

eat, though the food is now stone cold." Hearing this he says that he has already eaten.

On account of the exhausting walk, his encounter with the heroin-addicted muggers and the unsatisfying meeting with the girl he lies tired and depressed on the bed. He had thought he would fall asleep immediately. But as the night advances, that possibility recedes further. His attention now turns to a book lying on the table: *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker. He still hasn't started it. He reads the first page. The writer is experimenting with language. She has deliberately left the wrong spellings uncorrected. 'Kind' has been written as 'kine', and in place of 'against' she has written 'gainst'. The text is heart-breaking. A fourteen-year-old girl, a victim of sexual abuse, is pouring out her woes in a letter to God. 'I am fourteen years old' after which the 'I am' is crossed out. And that's how it has been printed:

"Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl. May be you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me..."

..He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say you gonna do what your mammy wouldnt. First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around..Then he grab hold my litties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying you better shut up and it used to it..."

Having read up to this point he feels nauseated and wants to throw up. Sharp pangs of hunger make his belly churn and ache. It feels as if he hasn't eaten in days. He pours himself a glass of water from the plastic jug on the table and this makes his stomach

ache even more. He leaves his bed and starts to pace up and down the room. There is no relief from the pain. He slowly descends the stairs and knocks on Munshi's door. From inside, a Hindi film song issues forth. In the room, Munshi, his wife Sherbati Begum, his daughter Sumaiyya Akhter and the maid are sitting cosily watching the dance scene of a Hindi film on television. Hearing the knock on the door Munshi gets irritated and shouts, "Who the hell is that?" He mumbles timidly that he is sorry to disturb them so late at night. Munshi opens the door and asks, "Now what?" Seeing him hesitate Munshi asks again scoldingly, "Why don't you say something?" Abashed, he replies, "I'm very hungry." Munshi is surprised and retorts, "I thought you said a while ago that you ate out." He is unable to respond to this. Now Sherbati Begum whispers into Miyajaan Munshi's ears, "Why scold him, he's a growing young man. Who knows when he ate what? He is hungry now and is asking for food." Hearing this Munshi returns his attention to the Hindi dance. Sherbati Begum addresses him, "You go on upstairs. I'll send up some food."

Moments later the young maid enters his room with a plate of steaming hot *kacchi biryani* and a silly grin on her face. Her smile throws him into confusion and he wonders what it is that he has done that should be so funny to this girl. He wants to ask her the reason for her smile but he is unable to. After the girl leaves he attacks the plate as if he hasn't eaten in days. He can't fathom why this is so. The whole episode of his being at that rooftop restaurant with the young woman, eating wonton, soup, fried

chicken with garlic sauce, curried vegetables and ice cream, all seems now like a distant memory.

The next evening he goes to the Shahbagh area just to look for the girl, but there is no sign of that banner advertising the rooftop restaurant. But, since he is familiar with the place, once he crossed Aziz Market he starts to look for that tall building or the Dream Plaza. But not finding that building, he enters another building and asks one of the shopkeepers about it. The shopkeeper's jaw drops and then he smirks. Annoyed by the behaviour of the man he turns to a sidewalk cigarette vendor and asks him about the Dream Plaza and the rooftop restaurant. The man tells him that there is no such plaza or restaurant that he is aware of, and that he has been in this same spot for the last five years selling cigarettes and betel leaves from his kiosk. To be absolutely certain he asks a few more people but nobody knows anything about the building or the restaurant.

Yet he often sees that glum-faced, thin girl with her huge shoulder bag, riding the bus or rickshaw, at the market place or on the streets. She is always in a hurry. The girl seems to inhabit such an insuperable distance that he feels she cannot be reached or called out to. Since he doesn't know her name, he cannot shout out her name. In spite of that he tries to attract her attention with, "Hey there! Listen, don't you remember me?"

But the girl spares him not a glance.



Story Of A Cold Draught

MAINUL AHSAN SABER

(TRANSLATED BY NUZHAT AMIN MANNAN)

A nzam could feel a tremor in his right thigh. The muscles in the region quivered. That frightened him. This had happened to him twice before. A vein or muscle in his leg would involuntarily begin to throb. The sensation wasn't too marked this time, not like at other times when there would be a frenetic series of spasms. It was just a twitch now near the thigh. Could this niggling sort of tremor be more worrying for the body? He quietly slid his hand into the pocket and tried to feel

the spot on his thigh that throbbed. He withdrew his hands with a smile, and with a small frown fished out the cellular phone from his pocket.

A while ago they were in a meeting with the managing director. Before entering the MD's room he had switched off the phone, putting it on vibrate. The meeting did not accomplish anything. A wrangle of words had just begun but that was swallowed by the noise - gunshots to be precise, outside. Downstairs, feuding factions were trying to gain control over the locality. The meeting was

abandoned as everyone scrambled to the roof. From the roof, the entire battlefield was in view.

They saw that the traffic had come to a halt. A few people had sprinted as soon as the shots were heard. A few more brave at heart strolled on checking from side to side, curious to know more.

Shawkat said, "A bullet or two scares no one these days."

At that moment a member of one of the sides was seen running across the street, a pistol in hand. He crossed over and took a position in the corner of a