

THE birthday boy told Ambar the evening before the birthday party that this year the cake would be in the shape of an aeroplane because he wanted to be a fighter pilot when he grew up. Last year it was a boat, because he wanted to be a pirate with a big Kalishnakov, before that a motor-cycle because he wanted to be a dare-devil in a circus riding round and round the well of death, before that —

“Cakes can only be round or square,” said Ambar.

“Who told you that?”

“I know”

“How? Ever had a birthday party?”

“No, but—”

“Even know when's your birthday?”

“No, but—”

“Does even your mother know?”

Ambar jumped as he suddenly raised his arms and flapping them like wings, paper plane in hand, started circling her, mimicking her loudly, close to her ear. “No, but — No, but — no — ”

She ducked as he threw the plane at her, suddenly came to a stop.

“Father took me to the bakery himself. A square chocolate launching pad — if you know what's that — and on it a plane, blue and white icing on the wings, “Happy” on one wing, “Birthday” on the other wing and “Dear Qasim” on the cockpit. And inside the cockpit a fighter pilot made out of lots of chocolate and marzipan, all for me —”

“What about me?”

“What about you?”

“You know ...”

“One piece — maybe one of the wheels because they're made of nuts and no one likes nuts. But you'll have to wait a long long time. First I have to blow out the candles, six this year, five

SHORT STORY

A Piece of Cake

Talat Abbasi

before that, four before that, three —

“ Then?”

“Then everyone has to sing happy birthday dear Qasim. Not you — it's English. You just stand there behind us. Then Mother puts her hand over mine like this.....”

He grabbed her hand, chopped the air with it.

“.....and I cut the first piece, the largest, for myself. Then everyone claps. You can also if you like, no one will notice. Then she cuts the rest, passes it round. Then everyone eats everything — samosas stuffed with potatoes because I love potatoes — yummy — chips too with tomato sauce, egg sandwiches because I hate cucumber ones, lemon tarts because I love lemon tarts and — ”

“And the cake.”

“Of course, stupid. And lots and lots of other things. So many it'll be hours and hours before everyone's finished. And you'll

just have to wait. Then Mother will sit down and distribute the food to all the servants herself. She's got to, she says, because otherwise it'll become a free-for-all. You'll get your share of everything except maybe the lemon tarts because *they* always finish no matter how many you order. Unless of course you forget all about the food and run out to play.”

“ What about the cake?”



“Cake too greedy old thing – Mother’s kind to servants – says –”

“But what if it finishes too?”

“It won’t, cakes never finish, not birthday ones, not for days and days.”

“Sure?”

Cake too greedy old thing – Mother’s kind to servants – says –”

“But what if it finishes too?”

“It won’t, cakes never finish, not birthday ones, not for days and days.”

“Sure?”

“Cake cake cake! What’s the matter with you? Mother says something’s the matter with you though on the other hand she said, they’re all like that, especially about sweets. Really the way they fall on sweets. She said that yesterday when she found the cook had left the jar of honey uncovered and they were swarming round it –”

“I wasn’t!”

“Not you, stupid, not the servants, the flies. Look at them, Mother said, dying for sweets! The cook said he’d pick off the ones which had fallen inside and lost their wings and then the honey could be eaten. And Mother said, only by you – ugh!”

But the next day, on the very morning of the birthday party the baby came down with chicken pox and Mrs Khan decided that Ambar – who else but poor Ambar – had to stay stuck by his side in his room fanning his stupid hot face while everyone else would be downstairs with the guests. Her mother must help in the party like all the servants.

It was going to be a huge affair with fifty children plus their ayahs. At least Mrs Khan *hoped* they’d all bring their ayahs because they were all about the same age as Qasim. Noisy, unruly. All out of control before you knew it! The noise one didn’t mind, the litter afterwards on the lawn one didn’t mind,

what else could one expect – but no trampling all over her flower-beds like last year. No, she’d learnt her lesson. Two of her own servants at least would be stationed at either end of the garden by her precious flower-beds and one of them would have to be Ambar’s mother. Ambar, who was six maybe even seven years old and irresponsible for her age, would be worse than useless there. She’d forget herself, get caught up in the excitement and join in the games and worse, fall on the food making everyone think that Mrs. Khan starved her ayah’s poor child.

