



THE LITERARY SOLILOQUY



read and write anywhere and everywhere

THE LETTERS: A SHORT STORY

by pittershawn palmer

The attic housed a mountain of dust and cobwebs. In corners, on cedar trunks, under the mahogany desk, strung from hat racks to bookshelves--cobwebs. Some were old and deserted, hanging broken, as the breeze from the open door rushed in to sway them like tattered sails on a sea worn ship. Others were fresh and new, inhabited by species of insects indigenous to the little city of Long Pond. Stray beams of light peeked through the stained glass windows on either end of the vast room. Five years of dust gave a gray hue to the dimly lit space with splashes of red, blue and green. The paintings hung tilted and dark, covered with time. An old piano stood on three legs, defeated by loneliness and silence. Boxes of tattered games lay atop its grand frame, sharing in the mood of its unexpected life—five revolutions around the sun it has stood.

Edward had been dead for all those years. His books, writings and letters had long been placed amongst other long forgotten items and distant memories, some forgotten by intention, others through the suppression of pain—all now a mishmash of events in time. The large black trunk sat under his desk. It was ominous, almost expecting—waiting. It sat diligently, patient, as Edward would.

He would slouch, his head bent, writing for hours on end under the soft light of his banker's lamp. The green hue shown on his face as he punched away on the keys of his Underwood No.

5, an old piece he discovered at a remote auction house on the other side of town. His shadow climbed the walls, hastily mimicking his every move.

“Marie, would you please bring me a cup of coffee,” he chimed many times without lifting his head. “I just have one more page to complete and I’ll join you.” The keys resounded through the thickly decorated room, bouncing across tapestry, over stray papers and books spread eagle. Tap tap tap, tap tap, they pounded dull and swiftly.

Edward enjoyed writing romance novels. He said it helped him get in touch with his sensitive side. He was sentimental—a romantic at heart.

Half a decade of dust rose into the air as I opened the black cave that housed his memory. The smell of time met my nose in a flurry of musty worn cotton—many years in the dark. Books, bookmarks, manuscripts and letters lay unkempt throughout the deep and taunting time capsule. Ernest Hemingway, Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Edgar Allen Poe mingled with his unfinished works. Near the right corner, beneath his old compass, was a stack of letters. Tied around them was a red satin ribbon. Each one was stamped and sealed, but never mailed. They were addressed to me.

I felt light as I held the large stack in my hand. A cardinal flew by one window, then decided to perch on the other. It stood regal, gazing about the horizon as though watching over the earth—and

our tiny home. Its deep red body accented the clear sky. The cool of the hard cherry wood floor snapped me from my daze. I don’t remember when I fell to my knees, but the wood creaked as I shifted my weight to relieve the pressure. Why hadn’t he mailed these letters or simply given them to me? As I leaned further back to sit, I continued to flip through them and realized

in these letters. One day, I know you will find them. You may not understand why I could not mail them. But the truth of the matter is, my love for you cannot be uttered in the way I would like. It is like the belief by some religious sects that the name of God should not be spoken or written, for fear of desecrating the essence of our creator. But

reading corner



they were written during the first year of our marriage.

The first was dated January 1, 1956. As I gently opened it, the seal lifted easily, revealing years of wear and virtually no glue left to keep them sealed. As I read the salutation, Dear Marie, droplets of water ushered onto the envelope, jolting me once again back to the present—reminding me not to ruin these treasured correspondences. I read on.

*Dear Marie,
To tell you how much I love you would never help you to understand to what lengths I would go to give you the life you deserve. So I will profess my love*

my dear Marie, I must at the very least write it; even if I cannot tell you beyond simply, I love you. The day I married you, I thought myself undeserving of such a woman. But I learned to accept that you are my gift from the universe, a treasure to be revered and respected for as long as you live. I can only hope you will love me with the same depth and passion. Until I write again.

*With abiding love,
Edward*

Like the frames in a picture show, scenes and things from our life together flashed before me. The attic walls became a sea blue. Paintings adorned

"The letter drifted..."

each wall with images of mountains, grassy knolls, a mother bathing a child and melting clocks. The melting clocks always intrigued me. The piece was called, *The Persistence of Memory*. It was one of Edward's favorite pieces. He would sit and stare at it for hours. It was hauntingly true to the idea of memory—how persistent it can be—almost unrelenting.

A simple Persian area rug dressed the room, with well-polished floors peeking out at the edges. Images from a starry night sky adorned the low slanted ceilings. Our ebony baby grand Steinway stood like a sentry in the center of the room—I played it daily. Small dressers and tables sat in corners with games of every kind piled recklessly all around.

"Edward, stop! You're cheating."

"I would never cheat," he smirked.

"Edward, don't you dare lie to me. I turn my back for one second and your pawn is in another place. Put it back!"

The radio sang on as Sarah Vaughan's *Tenderly* filled the room, blending in with our cadences of playfulness and love. Our laughter danced on air, echoing through the open window, down the attic stairs, into our back yard—filling our weeping willows with tears of joy. Our uncontrollable laughter melded into dark sadness and gloom as Edward clutched his chest and tumbled to the floor gasping for air.

"Edward," I screamed, grabbing him and pulling him to my lap. "Baby, what's wrong? Help! Somebody help!"

