, into the wilderness, nude and frightfully aware of it.

Lilith watched them leave. The angels stood guard, flaming swords at the ready. Their scared faces glowed in the light of flame. She looked at Eve, shivering, covering her breasts with her arm and shying away from the light.

Next time, thought Lilith, she would be wise not to show what she knew.

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Brooklyn-based artist, *Basia Goszczynska*, explores environmental and waste issues through a variety of mediums including sculpture, installation, performance, social practice and new media. She has presented her work in exhibitions at Arcadia Earth, Pinto Gallery, Chashama's Space To Present and the Mid-Manhattan Public Library and has received fellowships from the Vermont Studio Center and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Her work has been featured in The New York Times, Forbes, Vogue, and Artnet among others.

Away is shown here as a portion of the full accompanying artwork originally featured on stillpointmag.org.