

Teachers – Writers – Poets

On the Landing

by Iris Devadason (India)

And then one day it happened, the realization of my hitherto vague fears. He called out to me and said: "...and so you decided to come, at last. How long I have waited for you. Of course, you are from a different world, a different time and so much younger than I am but we are soul mates aren't we? When I looked upon you, your time was the time of love; I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you and you became mine."

My heart froze in despair. It can't be real I said to myself. Did I really want him to appear? Do lustful dreams and desires become embodied at last if you wish for them desperately? Is this not a sin? But then those beautiful liquid-brown eyes! The crooked smile and those delicate long hands with fingers like a painter's or musician's! I ached to see him now but where was he?

How was I to enter the blocked-up room or vault behind the wooden panel that I had long suspected of leading to somewhere in my consciousness. Dare I reply? Even before I could think of how and what to say I felt someone behind me, so close, so warm. He still smoked and his perfume was the same...the bottle of lotion I had sneaked into his room one day those many years ago...the pile of cigarette butts in the ashtrays. I turned without hesitation and looked but it was too bright suddenly and I couldn't focus my eyes on anything. 'Please', I prayed to no one in particular as I had never believed in any God anyway. 'Please let him be seen'. After all these years one glance, one touch, one word fitly spoken might wipe out the pain of centuries of unfulfilled desire.

The light grew dim and I thought I saw him now.... That familiar stance and that teasing smile. As I forced myself to move towards him to the room below where he seemed to have fallen suddenly the wooden beam supporting the panel fell down with a crash and another bright light from there blinded me temporarily. Firm hands grasped my throat. I struggled to be free but I saw that it was Uma, his wife. She was always the pretty one with her huge big eyes and wide smile and

fun and laughter. She dressed to kill too and men fell for her easily. She could pick and choose and then discard and she had done so. He had come back to me and so why is she here again I reasoned, as earthbound as I was. But as we struggled on that landing, the only sane place for me at the moment beyond time and space and love and hate, I realized the foolishness of my desires. He was weak-willed. He might have stifled my soul forever. He deserved his fate and I my freedom from foolish lust. My writing had fed my soul all these years and this house had beckoned me to do more. Now Uma's hands on my neck seemed to loosen the pressure of her hate and I was free.

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They found her next morning crumpled on the floor of the landing. Why had she come here to write, this strange woman from another world? Did not love and hate transcend mortal lives? The coroner's report was simpler. 'The loose beam projecting from the wall on the landing had crashed and hit the unsuspecting tenant on the forehead and she had died instantly', it said. The family had been intimated, the beam restored to its original position and fixed securely now. The landlord put in another advertisement for the house the next week. Life goes on, indifferent to individual aspirations. Some of us land on our feet, others on the landing.