The unforgiving attic did not respond; in that moment, it did not echo. I was forced to leave my love alone while I called the paramedics. Time crawled along, moving through a second in what felt like a year. The attic

stairs were too many, the phone's ringing too long, the dispatcher too slow to take down my information, the paramedics took too long to arrive. The attic stairs they climbed became double the amount that were there before, they moved too slowly. Everything was too slow.

Even my screams as they pronounced him dead came out like a slow droning endless ripple. The frantic pitch of my voice pierced the afternoon sun as the news pierced my heart. Then all fell silent. He was dead. My lover and my friend was gone, and everything continued to drag. Nothing and no one wanted to hurry anymore. Without my Edward, my world stood still. I stood still.

The letter drifted across the floor, gathering dust as it floated across the room. I didn't realize I had let it fall. The room went from the bright sea blue of the past, instantly back to the dark dreary gray of the present. The letters now littered the attic floor as though tossed. I gathered each one up and hastily retreated down the attic stairs to the comfort of our bedroom. Sad sleep enveloped me as I stared at the steady, hypnotizing spin of the ceiling fan.

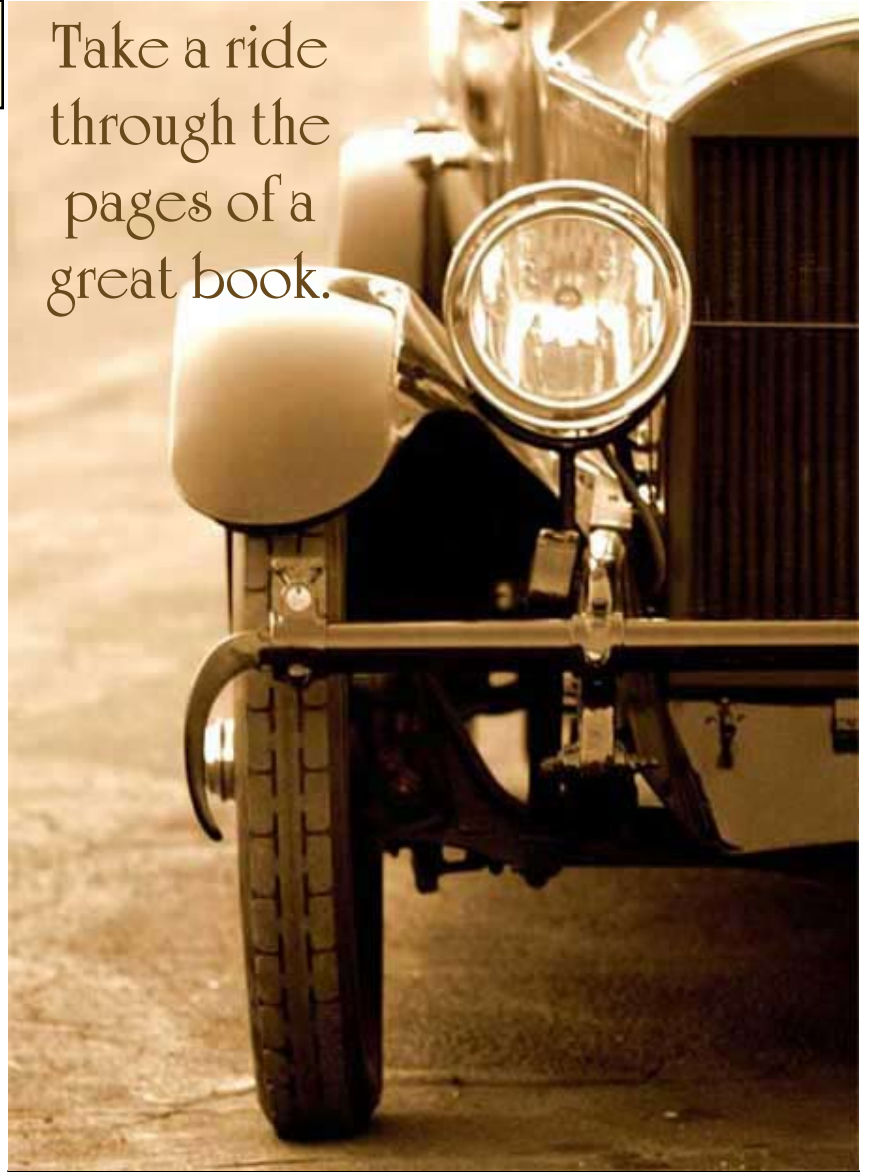
"Marie, Marie! Wake up honey, I want to hear your beautiful voice."

I jolted awake, searching the room desperately. The sound of a siren in the distance could not dull the beating of my heart. The din of each beat filled my ears, making them throb.

"Edward?" I hoped. The air was suddenly tepid and silent.

The letters lay all around me like friends come to visit and comfort me. I could almost hear them whispering for me to read them, read them now before they too died. It was eleven. Night had fallen as quickly as my resurrected sadness.

Take a ride
through the
pages of a
great book.

*"I remember shaking..."*

I began to read. Edward had chronicled much of our first year together. He wrote about the puppy he bought me, Casper, a beautiful white Siberian Husky.

"Close your eyes," he chuckled.

"What is it, Edward? What have you got?"

"Now if I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise, now would it?"

"Come on, hurry up. I wanna see."

"Patience my dear. And no peeking."

I remember shaking uncontrollably, nervous that he would be up to one of his tricks again. Within minutes, I heard him shuffle out the door, and shuffle back in with something that sounded like it was moving. I squealed, not sure if I should be scared, as he was always playing around and doing something outrageous.

