

Apartments

by John Riley

The woman who lives alone on the first floor had loved dancing naked for her lovers. Now she is well acquainted with long sunny afternoons and the winter days that never turn from gray. The girl who lives in the apartment above never sings when her lover visits but when she is alone she sings songs in a language the woman does not understand with a voice that clings to its lightness. When he leaves in the morning the girl's lover hurries down the stairs and after the woman hears the door of the old apartment building bang shut she stops her daily chores and sits at her dining table with two chairs and waits for the girl to sing.

The young girl who does not know the woman who lives below cannot remember when she last loved her lover. She remembers the nights they made love and how afterward he fell asleep. She watched him sleep and smiled at the way his girlish lips made a pout as his deep breaths blew in and out. She knew he was dreaming and would not remember the dream the next day. She can remember those nights but cannot remember loving him and now when he sleeps she reads through the night and thinks there is nothing so selfish as sleep.

While the young girl reads the woman below lies in her bed. She is old now and will soon die and sleep is no longer necessary. She once tried to remember what it was like to not be alone but now she knows that even when she had lovers and loved them the way she thinks the young girl above loves hers she had remained alone. The old woman wishes the young girl knew what she knows. She wishes the young girl would sing at night while her lover sleeps.

