

## AN ANNOUNCEMENT

As if bewitched, Lile was looking up at the sun in the dark-red sky, tired and exhausted from its sluggish attempts to come up and which, in order to find respite, was gathering all its strength leaning on the downhill slope. It was as though some very great, evil and unidentified force was tugging hard at the sun from that side of the mountain and was preventing it from floating off into the sky. Who could find fault with its coming up, but its radiant body gradually lost its brilliance, turned pale and descended towards the abyss. In vain did its silken rays wrestle with the sky and the earth, with the mountains and the lowlands, with the cornfields and the vineyards, with the ripples on the river and shimmering rocks that emerged from among these ripples. Soon, these themselves had to be saved: the sun that had rolled down the mountainside to be devoured in the abyss took with it everything in its path.

Lile was standing still and didn't notice Rupia. All around, neither the hay meadow could be seen, nor the scythe on which he had been leaning up to then with his whole weight, nor could he feel any longer the pleasant breeze which dried the drops of perspiration on his furrowed forehead, the sweetish aroma of scythed grass had lost its force. With Lile it was as if time, too, had been reduced to silence and he, dumbfounded, was staring at the torture of the rising sun.

It was just then that Rupia came up and sat on Lile's shoulder. The crow once or twice beat his wings, but when he couldn't attract the youth's attention he shouted angrily in his ear:

"Lile, come to your senses!" When he still didn't receive an answer, he sat on the youth's head and gave him a good pecking.

Now Lile was roused, distant lands had caught his gaze and he rubbed his dumbfounded eyes, at the same time heaving a heartfelt sigh.

"Is that you, Rupia? I didn't notice you," he apologized to the crow. "How could you have noticed me, you were standing as if bewitched."

"Yes... I'm looking at the sun... Just have a look at how difficult it's finding it to come up." Lile pointed towards the sun that had rolled down the mountainside.

"The sun? You don't say. The sun is right over your head, just at the zenith, you won't see a trace of a shadow. What sun are you looking at?" Rupia asked Lile, astonished at the latter's response.

Lile looked up, the shining midday sun dazzled his eyes. Just in case, he looked down at the hay meadow, and he really couldn't see his own shadow.

"How's that, it's already midday and the sun is shining?" he cried out in great surprise.

"I was astonished when you told me on this very sultry noon that you were looking at the sun coming up."

"Well, what was it then?" Lile looked at the horizon again, but he could see no trace of the earlier scene. "A couple of minutes ago I really was looking at the sun coming up, to be more correct, at its ordeal. It seemed to me that the whole world was seeing the sun for the last time and everlasting darkness would descend," Lile tried to justify himself.

“Don’t think any more about it. You can be calm. Our sun is shining on these parts as it always has. It will have been a simple hallucination. And now, if you continue to stand directly in the sun for a long time in this very sultry heat, you will be struck nicely in the head and will need looking after.”

“How did you put it, ‘our sun is shining’?” Lile solemnly repeated Rupia’s words while staring into the distance.

“Yes, I said that. What’s the matter?” Rupia turned the question round. “You’re right... The sun cannot come up for some other foreign land,” Lile

shook his head sympathetically. “Or else... Is it simply impossible for the people there to see the sun coming up? If that is so, then it’s not me who’s bewitched, but them.”

“I think a werewolf has really put you under the evil eye,” Rupia cried in dis-satisfaction.

Lile denied it. “No, I’m speaking in my right mind, I’m neither under the evil eye nor bewitched.”

Rupia knew well that putting Lile under the evil eye was not all that straight-forward, an army of werewolves couldn’t harm him, not to mention a lone one, and he had well thought out what he was saying now. In spite of this, he still behaved as if he didn’t place great significance on Lile’s words. Well, who knew Lile better than him? He even understood what thoughts were going around in his head and what decision he would take a couple of minutes later. This decision scared the crow and he appeared to dismiss Lile’s hallucination. “Perhaps he might no longer pay it great attention,” he thought.

“We’ve stayed for quite some time in Rashkashi, haven’t we?” Lile asked in passing, he cleaned the perspiration from his forehead with his fist, he passed his hands over his chestnut-coloured hair that reached in waves down to his shoulders and he pressed his stiff neck. The pain passed like lightning, but found it pleasant and once or twice he shook his head stiffly. He shook the dust from the tails of his short tunic, and then he looked again towards the horizon. The hallucination was not repeated, nor was the sun seen floating off anymore, nor the mountains, vineyards and cornfields lost in its rays. Lile put his scythe over his shoulder and he set off for shade towards his shelter in an isolated tree.