"Okay. Calm down. Stop

shaking silly!" he laughed.

"I can't stand it anymore! What is it?"

"Okay. Open your eyes." The tiny white ball of fur wriggled and sniffed, licking aimlessly at anything he could reach. A muffled bark was all it took for me to break down in tears. Edward almost tumbled over as I jumped on him, kissing him all over his face. Casper became our baby, and he could do no wrong. His P.S. read, "Remember that black silk top you couldn't find? Casper took it off to his doghouse and used it as a blanket. I didn't have the heart to tell you."

I found myself laughing and crying all at once, each emotion equally infecting my spirit. I read through our early life together, eagerly devouring each day and month. With each letter, I could feel Edward fill



"The clock read 3am..."

the room. I could smell his cologne, hear his laugh, see his smile and feel his mischievousness. As I held the last five letters in my hand, I could sense that something was coming. His last letter was heavy with a sadness that was perceptible, although not spoken. He talked about his visit to the doctor, and how he hadn't been feeling well those last few days. I began reading the next letter.

Dear Marie,

The results came back from my blood work and scans. Without going into much detail my love, my heart is not working very well these days. The doctor has told me that I don't have much more time. I am going to die soon, and all I can think about is losing you—not living to love you more, and feel you loving me.

*You have given me a life that is greater than any I could ever imagine. When you finally read this, know that I am watching over you. I am sitting beside you as you read this, holding you, drying your tears, and telling you how much I love you. Never doubt for a minute that I am here. Close your eyes. I am sitting beside you. With eternal love,
Edward*

The clock read 3am. I could hear Casper scratching at the bedroom door. He was whining as he usually did when Edward came home from work and he wanted to play. I opened the door to let him in. He ran to the window which overlooked our backyard, jumped up on the chair and began to howl. Casper had never howled before, but tonight he howled



long and laborious. He then lay on the chair and slept until the sun peeked over the horizon.

It was difficult for me to understand why Edward did not tell me he was ill. We had never kept secrets. Yet here it was. A secret. A secret within a secret—letters I knew nothing about. I wasn't sure what the last few letters would have in store for me, but I needed to find the strength to get through them.

My hands shook as I reached for one. I nervously began to read yet another of my dear husband's billets-doux.

"Marie, do you know the meaning of the claddagh?"

"What is a claddagh?"

"It is a special ring. It began with an Irish love story. It symbolizes the great love a prince had for his wife. I purchased one for you and me. I want you to wear it always. Please remember these words each time you

"Casper looked up sharply..."

look at it: For love, we wear the heart. In friendship, we wear the hands. And in loyalty and lasting fidelity we wear the royal claddagh."

"Edward, I---"

"Marie, I place it on your left hand, crown facing you, to symbolize not only that you have found your love, but that I have requited."

As I read, my eyes blurred. The watery haze faded into the memory of that day long ago. Casper jumped onto the bed and laid his head on my lap. I looked at my hand, twisting the claddagh from left to right.

"No matter where I am, always know that I am with you. Touch this claddagh I've given you and chant the Namaste that says: I honor that place in you in which the entire universe dwells. I honor the place in you which

is of love, of truth, of light, and of peace. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me; we are one."

I cried the day he chanted those words. I cried until my eyes were red and puffy, but I was filled with happiness and content. I never took off the ring.

"Remember, Marie. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me; we are one. And I am with you."

Casper looked up sharply at the bedroom door. I glanced around the room, feeling a warm breeze suddenly dancing around the bed, but no one was there. The curtains lifted and waved about the window frame, fanning a gentle good morning. All but one of the letters blew to the floor, as the breeze whisked through and swished them away. As they fell, tossing about in the wind, I grabbed the single letter that did not make it to

the ground.

It was the letter about the claddagh. The P.S. read, "If you keep none of the other letters, Marie, keep this one. It is my gift to you, forever." The wind continued to blow, the cardinal perched on the windowsill and sang, and that empty place in me somehow became filled.

Finally, I said good-bye and whispered, "You are with me always." The wind picked up and letters began to fly around the room. They

flew past me like paper birds teasing me playfully. They flew everywhere, rising high into the air, near the ceiling--twirling. I tried to catch them, but they were like elusive children in a game of tag—they seemed to giggle. As I laughed, I could almost hear the laughter of another. It filled the room--the laughter, the smell of cologne, and the strength of love. Casper barked wildly.

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SCI-FI: IN THE ZONE**THEY CAME LIKE US**

by pittershawn palmer

The night was cool. Stars speckled the sky in various formations, giving shape to things known—a dipper, a dog, a flower or leaf—and things unknown—strange, unearthly shapes. The unknown stood out. The unknown is what circled the sky, seeming to seek a place to land. No one saw this strange circular thing that stood on the air like a magician's floating ball, no string to be seen, nothing to indicate that it was a trick of the eye. No one saw it, but Kira.

Kira sat on the bank of the river, fishing by moonlight as the strange object hovered far above her—out of reach but within sight. She shook the fishing line, hoping something would bite. One eye was on the moonlit waters while the other observed the object floating about as though trying to make a decision. She lay down the fishing rod on the grass and followed the now descending object. It went down behind the trees, slowly disappearing as it came closer to land.

