'He did not marry me forcibly. I went to him with my own misery. And I still depend on him for bread and butter.'

The whole night these thoughts jostled in her mind. He said, 'Come, live with me, you won't have to beg for bread and butter in that demon's castle.' A fire sparked in her body at his touch. Then something happened. At the time she told him about this certain kind of failure of her husband, she vowed not to let the young man make use of the void that it created in her being. A change she noticed in him though, after he had been told about this incompleteness, this frailty, this impotency. When he had not known about this, what urge she had seen in him with sheer indignity because poverty is linked with one's pennilessness.' He hissed like a serpent: 'Why do I need to listen to this? Do I not earn enough? The music that enchants me (here the girl opened her eyes), why do you have to try to hush that song with the burden of your existence?'

He pulled her down to the carpet and, while giving her a thousand kisses when he was about to stroke her body, an unknown presentiment, an inexplicable fear crawled in her soul. She moved him away and shouted, 'You are not the one for whom I have been waiting for so long, you are not the one whom, in my childhood, I had mistaken for my shadow.'



to hold her soul, to make her feel like a woman! But after those words had slipped out of her mouth at a bleak incautious moment, the man, it seemed, was getting more and more interested in her body alone. She felt suffocated. She did not want to split her being into two and give him her body at the expense of her soul.

Yesterday, kissing her hand, he said, 'I want to marry you.'

The girl's lips quivered, she said, 'Do you not know that even more than the vilest of demons I fear penury? Since childhood it has ground me into pieces. A penniless pocket crushes one's self-respect. It can trample you

Angry, humiliated, he got up, 'Lord! I never thought you were as sick as your husband.'

Then the whole night passed. In every speck of her existence she could feel the presence of his enchanting touch; for the first time in her life she felt like a complete human being. So she did not wait for the sun to rise; as fear had abandoned her, she waded through the fog like a woman possessed and knocked on the young man's door: 'I can't take it any more. Believe me, I am not sick.'

Ahmede Hussain has edited 'Brown Writing', an anthology of English fictions from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which is going to be published by Tranquebar Press, an imprint of Westland Books Ltd, India.