“What do you mean ‘we’ve stayed’?” Rupia, lost in his thoughts, gave a belated response.

“You know very well what I mean... Perhaps you’ve grown old, your wings are no longer strong and your eyes sharp, perhaps you are no longer eager... Tell me and, without you...”

“Yes, alright, alright!” Rupia interrupted him. “Don’t I know that you still can’t rest. When do we intend to leave?” The crow finally gave up the last semblance of self-control. “Your mother will go crazy. It’s less than a year since you returned. Must she always be waiting for you?”

“I must find that place where they intended to swallow up the rising sun in an abyss,” Lile stated firmly.

“Do you know what I’ll tell you?” Rupia cawed.

“I know... I know... Why on earth did it appear to me, tell me? Why must I go, tell me? Imagine, if someone was drowning in this river and shouted ‘Help!’ wouldn’t we rush to

rescue him? We would rush to him. Since they trust me, I must help them as well. A mower will appear in Rashkashi for this hay meadow, it won't remain unmown."

"Still where do you consider the land where the sun comes up to be?" Rupia was interested.

"Shouldn't we look for it on the other side of the hidden door to the Nether Regions?"

"Exactly. Since the floating sun is not of our land, we shall have to go far in order to find it. We must visit the Nether Regions once more, once again must we push open the door there. Let's see where it will take us this time."

"It's up to you. But I'll not let you go alone. I'll come with you. Nobody can know where you might find yourself about. But tell me one thing, you aren't reluctant at all to leave here? Look at your village, what will you see to better it?"

Lile shaded his eyes with his hands, Rashkashi truly was a beautiful village, spread out like tree mushrooms on a mountain slope covered in green silk brocade, the only place which was remembered pleasantly by someone yearning for calm, parental love and warmth. Here there were the ogres who reared him and with whom he got on like the crown of a tree gets on with its roots. Here was lit the only hearth that he considered his and whose call could be felt everywhere. Here stood his parental home and, wherever he might be, he would always return here.

"Why do you ask me this? Don't you know that I can't settle down anywhere else," Lile was amazed at Rupia's question.

"Yes, you'll never settle anywhere else, but..." "But what?"

"You can't live permanently in Rashkashi, Iroeli!" Rupia responded, losing his temper.

"I can't dispute that. You're right!" Lile laughed. "It looks like the time for this has not yet come."

"But of course, you first have to search for the land where the sun comes up," Rupia laughed quietly to himself.

"If you say so!" On this occasion Lile didn't take offence at his friend's joke. "This matter of the sun doesn't interest you?"

Lile's direct question somewhat confused Rupia. If he had said that he couldn't wait to go down into the Nether Regions and once more open the sealed door, that would be a lie, but neither would it be true that he insisted on a wish to stay in Rashkashi. He longed for foreign lands and, if he was dragging his feet, that was also because of Lile, lest the youth get into danger.

"I'm only being cautious for your sake, otherwise..."

"I know, but what can happen to me by your side, under the cover of your wings?" Lile ingratiated himself with the crow.

Rupia did not have the slightest doubt over Lile's sincerity, he took the praise as his due and puffed up to the size of a brooding mother hen covering her nest. "Rupia, there's something I want to ask you, but perhaps you might not find it pleasant... you might even be offended," Lile said with untypical modesty.

"Be offended!" Rupia gasped in surprise. "How might you offend me? I'm all ears..."

"You told me just now that you don't regret leaving much-loved places... Weren't you born and didn't you grow up there, in the Nether Regions. Don't you think about there, surely you have sometimes yearned for those places where you have lived for so much time?"

"No!" Rupia spoke coldly. "The only thing that the Nether Regions taught me was hatred. You have no idea what it means to live seized by hatred and anger. How evil devours and destroys you. You see relief only in ruin and destruction. A man possessed of hatred is like someone who finds himself in a storm, dashed this way and that by a whirlwind, left breathless, made faint and threatened with suffocation. But one who has found themselves in a whirlpool of hatred will still choose a storm for you. Look, what did I leave there. What do you think, should I yearn for the Nether Regions? And they have taught you love in Rashkashi. Look after it. Just one slip of the foot is all it takes for a very small place to be freed up in your heart and for accursed jealousy and hatred to creep into you and you wouldn't even notice how it can devour your whole heart."

"You have never spoken of this to me." Lile stroked Rupia's dishevelled feathers sympathetically. His thoughts in unpleasant disarray, the crow raised a wing to the youth and jumped off to the side.