There was a thud. Quietly she moved through the brush, crouching low and tiptoeing so as not to be seen or heard. Through the trees bright lights beamed, drowning out the darkness save for the thick spot of bushes and leaves that concealed her thin frame. A fog floated around the area from where the light shown. A soft hiss rose above the low hum of what sounded like high tech engines, like a well-made Cadillac that barely gave clue to the fact that it was running. The hiss was

followed by another strange hum. Through the fog it seemed as though something was opening, moving from top to bottom, down toward the ground. Other unfamiliar noises climbed the night air, walking toward Kira as though sound were omniscient and could see everything around it and knew someone was there. The sound found her, and threatened to give away her presence. But it didn't. The sounds kept her secret and didn't tell that she was there; they didn't disclose that she was invading what was meant to be a secret moment.

They were humanoid, but not human.

Kira slowly lowered herself to ensure she would not be noticed. The visitors began to look around, sniffing the air, and touching the plants and trees. They made a sound in unison that was almost musical, melodic and hypnotizing. It was like a mating call, but not meant for a mate. It was meant for something she never would have imagined. Within seconds, the trees came alive. Steps crushed leaves; the wind rose and everything around her began to rustle. Animals of every kind walked and flew fearlessly to the place where the visitors landed. Birds, insects, mammals, every animal conceivable advanced to what was now the center of their universe. The visitors welcomed them, touching each animal. None of the creatures showed fear. An eerie thought came to Kira... have they been here before? Who were these visitors? What were they? How did they command the animals with such ease?

She realized she had been staring at this marvel almost entranced. She snapped herself from the daze and thought it best to retreat and never speak of what she saw. As she slowly

began to back away, she accidentally stepped on a twig that crackled and disrupted the peace of the moment she just witnessed. Kira looked up sharply, hoping she was not noticed. One of the visitors snapped its head around in her direction and peered through the brush. It spotted her. A shrill cry went up from its mouth, sending the other visitors into a frenzy. A wild and ear piercing shot of fire blasted in her direction. They were shooting at her. But why? She jumped up and began to run. She ran with all her might, hearing footsteps trailing close behind her and fire blazing up all around her from their strange, but powerful weapons. She realized at that moment that she might not make it out alive. She scampered quickly ahead and arrived at a deep patch of water, then submerged herself. Above the visitors looked around. They seemed to be assessing her whereabouts. Remaining underwater was not an option. Air seeped through her lips slowly. The bubbles that surfaced threatened to give her away. They continued to search the area as she felt her life force running out. Just as Kira was about to give up and meet her fate, they were gone. She surfaced, gasping for air that filled her lungs like a long lost friend fills the heart.

What kind of visitors were these who were kind to animals but hostile to humans? She gathered herself and walked through the night. Her car was lost. It was left far too close to the visitors, who by now had searched every area of



her fishing spot. She looked up at the night sky, then ahead at her dark empty house just a few feet away. She was soaking wet and tired, but she was alive. She would sleep and try to forget about her experience...try to forget the unforgettable, knowing she had no one to tell, because no one would ever believe her.

The news reports kept flooding in. Every day there were no less than twenty missing persons. There was no rhyme or reason... children, adults, teenagers, the elderly, black, white, everyone. There was no pattern. They only needed to be human. There were a few who claimed to come in contact with something otherworldly, but there were no clues as to what was different about those people and why they didn't disappear after their encounter.

Searches unearthed nothing most times. Other times, certain personal affects were



SCI-FI: IN THE ZONE

THEY CAME LIKE US...CONTINUED

spotted...a watch or a wallet...but no bodies. Detective Jones was one of hundreds on the case around the world. In every country, the story was the same—missing persons, no body found, very little personal items found, sometimes none, no explanation for how they disappeared. Some disappeared from their beds, from next to their loved ones while they slept. They would wake and find no clothes missing, slippers still at the foot of the bed, car in the garage, nothing to indicate that anyone broke into the house forcibly. The only thing Detective Jones had as a clue were the strange fires left behind—fires that never burned an entire area or an entire house. The fires were concentrated into a small space and went out quickly... more quickly than any fire anyone had ever seen.

“Have you got anything on the last kidnapping,” queried Jones. “There’s gotta be some evidence, something that can give us a lead.”

“Something was found in the bathroom, where the last victim was taken,” said Detective Cox. “It was thin and white, almost looked like skin. The examiners said it was definitely biological, but they couldn’t pinpoint what animal it may have come from.”

“What else?” Jones asked, turning in his chair to give his full attention.

“Well, something really strange, boss.” Cox crinkled his eyebrows and paused, shaking his head while looking down at the ground.

“Tell me, what?”

“The doc said there was something wrong with the

DNA structure. Like it was broken or something. Said she ain’t never seen no DNA structure like it before in any animal on earth. I figured the doc had one too many Tequilas that morning before examining that sample. But she seemed pretty sure there was something weird about it.”

“And what about the ash from the fire,” continued Jones.

“See, that’s the thing, boss. Turns out that is also kinda hokie. The ash contained a



read here...under the tree

strange chemical that no one can seem to identify.”

Jones scratched his head, swiveled around in his chair, leaned back and looked up at the ceiling. He thought about what was happening and for the first time in his career, couldn’t make heads or tails of it. Why were people disappearing around the globe at such an alarming rate? Where were they being taken to?

