



~ Part two of four ~

WORLD OF THE FIFTH SUN

a short story by Jeff Harrison ~ Illustration by Wade Shaw

The phone rang. Isabel dug her perfectly manicured, scarlet nails hard into the cheeks of Zack's naked ass. He grunted, then moaned as he climaxed. Untangling herself from him, she pushed him away and pulled her skirt back into place.

Zack stood dumbly mute, pants undone, still coming down from his orgasm. Isabel'd had her way with him, like usual, on her desk, but now that more important matters demanded her attention, she expertly finished him off and pushed him towards the door like a lost puppy, as she flicked on her earpiece and took the call on the fourth ring.

When he didn't move, Isabel shot him a piqued look and silently mouthed the words "Get out." He must have looked as wounded as he felt in that moment, because she covered the earpiece mic, blew him a kiss and whispered, "See you tonight."

Zack left Isabel's office still trying to tuck his shirt in, feeling lightheaded and a little amazed at the brazen way she loved to have sex with him in her office, the frosted glass of her door the only thing keeping the entire floor from seeing his indiscretions with their boss.

He'd finished his way overdue feature that morning over breakfast, inspired by his crazy dream the night before. Handing it in to her personally is what had precipitated the encounter. She hadn't even looked at it.

"Dude," Nick, his cubicle mate stage whispered to him from across the divide, "your fly's down."

Zack felt the blood rush to his cheeks even as he zipped up and sat down at his desk. Did the whole staff know he was having sex with their editor, in her office? Then a thought struck him: was he the only one who was? Isabel took what she wanted when she wanted it and it was very unlikely anyone said no to her, as smoking hot as she was. It suddenly put the knowing look he always got from her executive assistant into

clear perspective.

Zack swivelled his chair—he had the perfect view of the frosted glass door to Isabel's office from where he sat. It was just in time to see a broad shouldered UPS delivery guy disappearing through the portal and Isabel sitting atop her desk in her "predatorial" position: body twisted sinuously toward the newcomer, hands clasped on knee, legs crossed at the ankle, the ball of her lower foot planted on the brightly woven area rug in front of her desk. Then the door swung shut leaving him with the memory of the time they'd had sex on that very rug.

Zack shook his head. "I need a coffee," he said to no one in particular.

"Sure thing bro," replied his cubicle mate. "I'll cover for you."

"Thanks." Zack tossed the word over his shoulder as he left. He ducked into the elevator and brooded all the way down, across the street and until he sat down on the small patio with his steaming Americano.

He'd never spoken once to Isabel about exclusivity, but suddenly he felt used; then immediately stupid for getting emotionally involved in what was definitely just sex. It was clear that she didn't think their relationship beyond that. Given the time they spent together though, he must be pretty high on her apparently busy list. That thought gave him no comfort. He chided himself for being the emotionally vulnerable one.

An intermittent hiss, like the prolonged sibilance of a laughing snake seemed to mock his self-examination. The noise was distant, but poignant, and way too appropriate for the moment. Where was it coming from?

Across the street, a little ways down the alley, between a bridal boutique and a lady's designer fashion store, an Amazonian woman with skin the colour of his Americano was quickly throwing up a brightly coloured mural. The hissing sound was coming from the spray paint cans she held, one in each hand, deftly

moving them like an artist's brushes. She was very good and very fast. Even now as she swapped her cans of yellow and green for black and white—defly capping them and slipping them into her black leather shoulder bag, where she retrieved the new ones—he could see her blobs of formless colour immediately taking on shape as she defined them with shadows and highlights. The green banner became a thick-bodied snake, even as the yellow block resolved itself into a giant spotted cat, each animal devouring the tail of the other.

Zack dropped his coffee, cup smashing into saucer and hot liquid splashing across the small marble topped table, over his hands and into his lap. People turned to see what the sudden commotion was, but Zack was blind to their alarm, senseless to the scalding heat across his fingers and legs. She was painting the scene from his dreams.

She looked over at him from across the street and when her eyes met his, the jolt of electricity that arced between them shocked him into motion. He vaulted the low wrought iron fence staking out the cafe tables from the sidewalk, and sprinted across the four lanes of traffic. Lunch hour was busy on Spadina and cars screeched to a honking halt, the blasts of angry horns that chased him to his destination distant to his ears, as every sense was focused on her—this woman who knew his dreams.

By the time he reached her, she'd already turned back to her mural and was quickly finishing up the details. Slashes of brown became tree trunks as lighter green resolved into jungle canopy; red in the remainder of the yellow became a bleeding orange sunset; red again dripped wetly from the snake's scaly hide where the cat's claws raked away the emerald colour; dripped beads from serpentine fangs buried in the sleek feline rump.

Zack stopped as suddenly as he'd started running, strangely nervous of careening over the illusionary edge of the painted cliff where the two creatures fought.

"How...?" he started to ask, but then let his voice trail off as the logical part of his mind kicked in with the realization of how crazy he was about sound, asking

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this stranger how she knew about his dream.

