

L O V E

The Morning Dew

...A love essay

By Durga Prasad Pandey

It wasn't love at first sight. When our eyes met, we didn't miss heartbeats. We smiled.

"Hi," she said, as I approached her at the counter, "How are you doing?"

"Hello! I am fine," I replied. "Could I have something to read about your products?"

She laughed happily at my request.

"I am not here to sell anything," she said, looking at my puzzled face. "I am supposed to tell whoever comes over to join the Natural Health Association."

"And I am here to have fun," I said.

"I have been watching you for a while, and you seem to be amusing yourself at different stalls. Are you from Hong Kong?"

"No," I said. "I am from India, and I am going back tomorrow, though I have plans of coming back." I couldn't help making the plan.

So that's how it began with Janice. I sat down with her, and we talked about our lives. We must have talked for a long time, for it was soon time for her to close the stall and go home.

Janice was Chinese, but she had grown up in England. She had recently returned to Hong Kong and started her practice in naturopathy.

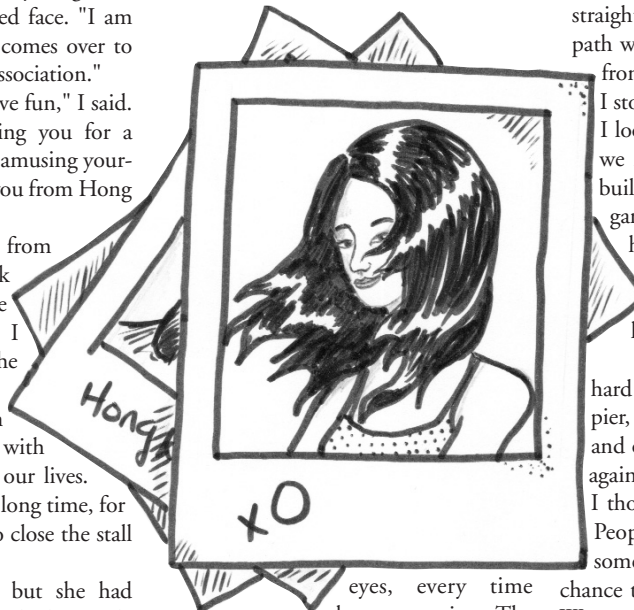
I offered to accompany her to her island, and she readily agreed. I had somehow managed not to find time to visit her part of Hong Kong; this was a good chance to catch up with my itinerary.

We emerged from the horde of stalls selling everything from books on healing, to essence for sexual prowess and herbal

massages. Outside, the evening breeze blew strands of her smooth, silky hair into my face. I would have closed my eyes, but for the rush of evening traffic.

We stopped by landmarks on the way, where she gave a short history of each, like the perfect travel guide. We took snapshots, and talked and walked along.

I couldn't help noticing the smooth glow of her skin. She smiled through her



eyes, every time they met mine. The skin-smile combination was a hit with me.

I wanted to walk holding her hand; like a couple; for some fleeting moments. I wanted to touch her soft fingers, hold her palms in mine, and kiss all the fingertips. I wanted to touch her face, and feel her soft silky hair. She was clean and fresh like morning dew.

I didn't do any of that. But we roamed with reckless abandon, like a

couple in passionate love, who care nothing about the world. I took mental snapshots of all the places we went to. Maybe I would come back some day, and the sight of the fountains, the malls, even the streets would bring all the memories alive...

Before I had expected, it was time for her to catch her bus home. I had to return and pack, too. My flight to Calcutta would leave early the next morning. Not that I had much to carry; my baggage consisted of a travel bag, and a large stack of brochures from the conference.

We stood in the queue at the bus-stand smiling at each other, not saying a word. I wanted to hold her hands, but her eyes would not leave me. And soon I found myself waving as she climbed into a bus and disappeared from view.

I turned around, but I didn't go straight to the ferry pier. I retraced the path we had taken together, backwards from the bus-stand to the ferry pier. I stood where we had stood together. I looked long and hard at the streets we had walked on. I looked at the buildings, the billboards, and the garden, and I thought of all that she had said about them. But most of all, I thought of the smile in her eyes, and the smooth skin of her arms.

And as I stood looking long and hard at the wooden planks on the pier, people rushed by me to get into and out of ferries. The shoes rubbing against it made the planks shinier, and I thought maybe life is like that too. People come into our lives, and sometimes we just don't give them a chance to rub their goodness against us. We are forever lost in the web of entanglements. We are always looking out for relationships, and missing much more that is beautiful, on the way.

And then I merged into the mass of humanity at the ferry pier, Janice floating in my eyes, the scent of her perfume in the air, the touch of her hair on my face.

And she was fresh and clean like the morning dew.

Illustration by Julie Comarda, WC 08