All this Mrs Khan said as if she were talking about Ambar to someone else though there was no one else in the room but the two of them and the baby. It was very early in the morning. Ambar’s mother had run downstairs to get the milk before the milkman woke up the whole house with his cycle bell. Mrs Khan had come in to check in on the baby who seemed to be coming down with a fever and had found his “poor little face full of bumps just as if someone had quilted his skin overnight!”

“So,” continued Mrs Khan, now pacing the room, now standing before his cot, feeling his forehead, “So - You stay here with Baby. Understand? Not to leave him for a minute. Understand? I’ll be looking up at this window and if I see your face there staring out even once..... Good! You understand that much at least. And in any case I’ll somehow get your mother to run up every now and then to check up on you. And she’ll bring up a plate for you, even a piece of the cake. So behave yourself. Really this chicken pox is the last straw....”

Ambar watched the back of the sandals under the thin cotton dressing-gown move quickly down the red carpet, heard the heels clatter on the tiles and only looked up once the door had closed behind Mrs Khan. Then her

mouth flew wide open in a soundless scream, her face turned purple as she held her breath, let it out and charged towards the cot, shaking it and shaking it. The baby gurgled and sucked his fist, kicked his fat legs in the air as the mobile of multi-coloured wooden parakeets above him swayed madly like the branches of a tree in a storm. That made Ambar spit on his face, then immediately she wiped his eyes as his face crumpled. He opened his mouth to cry but she shoved his pacifier into it.

“Na na na” she cooed just like her mother, patting his head. She wasn’t allowed to pick him up. As if she’d want to! Especially now!

“Ugly!” she said aloud, still bending over him, still patting him. “Ugly, Ugly, silly baby” she began singing in a low sweet voice which made the baby relax and start sucking on his pacifier.

“Ouch!”

Her mother had come up behind her, a feeding bottle with warm milk wrapped in a towel in one hand. The other twisted Ambar’s ear again and again. Then Ambar was released so abruptly that she fell to the floor. The baby had seen the bottle, pulled the pacifier out of his mouth and started to whimper.

Ambar sat where she fell sullenly rubbing her smarting ear with a corner of her shirt which she had moistened with her tongue until her mother kicked her.

“If someone hears what then? Get me thrown out of this house too!”

“Ma, the birthday cake -”

“Want a slice of it, eh?”

“But Ma, *she* said, honestly, just now, *she* said”

“Here’s your cake -”

Ambar caught the stinking wet diaper thrown at her face and slowly got

up. Her mother turned round from changing the baby.

“Out of my sight!”

Once at the bathroom door Ambar flung the diaper in the direction of the pail of soiled baby clothes which stood at the other end. It landed inside the bathtub. She retrieved it with two fingers barely touching it, threw it into the pail. Then climbed onto the edge of the bathtub, holding herself steady against the wall and looked down at the floor.

“Understand? “ she mimicked the Begum. “Understand....piece of cake”.

She laughed but only for a moment. She sat down at the edge of the tub kicking it with her feet.

As if she'd remember Ambar. She'd be there floating round, posing for her husband with the birthday brat and saying “Harder, blow harder.” They'd all be there singing.

“Happy birthday.....”

“Bottles!” Her mother yanked her off the tub. “Resting again are you? After a full night's sleep too! Who'd you think you are – swinging your legs and humming like a slut on the beach!”

And she marched her across the bathroom, leading her by the ear, twisting it harder as Ambar squirmed. As they reached the washbasin she gave her a hard shove. Ambar held onto the washbasin to keep herself from falling.

“Wash! I don't want to see one dirty bottle, one unwashed spoon when I return. Idle, lazy, good-for-nothing.”

At the door she turned back and hissed: “Quietly, close the door, he's sleeping at last.”