The hissing of the twin aerosol cans ceased. "Good. You're not a cop. Racing across the street at me like that I was afraid you were a cop." The lids made a light popping sound as the cans were capped and put away. She turned to regard him with bright green eyes. "You're lucky you made it through traffic without getting killed. Still, you've

caused enough commotion that we should probably be going before a cop does show up. They are never appreciative of spontaneous art in public places."

She headed farther down the alley at a brisk pace. "Public space, such a misnomer," she muttered. "I've never understood why they can only be enjoyed by *some* of the public and under very certain rules. If it's truly public space, should not the public be free to use it as they please? And why are public spaces always so barren and ugly, so concrete and dead?" She glanced over her shoulder at him once and then disappeared around the corner, down another side alley.

There was no question in Zack's mind that he must follow this exotic woman, so he took off after her. Rounding the corner she'd vanished down he was just in time to see her ascending a rusty iron fire escape. He climbed the ladder and trailed her up to the third story and through the open widow, where brightly dyed green on green curtains drifted in the afternoon breeze.

It took his eyes a moment to adjust to the dark cave-like interior of her apartment, but once they did, he saw her sitting on an orange futon, legs crossed in the lotus position, looking at him with those bright green eyes.

"Tell me about the graffiti you just did," he blurted.

She blinked once at him and let out a long sigh before unfolding from her seated position and sashaying over to a small galley kitchen.

"You sound like the establishment condemning public art as an act of vandalism." She sounded disappointed.

Picking up an enamel kettle the same colour as the futon, she filled it at the sink and put it on the stove, igniting the gas burner. As the bright blue flame licked at the orange vessel, she routed through a cedar wood spice cabinet hanging above the range. Exotic smells

wafted his way as she pulled out many coloured cloth bags and small metal tins and glanced at paper labels, finally settling on a glossy black box, a miniature clay amphora and flat bottomed glass tube filled with a brilliant vermilion powder.

"Graffiti is but one modality in a wide range of self-expression called street art." As she spoke, she began to move fluidly around the kitchen. "Street artists challenge the idea of commercial art by situating it in a non-art context, like an alley, under a bridge or on the side of a building." She pulled a garish, multi-coloured teapot and two matching mugs from a cupboard and set them on the counter. "The idea of street art is to pull viewers out of the traditional milieu of the galleries and make it an everyday occurrence to be experienced by everyone, not just the connoisseur and the snob in the staid gallery setting. Why should art only be appreciated by those of privilege, or those with money?"

Here, for the first time, she stopped long enough to give him a level stare. He was hypnotized by those searching green eyes, like she wanted something from him, but what? When Zack didn't answer, she smiled. He loved how her plump lips curved into the expression and how her eyes crinkled around the edges, like she was up to no good.

She continued, "Art has always been meant for the enjoyment of the everyday people. From the dawn of civilization it was always thus. It's a form of storytelling and storytelling has always been the life blood of the people. So why do we keep it locked up now? Because stories are power to the people and the street artists seek to return that power to the common folk."

"So what story are you telling," Zack asked, sitting at the small, rickety wooden table.

"I tell stories of love. Stories of the everyday loves of ordinary people—the ongoing conversation of our city's never-happening dream with Mother Earth."

"Okay," he said after the silence had stretched on for a while. The kettle boiled with a gentle, high whistle. "So tell me about the story you are telling with the piece I saw you just create on that alley wall back there."

A heady bittersweet aroma filled the small kitchen

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nook as boiling water was poured over the mixture of brown herbs, green leaves and red powder she'd portioned out of the containers she'd selected earlier and dropped in the bright teapot. That, along with the matching mugs, were set out on the table between them.

"And what the hell is up with the snake and the cat?" he finally asked, no longer able to contain himself.

Sitting down across from him, she folded her legs back up into the lotus position and filled their mugs with a steaming hot, creamy pale pink beverage that looked and smelled like no tea he'd ever had before.

"Do you not think the fat cats are devouring the natural world to satiate an endless greed for material power?" she asked him back.

"Sure."

"You don't sound very convinced. Yet, every last one of your articles talks exactly about this. Clearly your head listens to your heart, so why do you continue to exist in a state of complete denial?"

Zack had absolutely no answer for that and took a long sip of his tea to buy time for a reply. It was still too hot and he burned his tongue.

"Maybe," she breathed, as her eyes seemed to stare right through him, "you are not in denial, so much as your head and your heart are at war."

He would have asked for clarity on this cryptic statement, but his mouth was suddenly dry and...he was starting to feel...funny. Sweat sprung out on his brow and he found it difficult to swallow. He grabbed his tea and took another gulp. That solved the dry mouth problem, but when he set his mug back down, his hostess' face undulated strangely before him like she was being obscured by mist, or steam.

Putting his palms flat on the table before him he sought to steady himself. "What did you put in that tea?" His voice was a hoarse croak to his ears.

"Answers to your questions, I hope," she replied.

Zack felt himself falling and then everything went black.

Jeff Harrison is Editor-in-Chief of PinkPlayMags