

The Hallway

We coupled in the afternoons. I would sacrifice a vacation day just to be with him, to lie beside him on my living room carpet. Aristotle believed the wise man should seek not pleasure but freedom from care and pain. Clearly, the great Greek philosopher neglected to calculate into the equation the wiles of women. We are culprits. I never set out to destroy my love for my husband. My love simply moved to another. It's really a sinful, diabolical thing, the heart. One day you marry the man of your dreams and years speed by your nose and the next thing you know the new love of your life crosses the street.

My brother, Michael, unexpectedly came to the door. Mom worries about me. If she doesn't speak to me on the telephone every day she naturally assumes I'm face down in a ditch with rats gnawing at my raw flesh. We were admiring our naked bodies. I laid down a comforter to avoid soiling the bed sheets. We heard a knock. I threw on my kimono and answered the door. Thankfully I remembered to close the chain. I peered through the three-inch crack.

"You scared the bejeebers out of me...what are you doing here?" Michael shrugged his shoulders. He expected to be let in but I had no intention of doing so.

"Mom's worried sick about you. She called your work. They said you took the day off. You didn't answer your phone." He spoke politely with squinting eyes. Through his curious eyes, I could see the wheels turning in his head.

"She won't leave me alone, that woman!" I closed the opening to my kimono. Kumar ran into the bedroom. He was terrified of being found out. I was too, come to think of it. My brother and my husband were close friends. They both shared a love of marijuana; smoking until the blinds took on a pale-yellow tint from thick, curling smoke. I never objected. Everyone needs a vice. Trouble started when his libido went into hiding. He lost interest in playing hide the sausage with me. That's when I began to get up to no good.

"Well, I'm just fine," I said with a snarl. Michael looked down. Why, I have no idea. He looked down at my bare feet and saw the leather shoe, Kumar's brown leather shoe. I was

anxious to get at him. I made him disrobe in the hallway, throwing his clothes off to the side. He was candy to me. I couldn't tear my tongue away from devouring his honey-suckle flesh.

Kumar was at least five inches taller than me. We brushed up against one another at the annual Christmas party. I gulped three rye and Cokes before I spoke to him.

"I think the happiest of people are those who are ignorant." I tried to impress him with my flatulent opinion.

"How so?" he asked, moving in closer. My blouse was stretched across my bosom; a taut mast guiding the sailboat through choppy waters, one large wind and everything would topple. I thrust out my chest. I expected his eyes to eventually lower. The girls were accustomed to attention.

"Well," I said, taking a long pause for dramatic effect. "You can't get through the day without tripping over ignorance. It's all around us. There's nothing happier than a fool, right?" I had no idea what I went on about but I didn't let that stop me.

"Take me for example, I'm having too many drinks at this party, definitely a no-no, and I'm flirting with you and rather enjoying it. If that's not the epitome of ignoramus behavior." I allowed my eyes to settle into his. He smiled. He must have thought the same thought as I did at that very moment. I wanted to ravage him in the office, to throw him over a table and tear away his clothes. Oh, the things I could do to him with my tongue.

"But you can hardly claim ignorance if you are knowingly cultivating an office romance." Kumar was no slouch. The drinks worked magic. I never would have spoken to him in such a flagrant manner were it not for liquid courage. Kumar laughed, touching my hand as he spoke.

"You're telegraphing your desire in bold letters across the sky," he said. He knew I wanted him. Even my alcohol-muddled mind figured this out. A man had always wanted my body with the same equal measure I desired his. I had fantasies about making love to an Indian man - how exotically erotic.

"Tell Mom I'll call her later today." I slammed shut the door in Michael's face. I ran to the bedroom and laughed, finding Kumar in the closet.

"You're a cliché! You picked the closet to hide in, of all places." He started laughing. He looked so darn sexy standing nude, his soft penis dangling in the open. I wanted him.

"Who was that at the door?" he asked. I saw the look of worry on his face as though our secret rendezvous on my living room carpet could no longer be, becoming a lost cousin to the past. I read it all on his face in a split-second.

"Only my brother." I tried to re-assure him. "My Mom is behind this, pressuring him to check on me that everything's all right. I'm a married woman!" Kumar gathered his clothes. I wasn't ready for him to leave. I had only enjoyed one orgasm. He typically gave me three, my lucky number. I walked ahead of him to the hallway. I hid his shoes, dropping each into a deep pocket of my husband's overcoat hanging in the closet. He wouldn't think to look for them there. He couldn't leave without them, even though he had fully dressed, socks, pants, shirt and all. My Lord, he looked ravishing, those opaque, black pearl eyes and tight buns. Kumar was married. I met his wife at a party when our hearts collided. She was a beautiful woman, rotund and serene, at least two inches shorter than me. And I'm not a tall woman. She had sadness about her, the melancholy evident in her unblinking eyes. I dropped to my knees. I was ready to do anything to entice him to remain. Kumar was unaffected by my open mouth, my bee-stung lips; both were powerful weapons.