Isi wasn’t like other teenagers. He was a rebel who didn’t like to follow the status quo. His only place of refuge in a world he viewed as insane was up in the mountains in his favorite cave, far from the ruckus

of the town he’d lived in for all his life. He and his buddy Jiza would ride up to the cave on their bikes and spend the better part of the day there, talking trash and enjoying the view of the town and parallel mountains. It had been nearly three weeks since Isi and Jiza had been to the cave. They were caught smoking pot and put on house arrest until their parents sorted out the mess. They were lucky. Their parents worked for the government and pulled some strings to

tried to jack our spot, they’ve got hell to pay,” chimed Isi defiantly.

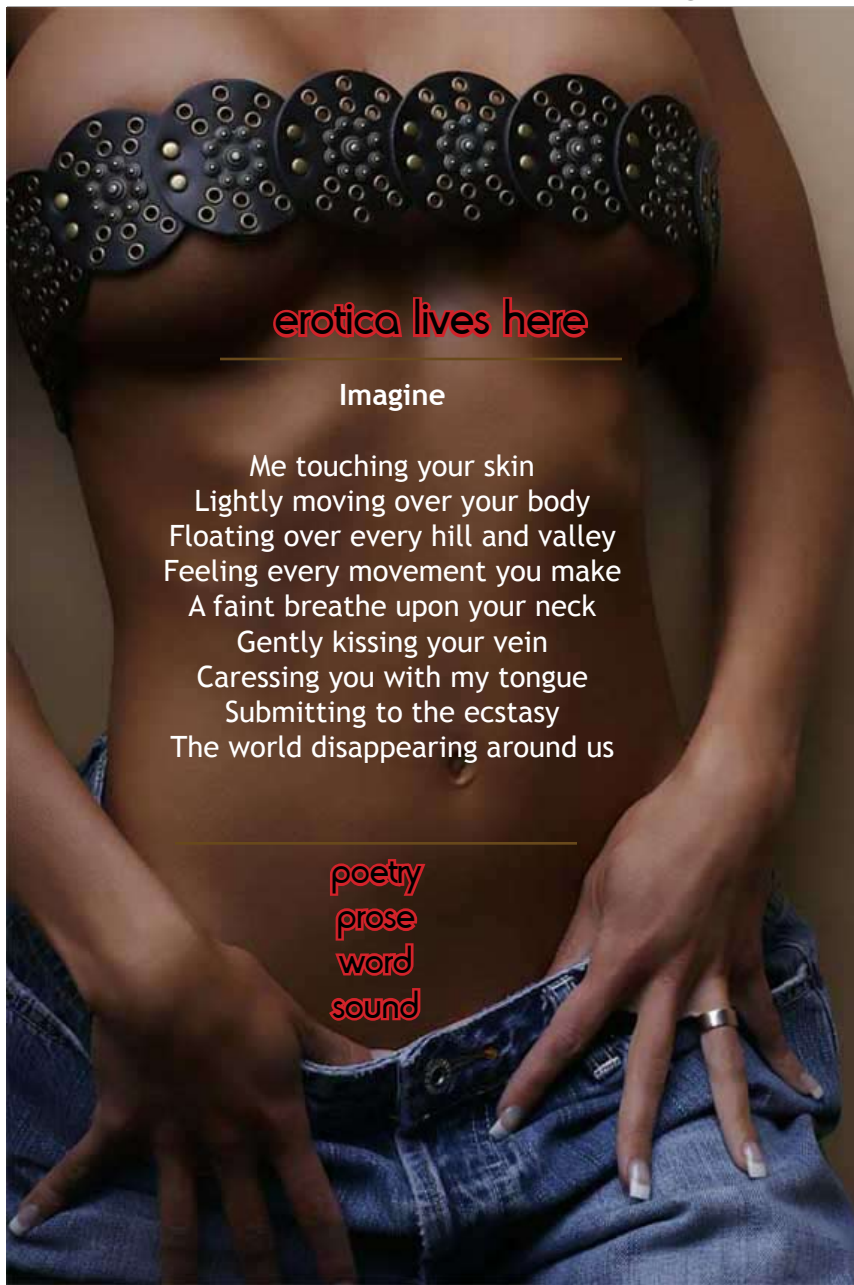
They both walked on, moving slowly so as not to alarm any potential thieves. As the light receded and the darkness surrounded them, they took out their flashlights. The walls they had left that were nothing more than rough stone, filled with stalagmites and stalactites, were now smoothed over with strange symbols painted everywhere. The ceiling of the cave was also now smooth and filled with images of hunters scarred with the number of their kill, or in the act of hunting. The hunters looked humanoid, but not human. On a wall farther in, Isi pointed his flashlight. The humanoids were now shown with animals from earth all around them. They were feeding them fruits and plants of every kind. Even the lions ate fruits and leaves, seeming comfortable around all the other beasts of the fields and air. The humanoids depicted themselves as the animals’ guardians. Isi turned to look at Jiza. They both turned back to the walls.

“Can you believe this crap, man?” whispered Jiza. “It looks like we may not be alone in the....”

As Jiza

continued on
page 7





erotica lives here

Imagine

Me touching your skin
 Lightly moving over your body
 Floating over every hill and valley
 Feeling every movement you make
 A faint breathe upon your neck
 Gently kissing your vein
 Caressing you with my tongue
 Submitting to the ecstasy
 The world disappearing around us

poetry
 prose
 word
 sound

Sewing

by pillershawn palmer

Granny carefully began to stitch my prom dress from scraps of cloth she bought from the neighborhood material store, which stood on the corner of Mount Vernon's busiest street. Her eyes twinkled as she tied off the pieces of thread being extra careful not to leave too much at the end of

the knot. She slowly picked up a spool of red thread from the corner of the bed. She almost didn't see it. Over the years her eyes have clouded with age and it becomes increasingly difficult for her to see.

