(Knock knock!)

“Yes, how may I help you?” a short heighted lady, probably in her mid forties, inquired politely through the narrow slit in the wooden door.

“Good Morning, I am here to see Mr. Clive, I am Rachel from ‘The Reader’.”

“Do come in, It is a cold morning.” She said as she opened the door to let Rachel in.

“Thank You, you must be Mrs. Clive, if I am not wrong. Pleasure to meet you Ma’m”

Mrs. Clive smiled warm heartedly.

“I’ll let him know that you have come, please take a seat.” She went upstairs leaving Rachel alone to look at the room.

It looked like a spacious manor from the outside. Probably a one and a half storey house, it bore an ordinary look from the outside. Interior was contrary to expectations. The door led into a hallway. It was warm inside. In the center were sofas arranged in a circular pattern. All seemed to have chestnut framework with weaved cane and jute. Cushions and pillows with circular and square shapes were neatly placed in a circle-diagonal-circle pattern. A small fireplace was placed to the east with two thick deep brown coloured cozy sofas facing it from the opposite ends. The cover of one of the sofas was ruffled and a small bundle of stapled pages lying on the peg table alongside. The lady must have been sitting by the fireplace. A big portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Clive and their daughter adorned its mantel. Colours near its bottom had started to fade a little from the heat. Netted curtains of yellow hues intricately embroidered with wool, beads and small shells tied neatly from the waists to the hooks nearby allowed filtered ambience into the hall through the full sized polished windows. Walls were painted in matte off white. To the west was a short flight of staircases leading to the upper rooms. Doors were polished lustrous deep brown just like the windows with scales of jute to artificially recreate the threads of a raw tree. They looked like blocks of wood that had just been carved and put in place. A wide alley concealed by heavy dark curtains divided the lower block wall lining. On its one side were shelves neatly stacked with varieties of alcohol, all locked inside sliding glass, Wine, Champagne, Sherry, Amontillado, Bordeaux, Cava, Martini, Chardonnay, Marsala, Rioja, surprisingly, all varieties of wine, no whiskey or beer. It seemed like someone here was an oenophile.

Mrs. Clive returned with the same warm smile on her face. “This way please!” she said escorting Rachel to Mr. Clive.

“You have exquisite tastes.” Rachel complimented her. Being a reporter and the best interviewer in ‘The Reader’, noticing minute details in an instant was second nature to Rachel. That is why she had been sent here. People often remarked that when she put on her Spectacles, meant she was ready to dissect and operate the subject and that the victim would soon be oozing out its secrets.

“Oh I don’t know much of it, its Richard who handles it. He has an eye for detail and beauty.” She answered gracefully.

Looking at Mrs. Clive, Rachel answered without hesitation coyly, “Of Course, it shows, he sure has seen the gardens and picked only the best.” Mrs. Clive blushed and smiled as they moved on.

Richard Clive had been a late bloomer, but what an explosion he had made with his first creation, as if it was his only shot to survival, which eventually made him a sensation. He’d been an auditor for most part of his previous life, working in a modest auditing company. Dealing with technicalities had been his daily routine, accounts, people, little scams and basic arithmetic; this was what he dealt with from 9 in the morning through 5 evening. Probably this was where his want for detail had stemmed from. He travelled to different places auditing, until one day when he decided to call it quits. His daughter was well settled and he had saved enough for himself and his wife to start a bookstore nearby and live a modest life. He loved literature, and his job had made him neglect his hobby of reading. But when he quitted, he found an opportunity to start anew. In the bookstore, he started writing casually, but on his wife’s urging, he completed the story and published it. Today, the same bookstore has emerged as the biggest in town, and people often come hoping to get a free autograph on the front of the book they buy.

As they climbed the staircase, Rachel notices that the frame too looks wooden, but is much too colder to be wooden, iron probably. She looks up to the ceiling and notices the meandering leaves made of plaster of Paris in dull gray on the edges and the huge chandelier hanging majestically the center of the ceiling. Rachel was getting a little impatient with the speed they were advancing.

“Richard does all his writing in the attic. He says he gets a better perspective from up there. His mood can be unpredictable sometimes. Some things of his stories reflect in him.” Mrs. Clive said, sensing her impatience.

“Oh!” replied Rachel, as if she knew what Mrs. Clive was talking about.

On the attic staircase, Mrs. Clive took her leave. Rachel climbed the staircase and turned the knob to the door. It was cold.

She was taken aback by what she saw…

(To be continued…)

P.S. This ain’t any horror story. It is just another simple story which is too long to be accommodated into a single post. Do bear with me, please!

P.P.S It is the first time that I am giving names to characters. So if you can relate the characters to some movie or serial or a person, go on, maybe I was having a déjà vu. ☺

Rachel, an interviewer from the leading magazine ‘The Reader’ had been assigned the task of interviewing Richard Clive, whose debut novel had been an international best seller. She makes a visit to his place on a cold morning and is greeted by his wife, who escorts her thorough the main hallway to the attic, where Richard often writes. Rachel being a journalist assimilates every detail of the hallway, ranging from the furniture to the ceiling chandelier. And now stands before the attic door…

Rachel climbed the staircase and turned the knob to the door. It was cold.

