

I woke up to the crowing of multiple crows; roosters are a lost species in Dhaka. I've never liked crows personally but they do accomplish one vital mechanism, they wake up the humans. And that means breakfast! Yes, breakfast, see, the mistress of the house always tends to her plants in the veranda and her bird (me) first things in the morning. It's one of the pleasures of being a caged bird, breakfast in bed...err... I mean cage... perch?

This morning though, a new surprise awaited me. The crows as usual started their cacophony just after the sun had risen (you can't really trust crows with time, they can never get it right and they always miss the sunrise by at least five minutes). I woke up and waited for my breakfast the usual way, by preening my beautiful blue mottled feathers. The mistress could at least be trusted to be on time and she wouldn't be waking up for another fifteen minutes. And then I noticed the open cage door. Don't ask me by what freak accident this came to happen, but it did happen. I stared at the door for a whole five minutes. As a bird brought up in a cage the outer world was daunting to me. But I had never flown in the open skies before... and don't we all crave what we don't have?

It was beautiful, that first flight from the confinements of my little cage. Through the bars of the veranda I flew out to meet the new dawn, the newly heated air raising me up over the land, opening huge vistas of a vast concrete wasteland in front of me. It was beautiful, that first flight. I was truly flying, floating on the wind and I don't know for how long I remained in the sky. And then it rained. Freedom had made the pregnant skies beautiful to me... I hadn't noticed the malignant clouds.

It didn't matter though. There were trees to shelter in. I had never before perched on a branch, and I got my first taste of a worm! It was hanging from a leaf and on second thought; I think it was a caterpillar... It was tangy and I think I'm getting indigestion.

Anyway, I waited the rain out. And afterwards I went out exploring. It was a cool world, right after the rain. The wind had a lulling touch to it and once again I took to just floating without direction. Until that darned crow came about that is. It came from under and bumped into me and ruffled my beautiful tail feathers, I had spent a long time aligning them all in the correct angle.

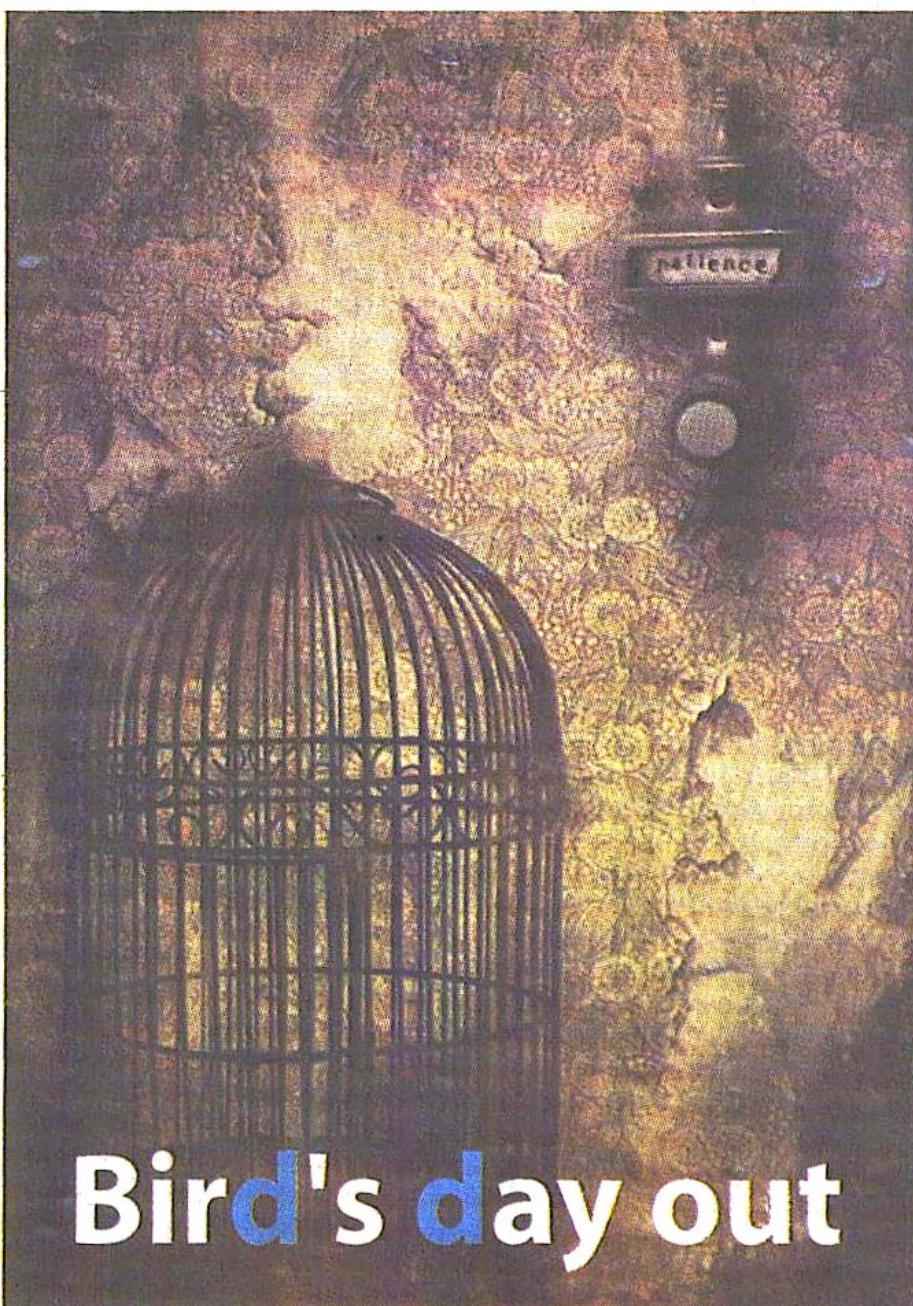
"Watch where you're going buddy, this ain't a free sky," grunted the crow.

