

# I.O.W.A



A SHORT STORY BY PEACHES PACIONE  
AND LEWIS UNKNOWN

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*By Peaches Pacione & Lewis Unknown*

Yeah sure man I got a bit of time, you want to buy me a drink? Just so you know I don't swing that way, if you're ok with that then I'll have a double of Jackie D with some ice. So if you're not after my beautiful body then what do you want? You're a writer, and that prick of a bartender told you I had a good story... Motherfu— you'll pay me... How much? All right then, sit yourself down because that asshole was right, I do have a story and it's a Moby-fucking-Dick sized whale of a tale, if you'll pardon my French.

You see that pretty lady in the corner, the brunette in the leather jacket? That's Patricia, she's my little woman, my muse, the love of my fucking life, and that smile on her face means she probably just pissed her pants. That'll be the third time today. The good news for the cleaners is that she's wearing a diaper; the bad news for me is that once we're done talking I'm going to have to go change it. She never used to be like that and she wouldn't be today if we hadn't moved to Iowa. No, that's not right it's all my fucking fault, well me and three bucks.

Three fucking bucks... Christ, it's always the little things that get you isn't it? Al Capone, the original motherfucking gangster, and they finally get him because he fiddled his taxes and me... If I hadn't been such a cheap son of a bitch and ponied up another three bucks she wouldn't be like that. She was so alive! She had this smile that made you really believe everything was going to be all right, even if you knew you were screwed six ways to Sunday. Sorry man I know I'm rambling but this isn't easy for me – another drink? Yeah, I'm going to need it. Right the three bucks. Well we were living together when this happened, had been for six of the happiest months of my life. I was playing bass in a garage band, doing some local gigs and she was selling jewellery in a New Age store in the mall.

One night I went to the drug store because we're out of condoms, and instead of getting the usual ones I grab these knockoffs that were three bucks cheaper so I could get a pack of smokes as well. Yeah you can see where this is going, so one split condom later and we were looking at a pregnancy test telling us the stork is on his way. Only problem was we couldn't afford a baby, at that point we were barely keeping our own heads above the fucking water, she couldn't go to her parents for help and mine died when I was a teenager. In the end we figured the only thing we could do was get an abortion.

I pawned my amp and borrowed as much as I could to afford it. The day came and I took Patricia to the clinic and sat in reception while this nurse led her through. The nurse was one creepy bitch, she had this big friendly smile but her eyes were cold and hard, like a rattle snake trying to decide just how it was going to bite you. That was the longest wait of my life, and I can't imagine what she was going through in that room. When she came out she was shaking, pale and had tears in her eyes. I swear that creepy nurse snarled something at me when I took her in my arms and held her while she burst into tears, but the only thing I could hear was her sobbing. She didn't say a word during the drive home and I didn't push her, when she was ready to talk she would and besides I think there was nothing I could have said that would have made a difference. The only thing I could do was be there for her and I was determined to do just that. She almost flinched from my touch when we went to bed, I heard a panicky whispered no, but soon she crumpled into me when she realised that all I wanted was to hold her. She began to cry again, and all I could do was whisper into her ear that everything was going to be all right, that we had made the right choice over and over again in the vain hope that she'd start to believe it, or maybe it was to convince myself. I don't know when either of us fell asleep, but there's no way in hell I'll forget when we woke up.

It started as a dream. I was dreaming about a kid, she was a little girl maybe five years old, blonde curls, with a smile to break your heart, and she was our daughter. We were happy watching her play on a swing, a perfect family living in a house in the 'burbs, perfectly cut green lawn surrounded by a white picket fence with a lazy old dog lying in the yard watching the traffic go by. Then she fell off the swing, the clouds covered the sun, and all I could hear was her crying. In the dream we were frozen in place just watching her sit there on the grass crying. Then I woke up and the crying didn't stop. It was coming from in-between me and her, along with a smell of rotting meat and this sticky, slimy... thing pressed up against us.

I threw off the blanket, jumped out of bed and turned on the light just as Patricia started to scream, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I screamed right along with her as she scrabbled backwards off the bed trying to get away from it. It was just lying there in the bed crying its milky blind eyes out, this lumpy, misshapen red thing that smelled like a slaughterhouse and was covered in blood and slime that glistened in the electric light. It was like someone had taken a baby and dumped it in battery acid, and even before it started calling out, "Momma! Dadda!" I knew it was ours, our aborted child come back to haunt us. The lights flickered all of a sudden and the crying stopped. It was gone. The evidence we weren't just fucking nuts was still there though, the two of us covered in slime and gore and the big, red, stinking stain on the bed.

Patricia was in shock, she just sat there on the floor rocking backwards and forwards, not saying a thing. I had to manhandle her into the shower, and strip her nightgown off so I could clean us up. She stood there just blankly staring at the red water swirling down the drain, it wasn't until it was nearly gone she started to cry. After we dried off I went back into the bedroom and got us some clothes to wear, I didn't want her to have to see that stain. We sat on the couch silently, her in my arms until morning and neither of us slept. We didn't talk about it but we both knew we couldn't spend another night in that house, so I called around and found a friend who'd be willing to put us up for a few days. Then I threw as much of our stuff that would fit into the back of the car. Sometimes being poor can be a blessing in disguise as the only thing I really had to leave behind was the furniture, most of which belonged to the landlord anyway. Once she was sitting in the passenger seat I went back into the bedroom, dragged that mattress out the back and set it on fire. If we came back I wanted nothing there to remind her it was anything more than a nightmare.