The bedspread is a bright floral pattern with fully bloomed red roses that camouflaged the

spool making it initially difficult for her to locate it. She pulled out a piece of thread the length of the span of her arms and broke it off with her teeth. Granny then rolled the frayed and cottony end between her fingers, licked it between her lips to moisten it so the fuzzy pieces would stick together forming a straight enough end to go through the eye of the needle, then pulled it straight with her fingers. She picked up the needle, which was amongst a dozen other sewing needles and pins stuck in a red-orange pumpkin shaped pin cushion with green stems and leaves. The cushion was as big as my fist and had lemonade juice stains from Granny drinking and sewing in the blazing heat in a room with no air conditioning. Beads of sweat ran down her face and they would glisten after just a few short hours of needlework. Somehow she never allowed sweat to fall on what she considered her masterpiece. She then closed one eye, held the needle up to the sunlight and slowly pushed the long black thread through the eye of the needle. I suppose in her day she was very good at it, but today it took her three tries before she finally got the thread through; this is after licking it two more times to re-straighten the end, which bent every time she missed. Her frustration was short lived once she was able to continue her work. She stopped to look out the window as the wind blew through the trees. She realized that the window was closed and that's why it felt hotter than usual.

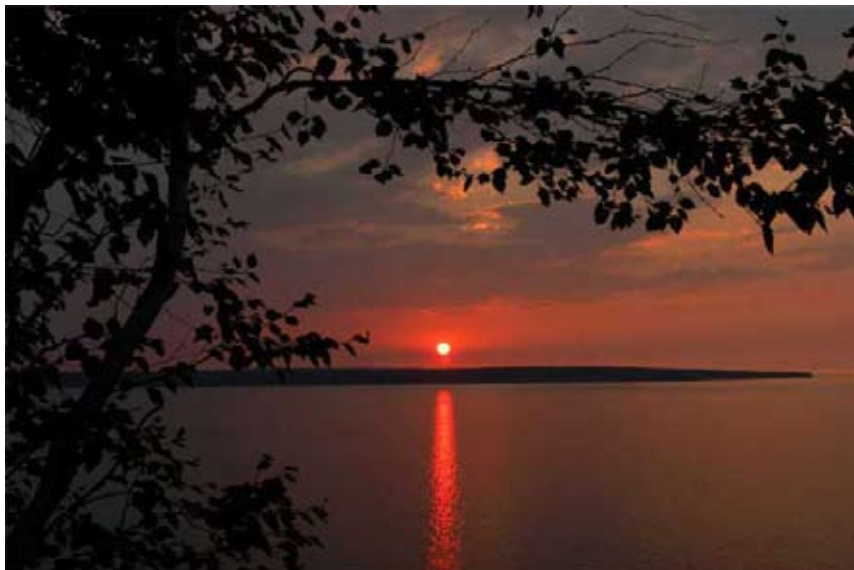
She began her ritual in the early hours, before the sun came up and just before the cock would crow. Although she is no longer in Jamaica in her country home on the hill, it's as if she can almost anticipate when they would begin their cackling and beat them to the early morning crow. I heard her shuffling around at about 4am, her slippered feet dragging across the wooden floor. I quietly got up to see what was going on and peeked in from behind the door like a five-year-old looking for Santa Claus. She sat on the corner of the bed cutting out the delicate pieces of royal blue silk cloth, pausing from time to time to admire the lace that would be used for the v-cut collar, which hung on the headboard of her bed. It took me days to convince her that I really did want my dress to be above my knees. She simply couldn't understand

why I would want my "meager" legs to show. But she finally gave over to the idea and said that it would be my problem if I couldn't find a decent young man to dance with because my bones were showing. So as she was cutting the skirt portion of the dress she laughed under her breath and mumbled something that sounded like "crazy gal."

She never needed a pattern to make basic styles, but she used the pattern I chose because she knew I wanted it to be special. After cutting the main parts of the dress she tossed the pattern to the side and continued from memory. She is almost done with the major sewing and is focused on finishing the hems, sleeves and collar. She skillfully uses the sewing machine as if she were a professional race car driver and this powerful machine was her car. She would slam on the pedal of her Singer and take the curves of sleeves and hems like a pro. Speeding up and slowing down only to gather the cloth that would next receive its white and blue dashes that looked like the lines in a two-lane highway. She smiled and sang about how Christ gave his life on the cross so that she could be saved; and my dress transformed from a bundle of cloth into a beautiful, well-tailored "frock."

She called me in to try on the dress. As I suspected and expected, Granny tried to give her final opinion by making the hem too long; well below my knees and far longer than I had requested. She argued all the way back to the sewing machine. She finally ended up cutting another three inches off the dress. And grumpily told me that it was "such a waste of good cloth." She would later use that "wasted cloth" to make a little sachet where she kept a few extra dollars for some yams and salt fish. She sewed a string to it and pinned it to the side of her bra so that no one could steal her "food" money. It never left her side. She slept with it.

After she lowered her voice and raised the hem of my dress, I tried it on, turned to examine the finished product in the mirror, and satisfied, took my dress to be professionally pressed and cleaned. She complained as I thanked her and kissed her on her cheek. She swiftly brushed me away claiming that she would never make another dress like that for me again. As I walked off I could hear her humming another tune about God's goodness and grace.