"I could say the same to you!" I blurted in retaliation, my poor tail feathers...

"Ah... a new wannabe. Do you know who I am boy? They call me Kallu Kaak around here. You must not know me..."

The crow had swerved around to face me, and I realized it was three times my size. Budgies are small creatures; I developed a newfound respect for crows, at least for this mean looking one.

"Um... I... uh... I think it was a mistake. I



## Bird's day out

thought you were someone I knew," I mumbled, anything to get away.

"I haven't seen you here before. I think maybe you don't know how to respect you're betters. Maybe I should teach you some respect," he glowered at me; he really was a big crow.

I bolted. I really bolted. The crow gave chase, frantic chase until I took refuge in a little opening in the crook of two branches in a tree. The crow was too big to reach me there and once again I waited out the rage of the renegade crow. The day was passing by and I hadn't done much, it depressed me to think that my first day of freedom would mean me hiding all the time. I wanted to fly, to explore. Ah,

well.

The crow tired and I finally ventured out again, albeit hesitantly. The afternoon had worn on and I was hungry. The worm was still causing havoc in my stomach and I was one sad little birdie. I wanted a cracker, but unfortunately, in the wild (as wild as you can get in an urban metropolis that is) crackers don't come easy. They don't come at all. Sad, I know.

I roamed right into the centre of the city, the towering buildings awed me and for awhile I forgot my hunger. There were cars on the streets below me and people in the windows around me. The smoggy fog from the cars and the heat of the afternoon choked me and I perched on a window sill to rest awhile,

and Hindi movies and we sat late into the night watching them, eating junk food and cracking up over the silliest things. It was one of the best nights ever.

Also, even though you may meet your friends in classes and stuff, there barely seems enough time to sit down and a nice chat with them. A night out is a great time to catch up on what's going on in each other's lives plus also a little gossip. Winter's also a good time to go somewhere for a change, like on a long drive or on picnics. You could finish some Eid shopping together before the crowds. If you want to stay at home there are countless things to do. Other than the movie option, you could brew steaming cups of coffee and play board games or cards. And whether you're out or in, you could also enjoy winter delicacies like hot bhapapithas. To me food always tastes better when shared.

Speaking of sharing, the second recent outing of mine was with the girls from RS when we went to a certain pizza place. We pooled together the money we had and managed to enjoy enough food. It wasn't however only the eating. It was the fun in singing stupid songs in the car while driving to the eatery and cracking the most insane jokes ever and making fun of Mallika Sherawat (nothing personal).

A girl's night out is a great way to strengthen friendships, forget about exams and other pressures and simply unwind. Take the time out to have one because believe me, you deserve it.