"I have to leave," he said, searching for his shoes. "I thought I left them in the hallway. Where'd you put the bloody things?" He was perturbed. It was the first time I had seen this side of his personality, almost borderline rage.

"Baby, stay a little longer. We won't be able to get together for a while because I'm traveling next week." I hated my job. I hated traveling across country. It tore me away from my lover. I was bored to death with being married, bored out of every pore in my skin with work. Feeling like the dirty whore of a married man gave me goose bumps.

The phone rang. I picked it up, angry at being disturbed - so much for privacy.

"I'm really sorry about interrupting you," said Michael. His apology was sincere. I wanted to explain why I was at home. I knew the bastard had already figured it out. My husband had smaller feet. He was two inches taller, wearing size 9 and Kumar size 11. Kumar was tall for an

Indian man. He was erudite too, reading like a demon, until his eyes turned into a pathway of crimson veins. Michael went out on a limb.

"That shoe doesn't belong in your hallway." He spared me a direct inquiry.

"Just leave it be!" I shouted.

Kumar was frantic, tearing apart the house looking for his shoes.

"I have to get off the line. We'll discuss this later. Do me a favor and butt out of my life, PLEASE!" I hung up the receiver. I threw my arms around Kumar and spoke about the lurid things he could do to me. He was non-pulsed.

"Now, woman! I want my shoes!" I was shocked by his derogatory tone.

"You want your fucking shoes?" I said, running to the hallway. I pulled them out of the pockets and hurled one at his face. Kumar ducked. The wild throw nicked the edge of my limited edition print, landing with a thud to the floor. I took better aim for the second, holding up the weapon in front of him, threatening with a wild gesture. He stepped back, bracing himself for the onslaught. I cried instead, holding his shoe, pulling it closer to me.

"You'll have to pry it from my cold, dead body," I declared. Mom always said I was a bit of a drama queen. Sometimes it worked and other times I died on stage. Kumar walked toward me, softening the tone of his voice.

"My other shoe, please."

I wanted to believe he felt something deep and meaningful for me.

There can never be peace in every moment. The phone rang yet again.

"I've been standing outside your house for the last fifteen minutes," said Michael. "Guess who's car just pulled into the driveway?" I wanted to pummel his face. He had to be lying. Maybe he wasn't. I held Kumar's shoe tight. I knew it was over. Never again would I feel his tongue against my tongue, the touch of his lips against my skin. When we were together, he would kiss every part of my body, exploring me like a planetary globe.

"Be my friend, Michael. Stall him...just give me five minutes." I hung up the receiver and looked at Kumar. He stood in front of me wearing one shoe. He looked ridiculous. I wanted to laugh. Tears fell instead - they're so much more powerful when feeling powerless. I let his shoe

drop to the floor. I couldn't move. Kumar bent over. He stayed at my feet as he laced up. I lowered my gaze, looking at the top of his head, the crown of his dark hair, swirling into a counterclockwise curl. My hand reached below, touching him lightly. He had no idea how I felt. I never told him. I never told him that I fell in love with him. I couldn't fathom giving up my lover to another woman, least of all a wife. Those who are ignorant are not the happiest of people. You can build walls forty feet high and carefully wrap lies around you but there are no walls high enough to lock out the truth. The truth always finds a way in. Kumar didn't love me. He never said goodbye. He never kissed my lips or touched my arm, opening the door and leaving without saying a word. I broke down into a torrent of tears.

Michael watched out of the corner of his eye. Kumar passed both him and my husband on the street, coming from behind the back of our house. Michael greeted my husband who had walked to the end of the driveway to retrieve the garbage cans. The sanitation engineers had a habit of throwing the empty cans down the street as the dump truck sped off. Michael was the actor in the family. He shook my husband's hand as though he had just arrived. I saw it all from the second floor window. I felt my heart cave in, become a lesser thing. Kumar parked his car two streets down. I watched him cross the street, his head lowered, as he walked out of my life. Michael and my husband were sharing a joke. I stood in my bare feet with a drenched face. My mind was deluged with every cliché known to memory. *If you love someone set them free, if they come back they are yours...It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all...We always hurt the ones we love...You don't know what you have until it is gone...Love is blind.*

I stood up, wiped the smudged mascara under my eyes, dressed, checked my lipstick in the mirror, and went down stairs, to greet my husband. I didn't deserve him. I didn't know why he had returned home early, nor did I know how I was going to tell him the truth. But surely, I would. The smartest of people are those who embrace the truth.