SCI-FI: IN THE ZONE

THEY CAME LIKE US



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He fell back and dropped his flashlight in shock, pushing himself backwards quickly on the ground, all the while kicking up dust and dirt. The light from his flashlight randomly lit the cave floor, not settling on anything in particular as it rolled about. Jiza raised his flashlight to the spot that seemed to be the object of Isi's throbbing fear. On a far off wall, lined neatly with the word "human" below them, were the heads of people. There were children, adults, people of all races and nationality. The heads were mounted on wooden backs with engraved gold toned plates.

Jiza grabbed Isi and pulled him along the cave floor. The boys' breathing was enough to echo through the cave, bringing the darkness to life as they ran for the entrance. The cave seemed to breathe, but not with the breath of its own fears. It inhaled their fear; it sniffed their confusion and sent a breeze through the alien space. They ran as fast as they could, stumbling and falling with each step.

Near the bottom of the hill, Kira could hear the screams of her child, her teenage son. She knew something had revisited... something she tried to push away. It was back, or it had never left. She saw her boy

and his friend running toward the house, sweat pouring from their faces. They were shrouded in terror.

"Mom, mom! There is something up there, in the cave! It has people's heads stuck up on the cave wall mom!"

Kira grabbed her boy and squeezed him tight. He cried in her arms as though he were still eight years old, not the seventeen-year-old man he tried so hard to be. She stroked his head, told him it would be alright and began to tell him about her experience from weeks earlier. His shock outweighed any emotion that threatened to surface. Something was terribly wrong... and everyone was in great danger.

The visitors hunted daily. They started out in inconspicuous spots, taking those no one would miss. When that was exhausted, they began to hunt for others, no matter where they were, in their homes, at their jobs, taking a walk in the park. It didn't matter to them. It was all about the hunt. They needed their trophies to take back to their planet, to show their hunting buddies what they had accomplished. Some of them even decorated their kills in advance of their trip home. They would seek out the best quality wood or metal on the planet and mount the heads of what they caught. They were anxious to get home so they could adorn their homes, filling their walls with the beautiful creatures they had killed. It was an honor in their world to acquire such exquisite trophies, expressions of their status and superiority.

Humans were a rare commodity in the universe.

Although violent and primitive, there was something majestic about them, something interesting, something worth having on a wall for all to see and admire. Besides, there was nothing about them that required the visitors to keep them alive beyond their external form. They were just a lower form of animal that could not communicate effectively with other species. They were nothing like other creatures on earth. Everything else knew

things that humans did not know. Other creatures' methods of communication were so far advanced, it was incomprehensible to the visitors that these humans could find it in their souls to kill them, that is if humans even had a soul. Humans killed each other.

The animals the visitors encountered told them stories from ages gone by about humans and their primitive and violent behavior. The birds told it from their perspective, the lion from theirs, the deer and bear from theirs. The insects told their story, the fish, and even the trees and flowers chimed in. They all shared their stories of these primitive creatures that came long after them,



and somehow began to act as though they were above them—as though they weren't the latecomers on the scene of life. The rocks were the most baffled, as they were the elderly of the earth, seeing and hearing everything that has ever happened throughout the millennium. Yet, the infant humans, who have had no ability to communicate with their predecessors, to learn about their origins and their place in the cycle of life, have claimed the earth and universe as their playground.

The visitors listened to every creature in abject horror, wondering how things took such a turn. They watched for centuries, hoping that the kingdom of non-humans were mistaken, or misled. But they weren't. They had even begun corrupting the non-human kingdom of creatures, slowly transforming their way of life. The visitors eventually realized they had to find out what made humans tick. What made them the way they were? They needed to experiment. Each new experiment yielded nothing. Ages went

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TASTES OF LIFE

BY PITTERSHAWN PALMER

Today I tasted the wind and realized that life's flavor was oddly unfamiliar. There was some semblance of what I was accustomed to, but there was this overpowering taste of uncertainty and fear. A fear of something, I would never know, and uncertainty of the mysterious future that lay ahead. But I knew one thing for sure, I was not the person I once was and this place that I called home was as alien to me as an eagle without wings. There was a huge chasm in my life, a hole that seemed abysmal. I was in a foreign land. And time seemed to stand still.

Unlike most days, I awoke this morning feeling out of sorts. The events

of the day ahead ran through my mind like a herd of elephant, leaving indelible footprints behind. I remembered everything and nothing at all. The hours to come seemed bleak, a fog of memories that would later resurface, subside, elude me as if they were not my own. I was in a strange land, the land of my skin. I went to take my usual morning shower. It was another scorching August morning, 102 degrees, yet I turned the water on as hot as I could bear it. Somehow it felt cooler than the dizzying figures that set my mind on fire. Thirty minutes later I stepped out of the shower,

pruned and soft.

There was a cardinal by the window, watching me as I dressed. It looked on as I pieced myself together, adding a new layer of skin. Without movement it watched in amazement as I, like a chameleon, transformed into a new creature. My skin went from brown to red; my feet became a black casing, very different from the ten toes and feet that were more than capable of carrying me across miles of time. I felt naked in my clothes. There was something unnatural about this ancient ritual performed long before I became aware of my existence. I imagine the cardinal is wondering why I bother. It has flown off in disgust, and rightfully so.

