



Lilith, The Devil & The Blue Suede Shoes

Once upon a time there lived a nice married couple called Damien and Regan both devoutly Catholic by religion and by nature. They prayed for a child and when in the fullness of time a daughter was born to them they were overjoyed. 'We must give her the best,' declared Damien and Regan, with all thoughts of pain and the slimy feel of afterbirth between her thighs already fading from her memory, smiled sleepily and hugged her newborn baby. 'How about Mary?'

Damien frowned. 'Or perhaps something a little more contemporary?' Regan thought for a while. She looked down at her dribbling, jaundiced daughter with blinkered vision of a new mother. 'She's beautiful.'

Damien peered inside the pink wrapped bundle. 'She's dark.'

Regan was a redhead and Damien was fair so they naturally thought... 'Grandma McAuley is dark,' Regan offered.

'Something Celtic then,' Damien suggested 'something original.'

Regan thought about that for a moment. She'd had more than one occasion herself to thank her parents for the Shakespearean first name which they'd bestowed on their daughter although by the time Regan went to school it was commonly believed she'd been named for the President of the United States.

'Morgan!'

'Fionna!'

'Meghan!'

'Jenna!'

'Lilith!'

Regan frowned. 'Is that Gaelic?'

'Don't think so but it seems to suit her. Look she's smiling. She likes it, don't you Lilith?' Damien grinned at the baby but his wife remained unconvinced. 'I'll find out what it means,' he said 'I'm sure it's something nice.'

Damien didn't get back to the hospital until evening visiting. 'Where have you been?' Regan said crossly 'I thought you were coming back to -'

Damien planted a loud smacking kiss on his wife's forehead. 'Worry not darling.'

'Did you find out what Lilith means?'

'Oh I've done better than that,' he said 'I found out what it means then I registered her birth. Lilith McAdam welcome to the world,' Damien lifted the baby from her crib where she was sleeping and immediately the baby set up a piercing wail. 'Strong lungs she has,' commented a new father at the next bed.

'She'll make her mark, no worries about that,' Damien smiled the sappy grin of the besotted new father.

Regan huffed and puffed a bit because she really wasn't sure that she wanted her daughter named Lilith at all. 'So what does it mean?' she asked huffily.

'Lilith is an Assyrian name,' Damien trumpeted proudly, mistaking the other visitors' irritated glances as interest 'and it means *of the night*.'

'That's not very nice is it?' Regan replied folding her arms with difficulty across her swollen breasts.

'Nice? It's absolutely perfect. She's dark as the night as it is.'

'And if all her hair falls out and starts coming in fair, what then?'

Clearly Regan was just a tad annoyed at her enthusiastic husband.

Damien stroked the soft skull of his baby daughter. 'No chance of that,' he decided 'is there Lilith? Look Regan she's smiling. She likes her name.'

Regan took the baby from her husband and started rubbing her back. 'Wind,' she said tersely.

When Lilith was ten months old she said her first word. Obviously she was trying to say Mum but it came out Mim and Regan had been Mim ever since. 'I like it,' she said proudly. When she was five Lilith was sent to St Joseph's Primary School and during her seven years there she proved to be an industrious if somewhat dreamy student. *Lilith tries very hard* read her last report card and Regan and Damien, who to their credit, held no real academic ambitions for their daughter, treated her and her friends to a meal at the local pizzeria as a reward. 'What for?' Lilith asked 'I got all B's and C's.'

'But you didn't get any F's,' said Dad cheerfully.

'And that's the main thing,' added Mim.

Lilith frowned but she trundled off to enjoy her pizza nevertheless. 'Really good of your parents to spring for this,' said her friend Louise 'considering you got no A's. I of course got all A's you know,' her voice rose so that everyone at the surrounding tables would hear 'and *my* parents gave me nothing. Where's the justice eh?' she spread her hands appealingly so all the girls would know that even though she was far more advanced academically, Louise wasn't the type to begrudge a friend.

'That's because your Mum's a skinflint,' offered Claire helpfully 'don't worry Lou - we all know she is and no one blames you.'

Louise bit into her pizza with the contained savagery of a wild animal.

'I wish I had parents like yours,' said Claire wistfully to Lilith. 'It must be great to be the only one. Everything you get is new, you've got a room all to yourself, you don't have to wear your big sisters ratty hand-me-downs and your stuff never gets broken.' Claire was the youngest in a family of five so Lilith assumed she knew what she was talking about so she nodded wisely as if she understood. 'It gets kind of lonely sometimes though,' she confided.

