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The Pale

By Liz Williams

30 August 2004

She came out of the poisoned sea, my mother, out of darkness and winter. When my father found her she was close to death. The December storms had beaten her to and fro and at last the sea had cast her up onto the shingle. My father said that he had been watching from the cliff top, and, thinking that a seal had been washed ashore, he had rushed down to retrieve the fat carcass. It was rare to find a seal this far into the reaches, or fish, or anything that had not been transformed by the waters: things with lumps where their heads should be, things that were eyeless. When my father found her, he saw that she was not a seal after all, but a woman.

Long, long ago the people in Shetland and Orkney called them the seal people, the selkies, and even now, in this year of our Lady one thousand and ten, you still sometimes heard the ancient name. The men of the trawlers said that the selkies had always been there, riding the tide. Sometimes they came to shore and, casting aside their sealskin guise, would sit on the rocks, singing and strolling as one might walk upon a summer Sunday. Who could believe such talk of magic these days, now that we have been abandoned by the world beyond the Pale, our ruined coasts closed? Yet, now that I am grown, it seems to me that if there is a time for legends to come true, it is in this new century, now that science has failed us and truth is open to interpretation.

My father gathered the woman up from the rocks, and she lay heavily in his arms, like a sodden counterpane. There was blood in her hair. Stumbling, he carried her up the beach and along the hawthorn track to the house, where he set her down in front of the fire. Then he sat back on his heels to catch his breath, and looked at her. He could see very little of her face beneath the covering, but as he watched she opened her eyes and stared at him.

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

[Archived Fiction Dating back to 9/1/00](#)