By Nisma Elias

and anyway, I wanted to see how life was in this part of the city. Unable to help myself I became a peeping tom for the whole of five minutes.

Through the window, the room inside was austere, and small. Just the smallest of beds and a chair were in it. I guessed that it was a servant's quarter. And I was right. A little girl came in and tiredly, almost drunkenly lied down on the bed. Her rags told me she was the maid. She was bleeding from several places... signs of an obvious beating. And the room, it was so much like a cage. She was just like me, a caged bird. I valued my freedom more all of a sudden.

Evening came on and I still hadn't eaten. It was starting to get cold and a stiff breeze had started. I felt alone and cold. I wandered into the poorer areas of the city, where miles of shanties extended into the horizon. On the flea infested earth there I scrounged out a few more worms. The indigestion was getting worse. Worms just don't suit me. I noticed the houses around me. Corrugated tin, bent and rusted and single room abodes made up most of the houses. And there were children playing in the last rays of the dying sun. I was too busy slurping a worm to notice the kid come up from behind. I don't know if the kid was young or just plain starved, but it tried to eat me! Eat me! I pecked myself out of his grip and fled. I had enough of the city.

Roaming again, the night stars keeping me company I wondered about where I would sleep. It was an empty world really. I was still hungry and still cold. It was going to rain again and I wanted home. That's when the crow came up again. Darn it!

"I'm gonna get you this time you blue tailed sissy! You can't insult and get away with it!"

Once again I ran. The crow kept right at me. It even came close enough to peck out a few of my beautiful tail feathers! And it seemed an eternity, me racing away from the crow. I was tiring though. Budgies aren't made for long distance flights, especially not with worms for lunch. And then I saw something that felt like heaven. My old cage! My old veranda! Home!

With a last burst of speed I flew into the veranda and into my still open cage. The crow, disgusted that it couldn't pass through the bars of the veranda raged and finally, with a disgusted look (and very profane gesture at me, I was offended enough to go out and fight, if hadn't been a natural coward that is), he flew away, leaving me to my cage.

The mistress, noticing the racket came into the veranda and with a cry of delight noticed me in the cage. Without haste she ran to pet me. It felt good, being loved. And then she brought me dinner! Ah... how I missed bird food! Bhejal worms just don't suit me and nor does freedom. If it means to live on edge all the time, to live amidst filth and decay and crime, well I don't want freedom. A cage at least provides me with safety.

By Tareq Adnan

## Roses for Radhika

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So that day, as I returned home from the library, I stopped to buy flowers on the way. Just when I was about to pay for the roses, a few police officers stepped in front of me and put handcuffs on my wrists. When I protested, they told me that I was charged with drug peddling. My world seemed to crash down upon me. When I denied, one of them said that the owner of the pharmacy confessed in his statement that I was the main culprit and I had threatened him not to say anything about it so that is why he kept mum in the beginning. The police were on my trail all along and were looking for the right moment to arrest me. Without being given the chance to speak further, I was dragged into a police car and then to the police station. Soon I found myself in a prison cell with other gruesome inmates. Years passed since the day I was standing at the florist's buying roses for Radhika. Today I reside in a prison. What happened to Radhika? I guess I have no proper answer to that. If I am lucky then she is still probably waiting, like she used to everyday, for me to get back and relate my day's work and new discoveries to her otherwise by now she could be happily married with kids of her own. As of today, I shall finish my diary and look forward for tomorrow when another day filled with gloom will appear. I am prepared though; I shall face it.

By Faria Sanjana

## Girl's night out - fun galore!

I bet most of you gals out there are stressed out right now; what with confusing mocks, imminent examinations, tiring school tests, fire breathing parents, whiny boyfriends, merciless teachers and exhausting coaching schedules. My sympathy goes out to each one of you. Since one can only dream of therapeutic measures like regular massages and monthly vacations to exotic islands to help one relax, there's something else that can be done to unwind. Clear out your overloaded schedule just for a day, or for an evening. Call up your closest girl-

friends and find out when all of are free so all of you can get together. Then plan something together.

I've had two girls' night out very recently and they both reminded me how fun it can be just chilling out your friends. You don't have to go anywhere expensive neither do you have to necessarily go on an outing, like to a party or anything. The first night some of my friends were free was when we got together at my place, bought popcorn and drinks and had a movie marathon. I had already bought some of the latest English

