

The Lion's Shadow by Linda Dielemans

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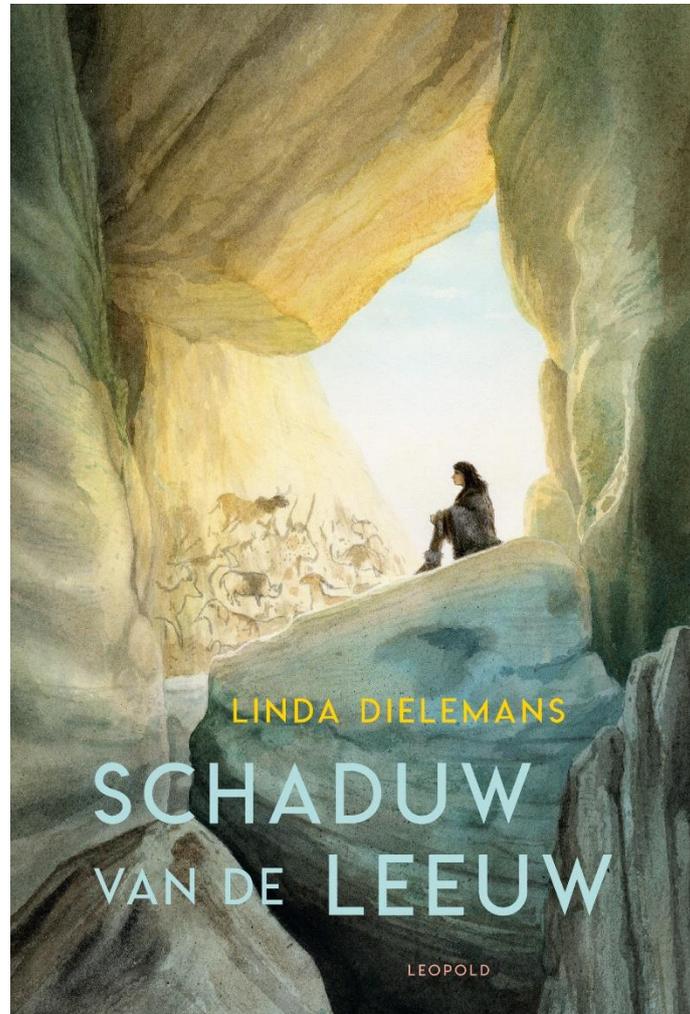
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About *The Lion's Shadow*:

Number of pages: 293

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pages 10–13 (Yuni is told to stop dreaming)

‘You have blood on your coat. Let me comb it out.’

The voice of Uma, the tribe mother, was soft but insistent.

Yuni glanced back longingly at the fire, but then sat down obediently, beyond the reach of the delicious heat that the flames and the stones were giving off. Uma never sat by the fire, usually staying in the shadows, just outside the circle of people. She slept in the alcove at the back of the home cave, where the sharp rocks reached forward as if the interior of the earth wanted to protect her with its hard arms. She never felt cold anyway, she said. And it was easier for the members of the tribe to come to her with their questions if everyone else was not right on top of them.

That was true. But Yuni had not asked to talk with her. And what did she care about the blood? Lots of people had blood on their coats. That was normal. She had carried two heavy hind legs to the home cave. And now all she wanted to do was relax and warm up. She shivered and pulled her hands into her sleeves. It did not help much.

‘Das told me about your trip,’ said Uma behind her, as she pulled a bone comb with short movements through the fur of Yuni’s coat.

Of course it was about that.

‘Did you forget what I said?’

‘No, Uma.’

‘But you still went outside.’

‘I’m sorry.’

The woman stopped combing. ‘Look at me.’

Slowly Yuni turned around. Uma’s face was soft and round, and her hair was tied closely to her scalp in dozens of knots. Her eyes were worried, but Yuni knew this concern

was false. Uma took hold of her hands. Her plump fingers were warm.

‘I know that you dream. I also know that you don’t tell me everything. And maybe you’re a better dreamer than Tira. But you can’t take her place – you understand that, don’t you? There is no other place for her. You are strong and fast. You have to run and hunt and to look after your children when you become a mother. The dreams are for Tira. She is Took’s pupil.’

Uma sighed.

‘I am the tribe mother, Yuni. It is my job to take care of everyone. The dreams that the Mother sends are deceptive. The truth lies hidden deep within them, and only a true dreamer can recognise it. If you follow every dream that presents itself, you will bring about disasters. Disasters that can never be put right.’

‘Then teach me to recognise the truth,’ begged Yuni. ‘Let Took help me!’