'Loneliness I can put up with,' Claire replied 'if it means my CD's are where I leave them, if it means my Mum hasn't spent all her extra cash on more football boots for Darren and Steven or on Kevin's school trip. These things cost a fortune you know. No Lil, I wouldn't mind being lonely if it meant there was something left for me. Maybe I could even get that new bike.' Small for her age, Claire looked young and pathetic then, even to the inexperienced eye of Lilith and she flung an arm around her friend in sympathy. 'Grass is always greener Claire,' she said, parroting one of Dad's sayings.

Things were soon to change because after primary school most of the St Joseph pupils expected to go to Star of the Sea Secondary, commonly called Triple S and all during the long, summer holiday weeks Lilith and her friends spoke of nothing else but where they were going, what the teachers were like, who was fanciable and who wasn't. 'Ooh I fancy Mr Steepleton already,' said Claire 'our Janey says he's gorgeous.'

Louise snorted. 'I intend to make these years count,' she said sniffily 'and not be wasting time fancying teachers. Complete waste of time Claire,' she lectured 'after all what do you think would happen if he actually fancied you back eh? Not that it's likely to happen.' The last sentence she added under her breath but Lilith heard it and wondered why Louise had to be so nasty. Claire was harmless really, a little scatty but good natured and fiercely loyal to her friends and she nudged Louise with her arm. 'Don't be so rotten,' she hissed.

'Oh my God,' Claire was rambling, genuinely shocked at Louise's suggestion that anyone might actually fancy her back. 'Oh no,' she stated 'I wouldn't like that at all. Not one little bit.'

Louise laughed unkindly. 'Don't worry Claire,' she said 'no one, not even a teacher, is in the remotest danger of fancying you. There do you feel better now? What? What've I said now?' she had the sly grace to look amazed as Lilith led a now bawling Claire away.

When Lilith arrived home it was tea-time and mum was setting the table with the dulcet tones of Brooklyn's finest, *Judge Judy* in the background as usual. 'Hiya. Dad will be in soon,' she put a wooden spoon in her daughter's hand 'stir the mince for me.'

Lilith stirred dreamily until the familiar sound of Dad's car was heard in the driveway. Usually it took Damien a good ten minutes to unload and lock the car, open the door and actually enter the house. He was so careful about everything that for a laugh one night Lilith and Mim timed him. 'Nine minutes and thirty-three seconds!' they cried when he finally let himself in. But tonight was a record. Damien was inside

the house in under a minute. 'What's up Dad?' Lilith cried from the kitchen.

'Where's Mim?'

'Here,' replied Regan 'what's wrong?'

Lilith carried on stirring the mince with one ear tuned to the truthfinder judge and the other listening in vain to her parents muted conversation in the next room.

'We have a surprise,' announced Dad after dinner.

'Another holiday?'

'No my girl not another holiday. Wasn't two weeks in Lanzarote enough for you eh?' but Damien was in rich, good humour which made Lilith feel happy too even though she had no idea why. 'I've been promoted,' he said.

'Oh well done dear,' said Mim giving Dad a hug as if hearing the news for the first time. 'Isn't that great Lilith?'

'Yeah. Cool,' Lilith replied, genuinely happy for her parents, especially dad whom she knew was fed up working for old Mr Urquhart – Mr Upstart she privately called him – in the office. Maybe now Dad didn't have to work with him any more.

'That's the beauty of it honey,' Dad yelped in excitement and just for a moment and the tiredness disappeared from his eyes and he looked like he did in one of Gran's old Polaroid pictures on the beach at Blackpool. 'I'm now old Upstart's boss!'

Lilith blinked. Imagine Dad calling him Upstart too.

'Too right,' Dad expanded his chest and marched a circuit or two around the table 'now we'll see what's what.'

'Now Damien,' said Regan 'you said yourself office politics are –'

'Oh be quiet woman!' he rushed at his wife then and grabbed her up in his arms and rag-dolled her around the table in a weird sort of can-can 'of course I won't. But I could. That's the beauty of it,' he winked 'I bloody well could!'

'Do we have more money now?' Lilith asked later when Dad had finished watching his shark programme.

