

A Previous Life

By Donal Mahoney

It was their wedding night and Priya didn't want to tell her new husband all about it but Bill kept asking where she had learned to walk like that. Finally she told him it was inherited from a previous life, a life she had lived many years ago in India, not far from Bangalore. She had been a cobra kept in a charmer's basket.

When the charmer found a customer, usually a Brit or Yank, he would play his flute and Priya would uncoil and rise from the basket. Her hood would swell and she would sway as long as the customer had enough money to keep paying the charmer. She never tried to bite a customer but some of the men weren't the nicest people in the world. You think they would know better than to tease a cobra.

Being a charmer's cobra was Priya's job for many years until she finally grew weary of the tiny mice her keeper would feed her so she bit him and he died. His family had Priya decapitated but she was born again later in a small village, this time as a human, a baby girl. After she matured into a young woman, she had a walk, men said, reminiscent of a cobra's sway.

Priya told Bill she had been married many times in India, England and the United States but always to the wrong man. She would give the men time to correct their behavior but none did. As a result of their failure, she bit them with two little fangs inherited from her life as a cobra. They were hidden next to her incisors. Death was almost instantaneous.

No autopsies were ever performed. Death by natural causes was always the ruling. Priya, however, would move to another state or country before marrying again.

She told Bill she hoped he would be a good husband because she didn't want to have to move again. She wanted to put down roots and have children. She was curious as to whether they would walk or crawl or maybe do both. But Bill had heard enough. He was already out of bed, had one leg in his tuxedo pants and soon was running down the hall of the 10th floor of the Four Seasons Hotel. He had his rented patent leather shoes in one hand and an umbrella in the other in case he ran into a monsoon.