The sun hits my face as I step onto the concrete. I turn to look at the cave they call an apartment. They say it's a brownstone, I say it is simply brown stone, nothing more than a highly decorated cave. I leave this artificially lit cavern, realizing immediately that I am on the hunt. I will continue to hunt for at least another forty years before I realize that all I really needed was food, water, shelter and skin coverings during the winter months.

But I venture off into this vast unknown, alien planet, and do as the Romans do, hoping that they will eventually tell what all this hubbub is about. As I float past my fellow creatures, I see some familiar faces, with new and different expressions. I see the fear in their faces, but they behave as if they feel nothing. Good morning, nice weather we're having, you look well today, is all I hear. No one talks about the mystery. Who are we and why are we here? It's written all over their faces, but they're all afraid to be the first to cast doubt on the things they spent their entire lives telling their spirit. They don't want to let go of the fantasy of superiority in what they would call an inferior world. This world that we have convince ourselves we have a handle on.

What is this place? Yesterday, without question, I knew where I was and who I was; today the world has a strange aftertaste. The flavor is too sweet, too sour, too salty, too bitter. Too disturbing.



THEY CAME LIKE US...CONTINUED

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by and their behavior did not waiver, save for a few who seemed aware, but were powerless to change their situation. The experiments eventually gave way to curiosity by others from their planet. Eventually, people wanted to see these human creatures, what they looked like, how they acted. They wanted to collect them, as souvenirs. So many began to hunt for them. The hunt continues.

Detective Jones got wind of the Williams boy's experience. He decided to take a trip up to the cave, in hopes that it was nothing more than a teenager's active imagination. He hiked up the mountain, wondering what he would discover, if anything. He couldn't understand why his heart was beating almost out of his chest.

"What the hell is wrong with me?"

"What you say boss?" asked his deputy.

"Nothing. Let's go. Move it."

They climbed until they finally reached the top, and the mouth of the cave. They carefully walked inside, hoping that nothing was asleep that might be frightened into attacking them. The mountains were a home for the black bear, which spotted the hills for miles around.



The men saw some of what the boys had mentioned. They knew then that what they didn't want to believe was probably further on down inside. Their heartbeats were almost audible, building pace the further in they walked. A light raised to a distant wall adorned with the heads of people. Jones gasped and turned to walk in the opposite direction when he was grabbed by something that outpaced him and was more than a head taller.

It spoke in English.

"Welcome," it said in a sinister voice. "You will be a perfect addition to my wall."

"Why are you doing this to us," Jones cried in terror.

"Because you are primitive and because we can."

"Because you can? That is no reason to harm us. We've done nothing to you. Don't you have any sense of right and wrong? How could you do this without thinking?"

"How? Why?" responded the visitor. "We learned this behavior a long time ago, and although we had our own way of living, we saw that maybe this was not such

a bad thing."

"Where on earth did you learn that from?" cried Jones, as the visitor squeezed his neck, further cutting off his airway.

"Where? On earth?" the visitor laughed. "Everywhere! Everywhere on earth taught us this. You taught us. We believe you now after centuries that it is ok to take advantage of what is imagined to be a lower life form. And we see you as a lower life form. But have no fear, we do not take all of you...only those who believe as you do, that other creatures are primitive and lower, and not deserving of life. We only do this to those who believe themselves superior. There will be many humans left. But not those who are not working as a part of the cycle of life; those we will study, and examine, and hunt."

There was a strange hush that blanketed earth one day. Overnight it seemed that wars, famine and hatred ceased. The few who were left began anew, nurturing the planet and rebuilding it

so that it could sustain every living thing. They did not try to control it, but worked to end control of it, allowing it to heal on its own—that was their method of rebuilding. The change came with very little fanfare. The visitors openly began to walk among those who were left. There was a mutual respect that grew over time, not only for the visitors, but also for every rock, tree and creature on earth. A new form of communication arose from the confusion. The remaining humans learned how to understand all those creatures that had come before them. It was a time of awakening...the question was, how long would it last.

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A Field of Lilies: A Short Story

by pittershawn palmer

Prologue

They call me Lily. They said it's because I was born with a birthmark on my left thigh that looks a lot like a real lily, just not as majestic, not as loved, not as beautiful. I've never felt much like a lily, so I don't know why they decided to name me that. But it's my name, and I've gotta live with it, even though it don't feel much like the truth. But I don't know much about the truth these days, maybe never have. My daddy told me there ain't no truth in the world. He said the sooner I realized and accepted that, the better off I'd be. But believing that ain't made me much better off. He still come in my room at night, whispering in my ear about mama and her triflin' ways. He says he feel better when he touch me. And of my thirteenth birthday, said he wanted to give me a birthday present, something special just from him. It was one of many birthdays. I was hoping for a break that night, but after the first slap across my mouth for asking, I knew there was no use trying to stop it. So I pretended he was Sammy from my gym class. Sammy was the cutest boy in the school. But he didn't notice me. He hardly even said hello sometimes. Sammy had all the girls chasing after him. But I wouldn't chase him. I just watched him from a distance, hoping that one day he would see me. I saw him almost every time my daddy came in to be with me. I saw Sammy touching me and making me feel good. Sammy was a good lover, best there ever was. But some days, Sammy



didn't show up. And I was alone, alone in my mind with my daddy and his heavy breathing and pumping. He pumped me like I wasn't a person, like I wasn't there, like I was just something for him to get off on, like a blow up doll. I wished every night that someone would stick a pin in me, deflate me so he couldn't touch me no more, so he couldn't reach me in the places I tried to hide.

...to be continued

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