She was taken aback by what she saw. The room was in contrast with what she had just seen now. From no angle did it look like a study. She had just been absorbing the rich colours and exquisiteness of detail on her way up here, but now stood before her, a room, empty at best. Slanting roof, shallow walls, all flushed with white. Long in one direction, but a little constricted sideways. Floor was vinyl carpeted in brown. No shelves or cupboards to house any book, low wattage lights leaving the proper illumination at the mercy of the sun. It was not warm as downstairs, and all was quiet, much too quiet. It seemed like the place was in distress. The air was heavy and carried the scent of tobacco. Deserted, it was. Somewhere near the end of the room, there was light. A full size sliding window had been thrown open to let in air and light, which added to the chill.

Perplexed with the absurdity of this place, Rachel moved ahead with a contorted expression on her face. Just near the window were a wooden table and an armless chair. The chair had been moved slightly out of place with its seat slightly facing the window. On the table was a flower vase with a fresh black rose in it. A notepad was lying on the table and on top of it was an old pipe. Rachel entered the balcony. It was a cold and quiet morning. There Richard stood, gazing intently at the ground.

“Hello Sir, I am Rachel, from ‘The Reader’”, she politely interrupted his train of thoughts.

As if the spell was broken, he jumped back slightly. “Ah, I am sorry! I did not see you coming.” He smiled apologetically.

She extended her hand, smiling, “I am Rachel, from ‘The Reader’ “.

As they shook hands, Rachel noticed his hands were cold, just like the room. She had only seen him on the book cover before. He too might have been in his late forties or fifties maybe, but the years of mental labour as an auditor were clearly manifesting themselves in deep gorges and bends on his forehead, and the ever receding hair line of grays. Still, the patience and benevolence clearly showed in the way he maintained his stance.

“Sir, I read your ‘Another Routine’, it is very impressive I must say.” She started her ritual.

“Thank You Rachel, and I am Richard, if you may” said he.

She noticed that his mood was a little off, his face wasn’t hiding any emotion. “His mood can be unpredictable sometimes. Some things of his stories reflect in him.” Rachel remembered Mrs. Clive telling her.

“I guess you have been working on the next piece?” she tried to start again.

“Yes, I have been working on it for quite some time now.” He replied, his glum expression returning again, as if somebody had stepped on his nerves.

“Any insights?” She asked jokingly.

“Ah, just another casual story.” He replied.

“I learnt you liked reading from a young age, and then what prompted you to write after so many years?”

“Oh it was my wife, she has been a constant motivator. And she has been the one who revived my flare for literature in the first place.” He replied without hesitation.

“Yeah, she is a very gentle and motivating lady. So what makes your creations so alive? I mean, when I read the novel, I could easily imagine the scenes as if I was there myself. It all seemed so natural. Like it just happens around us every day.”

“I write it as I experience it. I am glad that it turns out that way.”

“Now we’re talking”, Rachel thought.

“That’s interesting, you mean to say that you feel what you write?” She asked.

“Why, yes. I try to experience them first hand, nothing second hand should pilfer the small emotions that I feel while I write.” He said affirming himself.

“But is it not like living alien lives?” she questioned.

“In a way yes, but isn’t it exciting. Stepping in someone else’s shoes, if only for a while?”

“But how can we do that?”She asked.

“That is what I try to find out while I write. For that, I describe them to myself, who they are, how they are, what they have, and every attribute that I can think of. I wouldn’t say they are fictional characters. They are always fueled from the characters I have met and lived with, or observed. Each character is a mix of many people whom I have met. And when we’ve shared some part of their lives, it is not that hard to emulate them, is it? The room inside is my workspace, my sway to create the surrounding and environment I want.” He explained it quite lucidly and plainly.

“That explains why you take so much time in writing?” she was trying to understand.

“Probably, I can’t say anything about other authors. I treasure my characters.” He said fondly.

“That’s so benign! But you look a little off today? And does this attic always bear this semblance.”

A sudden wave of nostalgia swept past through his face now and his expression was a little serious again. She sensed that she had stepped on wrong lines and tried to explain. “I mean, it is cold today. And the room inside is even more chilling. Plus the black rose on your table, it felt like…”

“Eric died, it is his funeral.” before she could complete it, he said suppressing some invisible pain.

Bewildered, she asked “Eric?”

“He, was a part of my story for a while. Died of a stroke, had a little girl and a beautiful, caring wife.”

It was all quiet once again. Rachel stared at that black rose from through the glass. It was not an interview anymore.

\*Note: ‘The Reader’ never published this part of interview, only a line related to it. This guy writes genuinely, and maybe that is the reason, there are only a few critics.

P.S. I liked the idea, but I did not like it, and I think I failed to convey it too…anyhow. Sigh!