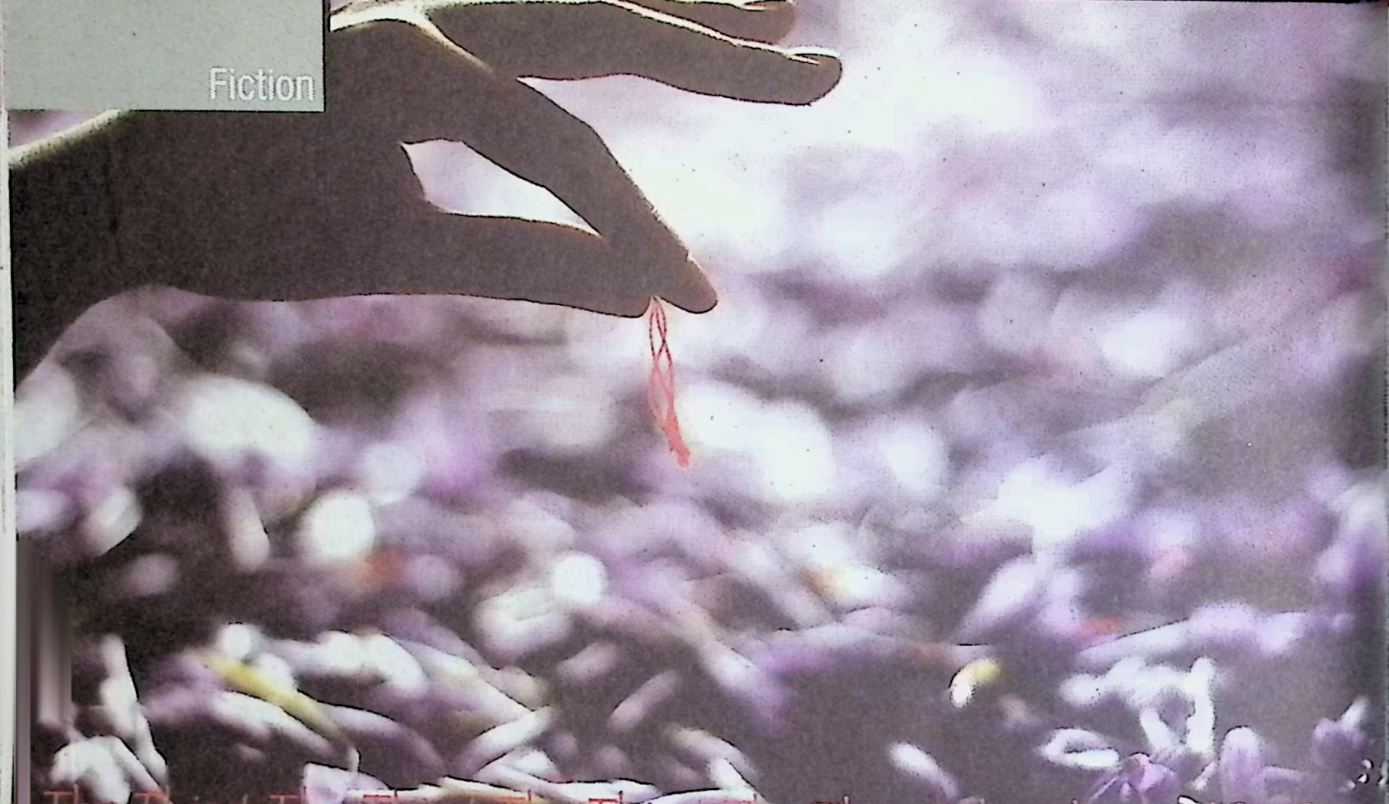


The Thirst

NASREEN JAHAN

Translated from the Bangla by: AHMEDE HUSSAIN

The sun hadn't risen. The fog-ridden streets of this city were not safe for women, yet the girl tossed about the whole night in an unknown discontentment. It did not occur to her even for a moment to step outside her room to see if the light was on in her aged husband's chamber, or to know whether he was asleep or deep at work. On the contrary, yesterday's fiery touch of that young man was still wreaking havoc in the core of her soul, until now which had been left numbed, dead as an inactive volcano.

What had she really got from this old widowed man, whom her father had owed money at the time of their marriage? He had feelings for her, she knew, but what was the point of having it when the man himself lived on the memories of his dead wife? For his new young wife he felt a wave of lament in his heart, but that did not help himself with his own grief, with his own impotent failure; this defeat had made him open the door of his own house before this young man who was madly in love with his wife.

Before this happened, before the young man came to her life, the girl would shut herself out from the outside world. It was as though he had given her means to swim, to fly. Did it pain her husband? No, not at all, it was the other way round; whenever he stood before a mirror he saw a grey old face: he had married this girl only out of a sense of piety, knowing deep down in his heart that he loved only his first wife. The girl was young, she was beautiful, he thought, she should not be denied life; 'See how happy she is,' he would tell himself, 'after that boy has come to her life.'

The night was getting old and Shahbagh was humming with life, she never knew that nights could be filled with such blissful mirth: there were the young with the old, from doctors to journalists to lovers - everyone sat in a circle, gossiping. The air brimmed with the aroma of