'We will do honeybunch. Why? Is there something you need? New trainers or –'

Lilith shook her head. 'I'm all right,' she said imagining Louise in her place 'oh Dad,' she'd have yelped 'I need twenty-five pairs of trainers and two dozen bags and a million CD's and...'. Lilith's thoughts made her laugh out loud.

'What is it?' asked Mim, all concerned in the way mothers often are.

'Nothing Mim. I was just thinking about – something.'

'Well as a celebration I decree that you and mum can have a wee pressie on me,' declared Dad generously. 'Anything you like.'

'Well there's a lovely pair of shoes in that shop in the High Street just now,' said Mim.

'Then my darling you shall have them,' Dad opened his wallet and threw seven twenty pound notes at mum. Lilith knew it was seven because she counted them.

'Dad stop it,' she cried 'this is all wrong. This is not you. You're just all excited and maybe if you go to bed and –'

'The girl fusses as much as her mother! Now come here and give your old Dad a huggle,' he whooped and caught hold of Lilith in one of his bear hugs. 'This is a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity; he told her 'and may never be repeated so what I advise is – take the money and run!' he threw some ten pound notes at Lilith who let them fall from her fingers onto the carpet. 'Dad no! I really, *really* don't need anything. You and Mim give me everything I need and anyway when I start at Triple S next month I'll need new –'

'But you won't be going to Triple S chicklet,' said Dad 'not now. Mim and I always said that if we ever could afford it we'd give you the best education money can buy.'

'Not going to Triple S?' Lilith was floored 'all my friends are going there. Claire, and Louise and – everyone.'

'We'll you're not,' Dad said firmly 'it's decided isn't it Mim?' Regan nodded on cue. 'My promotion means you'll be going to The St Margaret-Mary Academy for Girls.'

'The – where? I've never heard of it.'

'It's very exclusive Lilith,' Mim promised 'and they have the best amenities; swimming pools, tennis courts, they go on ski trips in winter, educational excursions in summer, they even have their own ice rink although I've heard tell its not very big.'

'Yeah but where is it?' Lilith repeated.

Damien and Regan looked at one another and that look was not lost on Lilith. 'You're sending me away,' she realised sadly.

'We're not sending you away as such,' Dad explained 'it's just that the school is up north. Too far for you to travel every day so we thought we'd board you during the week and you can come home at weekends.'

'There now that wouldn't be so bad now would it?' Mim asked in her bright voice, the one she uses when she's been watching a sad film on TV and doesn't want anyone to notice she's just about to cry.

'Do you want rid of me?'

'Of course not you silly girl!' Now Mim's voice cracked which made her angry and she turned her anger towards Lilith who'd done nothing wrong. Sometimes anger works like that.

'Hold on girls,' Dad stepped in 'we only want the best for you Lil, that's all. You'll never get a better start in life than a fine education. You're twelve now, by the time you reach seventeen or eighteen you'll be ready to –'

Lilith whirled on her father like a Tasmanian Devil. 'To do what? Go to finishing school in Switzerland perhaps? Oh God, you've both lost it now. I'm a normal kid. You're normal parents, or at least you were until now. If Triple S was good enough for you two why not me? I don't need anything fancy honestly I don't. I'll do without ski trips and ice rinks. I want to go to Triple S with my friends and I want to stay here,' she finished plaintively.

‘The truth is you’re better off away,’ said Dad in his patiently-explaining voice but the words he chose made everything clear as mud and Lilith looked at her mother helplessly. ‘Why am I better off away Mim?’

Regan shook her head in annoyance at Damien’s verbal clumsiness. ‘Oh look Lilith Dad doesn’t mean anything. You know by now if there’s a wrong way to say a thing your father will find it,’ Damien grinned helplessly in the way of men when faced with more than one woman at a time. ‘What Dad’s saying – what we’re *both* saying dear – is it was always a dream of ours to do the very best for you. You know when you were born and the doctor said I couldn’t have any more children,’ Lilith nodded impatiently and this well-worn story ‘the thing is, we decided then that if God meant us to have only one child we would do our very best to give her all the things she needs to have the very best start in life and one of those things is a good education.’

‘Triple S *is* a good education,’ Lilith said stubbornly.

‘Triple S is a fair enough school and is where you would have gone Lil, but only because we couldn’t afford anything better. But now we can. My promotion means substantially more money and –’

‘Can’t you just invest it or something,’ Lilith’s dark brows drew down above her deep brown eyes mutinously.

‘We have dear,’ Mim said using her bright voice again ‘we’re investing in you.’