"Well, observe this place closely and say the first word that comes into your head," Rupia asked Lile.

Nature encircled by thousand-year-old mountains brought calm to Lile, but that calm was not insignificant, on the contrary, Lile felt its breathing and its pulse, it filled his heart with strong feelings and made him think of the splendour of life.

"Calm!" said Lile.

"Yes... It's a splendid word!" Rupia cried out. "And in what mood does this calm put you?"

"It strengthens my thirst for life."

"And pushes you towards doing great things. You long to help the rising sun," added Rupia.

"If you like," Lile agreed with him.

"In the Nether Regions you would not recognise the splendour of calm, it would appear to you as a swamp and you would find it hard to breathe. Calm there pushes you towards destruction. It is as if this destruction in the end is still not followed by calm, only a dead and empty calm."

"Rupia, today I remember what you once said to me in the Nether Regions and which I'll never forget."

"What was it I said?"

"That behind every event there is hidden a much more significant reason than is seen at first glance. That reasons are linked to each other like a chain and no one can keep an eye on all the links, or be aware of where the beginning and the end of the chain are hidden."

"I put it well..." Rupia laughed quietly to himself.

"Yes, really... I have thought about this many times. It seems to me that this infinite universe is woven from such chains. Sometimes one is the main, and sometimes another. But which is which is hidden from us mortals. Perhaps breaking one is enough to change, to

destroy and to ruin everything. For this reason it is necessary to maintain the strength of every link of every chain.”

”What does smashing everything mean?” Rupia asked with interest. ”Shall I tell you step by step or... tell you the final outcome?” ”Simply tell me.”

”Simply is difficult... Alright... When honour, belief, love and hatred itself will disappear entirely..., then life will cease everywhere and in everything.”

”I knew that you could see through walls, but I couldn’t imagine that you could see the future.”

”But I can’t. What are you saying! It’s just supposition and nothing else.” ”Even so, is that insignificant? You are given the means to change a possible future and to weld together again a link fated to be severed. Aren’t you now setting off to look for a chain fated to be severed?”

”No! What are you saying! I’ll simply call on the Nether Regions, I’ll be over-joyed to see it,” Lile laughed.

”It’s great that you are in the mood for, both, discussion and humour at the same time, but it’s good to be cautious. You haven’t forgotten where we are going?” ”You’re right!” Lile immediately agreed. ”We’ll take the old path again, or is there another path leading to the door?”

”Of course there is. The Nether Regions are a hundred times larger, there are numerous paths, but that is the shortest and also the safest, if it can be called safe,” Rupia explained to him. ”Take Alaia Volcano, from where the fiery clouds are fed. You won’t come across such a sight anywhere under the sun. Shouldn’t we take a stroll down there sometime? To see Alaia’s raging heart is worth a life. Hey, I can’t even remember when I last saw it. Aren’t you interested?”

”Of course, but we don’t have time for that now,” said Lile with regret.

”Of course. There is no time for that,” Rupia, who was not at all offended by Lile’s refusal, quickly agreed with him. Quite the opposite, he was glad. He himself didn’t know why he had proposed that Lile descend into the depths of the Nether Regions and he was already annoyed with himself.

”Lile!” a call could be heard.

”They have brought us a meal... I’m over here, over here!” Lile called out. Lile ate heartily and in silence. He picked up some mallow leaves with a piece of unleavened bread and followed this with gulps of cold water from a small pitch-er. He was carried away by his thoughts. Again the rising sun in a dark-red sky appeared before his eyes. He couldn’t understand what power was holding the sun and dragging it towards the abyss, or whether it would take the whole world with it if it fell in!

Rupia was also lost in thought. ”All the same, why on earth should he, at one time the uncrowned king of the Nether Regions, the first among the evil spirits, have become Lile Loreli’s supporter and guide? What would have happened if their paths hadn’t crossed and he had remained forever in the whirlpool of hatred and never seen what was happening on the other side of the threshold to his world?” But even thinking this terrified him.

Rupia pecked up the last grains. He cleaned his beak on his feathers and he adjusted his wings. After his bite to eat he wanted to cool off his heart burdened by the heat and by recollections of the past. Now he wanted nothing more than to bathe in cold water.

"I'll fly over towards the river, I'll cool off a little. Are you going to stay in the hay meadow for long?" Rupia asked.

"No! I'll do a little work, I've done nothing since morning." Lile looked at the hay meadow.

"Don't go too far, I intend to leave tomorrow."

"Where might I get lost? I'll be back soon." Rupia calmed him down.