This was not the first time Uma had spoken to her about her dreaming. And this was not the first time Yuni had asked for Took’s help. Why would Uma not give in? She was supposed to care for the whole tribe, wasn’t she? Then why not Yuni?

‘No,’ Uma replied firmly. ‘I forbid you to continue dreaming.’

‘How can someone stop dreaming? Everyone dreams.’

Yuni had to struggle not to raise her voice. Shouting did not help, and certainly not with Uma. The tribe mother’s mouth turned into a hard line.

‘Don’t act as if you’re stupid. You know what I mean. From now on, no slipping away to isolated places. Don’t go thinking I don’t know about them. And you must tell me at once about every dream that still comes to you. Then hopefully it won’t take too long for them to disappear from your head. You need to forget them. So no more drawings either, Yuni. Not inside the home cave and certainly not on the rocks outside. Do you understand why I’m saying this?’

Yuni wanted to pull her hands from Uma's and run away, far away from the fire and the cave and the cruel woman who was sitting in front of her, but the tribe mother was holding tightly on to her. Didn't Uma understand? Without her dreams, Yuni was nothing. Without her dreams, she was no one. She would never see the lion man again.

Tears filled her eyes, but the angry words inside her head did not come out of her mouth. She hung her head. No more dreams, no lion man. No more drawings to prove that she really had seen the reindeer from her dreams. Without drawings, her dreams had no meaning. And that was exactly what Uma wanted.

'I can see that you understand,' said Uma. 'But do not weep for too long, girl. Tears are for death, not for life. Give up dreaming, as I have asked. Be sensible. I shall tell Das to keep an eye on you.'

'As if he wasn't already doing that!'

'Don't be rude, Yuni.' Hard lines appeared around Uma's eyes. 'It doesn't suit you.'

Then her face relaxed. 'It's not easy being tribe mother. Come here.'

She opened her arms wide and even though there was nothing Yuni wanted less at that moment, she still let Uma give her a hug. It was strange that someone who was so hard on the inside could be so soft on the outside. Yuni was almost suffocating; she was drowning in a river of flesh and fat, of breasts and belly. When the tribe mother let go of her, Yuni's cheeks were red and she was a little out of breath.

Uma smiled. 'Go on. Run along now.'

Yuni quickly rose to her feet, wiped her face and fled.

pages 195–197 (attacked by a lion)

A deep roar sounded through the valley.

Io dropped his flute, which landed in two pieces on the ground.

Yuni leapt up. ‘Let’s go. Now!’ she said.

The sound seemed to be everywhere, bouncing off the steep cliffs. Where was it coming from? Where was the lion? Another roar. It was behind them. Wasn’t it?

‘Quickly!’ said Yuni.

She pushed Io ahead of her with one hand, gripping her spear with the other and constantly glancing back over her shoulder. Where was that lion? It sounded so close.

‘Yuni...’ Io froze on the spot.

The lion was looking right at them, its tail sweeping across the ground, the tip supple, as if it had a life of its own. The animal was standing still, but all of its muscles were tensed.

My dream has come true. But why, Mother?

What was it going to do?

‘We need to make some noise,’ said Yuni. ‘Don’t run away. Maybe it’s not after us.

Wave your arms. Shout! Heya! Heyaaaaaaaa!’

The lion stepped back. Just a little. Its ears flattened against its fur. It was ready to pounce.

‘No!’ shouted Io. He ran forward and threw his spear with all his might.

‘Io! Don’t!’

The spear grazed the lion, which roared so loudly that the air vibrated. The animal began to run.

‘Out of the way!’ yelled Yuni, pushing Io over.

The lion reached her, and it leapt. Yuni screamed, clutching her spear with both hands

and stabbing as hard as she could at its eyes. Missed! She quickly turned away, but the lion lashed out, its claws hooking into her coat. It was tugging her down.

‘No, no!’

Its other paw glanced past her face, leaving a burning pain. She stabbed again, as hard as she could, but did not hit the lion. Then it roared, harder than she had ever heard a lion roar.

‘Io!’

Io had picked up his spear again and jabbed it into the lion’s side. Now he was pressing down on it with all of his weight. The animal was struggling and twisting to reach him, swiping at him with its claws. Io screamed and fell backwards. He was wounded! But there was no time to think about that. This was Yuni’s chance. She jumped up, braced herself and stuck her own spear into the lion’s throat. Its roaring turned instantly into a horrible shriek as it grabbed for the spear, but all it did was tear its own skin open even more. Yuni did not let go. The lion collapsed, its eyes rolling.