Our friends, let's call them Jack and Jill, were very understanding even though we couldn't tell them the full story. Jill took Patricia through to the guest room for girly talk while Jack and I had a beer. I couldn't tell him the truth about what had happened that night so we just talked about football and the new Metallica album, nice safe topics and when Jill and Patricia came through to join us for dinner I could see she was feeling more like herself, in fact at that point I began to wonder if the whole thing hadn't been a hallucination. That night would prove me wrong.

Again it started in a dream, this time I was teaching the little girl how to ride her first bike while Patricia was watching and shouting encouragement. Then the little girl fell off the bike, the clouds came rolling in again, she began to cry and I woke up to Patricia screaming and our... child? Could it even be called that? Well whatever you want to call it, the thing was sucking on her breast while Patricia flailed at it, desperately trying to get it off her. I grabbed it, every inch of my flesh crawling in disgust at the feel of its slimy, unformed flesh and threw it against the wall, where it made a soft splat of a sound and slowly slid down the wall. It was at that point that Jack and Jill came running in to see what was happening.

I couldn't explain it at the time; I mean how the hell do you tell someone you're being haunted by the ghost of your aborted daughter? We grabbed our things and went looking for a motel. We didn't get back to sleep that night. Come the next day I had to go play a gig, we needed the money more than ever, otherwise I'd have called it off. I tried to convince Patricia to come with me, thinking that being around people might cheer her up a little, but she just looked at me like I wasn't even there and told me she'd be fine, that everything would be fine. God I wish I'd stayed with her, that I'd seen the signs... I guess it's true what they say, if wishes were fishes, beggars wouldn't starve.

Look man, I'm going to need another drink before we go on, do you mind? Thanks, you see Patricia had picked up a little souvenir from Jill's medicine cabinet, something I didn't find out until I got a call from Jack in-between sets asking me, oh so politely, where the fuck were his wife's sleeping tablets. I may have hurt his feelings when I dropped the phone and ran for my car, but at that point I didn't give a damn.

I tried to ram the accelerator through the goddamn floor and I was driving like a cross between a racing driver and a maniac. I had two police cars chasing me by the time I got to the motel, and it was a damn good thing I did. I ran into our room to see her lying on the bed, so still, so fucking still. The empty pill bottle was sitting on the nightstand and that familiar bloody stain and smell of rotting meat was floating around the room like cheap perfume. I was trying to shake her awake, screaming at her not to leave me alone when the cops burst in and dragged me to the floor. They called for an ambulance and performed what first aid they could, while I tried to explain what was happening to them.

They let me ride to the hospital with her and sit in her room, I owe those cops more than I can ever repay. I didn't sleep that night so I actually saw the thing make its appearance: it was like a shadow lying on the bed that grew darker and then began to expand until it was the size of a baby. Then the shadow began to lighten and you could start to make out some colour, eventually all that was left was it lying there in all its slimy, red glory. I watched it for a few minutes as it vainly cried out for its mother and tried to get any kind of reaction out of Patricia. Then I stood up, I knew what it was and what I had to do. I wrapped it up in my jacket and held it until morning rocking it and singing lullabies until it stopped crying and just lay there in my arms. At some point I called it Lucy, we'd always said we'd call our first kid Lucy if it was a girl and that's what it – no, what she was, Lucy my little angel. I never saw her again.

Patricia was in a coma for a week, and after that first night nothing out of the ordinary happened again. Jack and Jill came by to visit and we mended bridges, they also brought me a newspaper which was how I figured out what had actually happened to us. The front page was about how a nurse at the abortion clinic had been killed in a traffic accident, that same creepy nurse with the rattlesnake eyes. Normally that wouldn't have been front page news but what they found in her apartment definitely was. The bitch had been stealing the remains of the aborted fetuses and using them in some fucked up ritual. The paper couldn't go into any detail but they mentioned that according to her diary she was barren and was punishing women who had had abortions out of some kind of fucked up hatred at them squandering a gift she could never have. I knew that's what had happened to us, that fucking bitch had stolen Lucy's body and used it in some fucked up black magic ritual to make her ghost haunt us. Though I suppose I should be a little grateful since I got to hold my daughter once, but the price she charged was too fucking steep.

When Patricia woke up she was suffering brain damage from her suicide attempt. Her parents didn't want anything to do with her but she still trusted me, even if she didn't recognise me at first so I took care of her. It was the least I could do, you know? The settlement we got from the abortion clinic was enough for us to live the rest of our lives on, could have been more but I settled for a reduction in exchange for Lucy's body,

which I buried in the jacket I held her in at the hospital, it just seemed right. Still look at her in the corner, giggling away, it kills me every time I see her because I remember how she was before this mess, but that's my fucking penance isn't it? For the sake of three dollars I turned the most beautiful woman in the world into a fucking I.O.W.A....

Hmm, oh you don't know what I.O.W.A. is; some stupid greasy little Italian Goth wannabe called her it. It stands for Insane Out Walking Around, of course I kicked his ass so badly he ran all the way back to his Granny's basement in Illinois but fuck, it sums her up doesn't it, I.O.W.A.. Come on, one last drink for Patricia and Lucy, and for me and you, Mr Writer. When all's said and done we're all fucking Insane Out Walking Around anyway, so let's knock it back and you can tell me what you're going to do with my story.