Alone, Ambar went back to the tub, settled down on the edge, leaning against the wall. Her mother was going to be a long time she knew. She would take the pail of soiled clothes to



a tap at the back of the house by the servants' quarters. She wasn't allowed to wash them anywhere inside the house because of the smell and dirt. There she'd dump the clothes out of the pail under the tap, run it full. And sitting on a brick before the tap she'd pick up a stick and start beating the clothes so hard that the cook's wife would lift the bamboo curtain of her quarter and come out with two bowls of tea. And Ambar's mother would drop the stick, turn the tap down to a trickle. And they'd be off talking.

Talking about the same old things. The wretched baby, born bad-tempered – like father like son – who was so restless all night he really should be given a pinch of opium. At least while he was teething. Worked like a charm on Ambar when she was an infant. Kept her quiet night and day so that her mother could go round from house to house washing pots and pans and then roll biddis at night. Quiet as an angel it kept the girl and gave her some peace to slave away. And slaving away she still is, no let up, no help

even from that girl. Lazy like her thief of a father though one shouldn't say things against the dead....

"Yes," thought Ambar, yawning, sliding down gently to the floor, "A long long time...."

And there she'd have remained snoozing on the cool bathroom tiles like a cat for goodness knows how long if it hadn't been for the commotion at the front gate.

"Furious – simply furious – wait till Sahib finds out. Today of all days!"

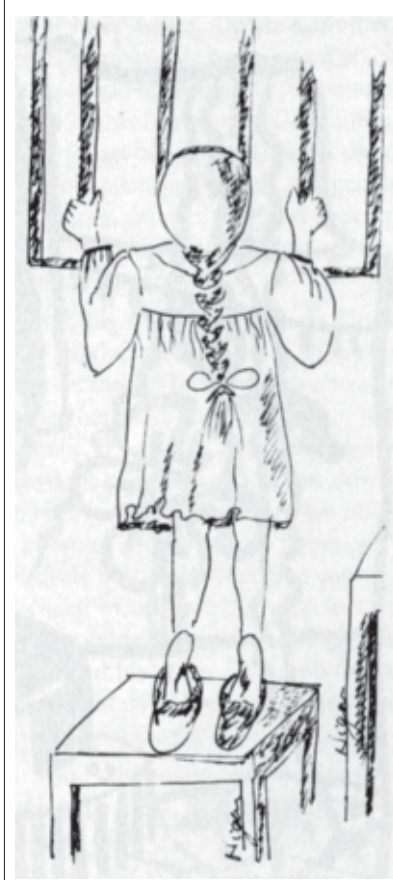
Ambar jumped, sobbing, her hands shielding her ears, ran to the washbasin and feverishly began rinsing the first bottle she could lay her hands on. Then she stopped, laughed at herself. Mrs Khan's voice was coming from downstairs and she wasn't shouting at Ambar at all.

"Today of all days! So I'm to keep this monstrosity on my front lawn with fifty to seventy guests arriving at my door?"

Mistake? A thing like this? Delivering it to the house instead of the repair shop! Landing up at my front door unannounced – Is this a house or a bazaar that anyone, anything can come through the front gate? Where's that chowkidar, why isn't he on duty at the gate?"

Then there was a jumble of sounds – Mrs. Khan's voice ordering: "Back gate, back gate!", tires screeching, men's voices yelling "hey careful", and finally a musical horn sounded shrilly.

A truck then, but what sort of truck, Ambar wondered. The water tanker? No, it wasn't the water tanker. The water tanker had a sound of its own and when it stopped you heard the huge thick hose drop on the ground like snakes hissing – each quietly but still quite a sound – a thousand snakes hissing! This truck sounded different, as different as a car from a motor-cycle. Besides the water tanker



had come yesterday afternoon. Mrs Khan had insisted that the water tanker come yesterday because she was taking no chances. Imagine the taps suddenly running dry the day of the party and a hundred unwashed glasses! Not to mention dusty floors and windows! No the cleaning and washing must start early that same morning. There was no point in doing it the evening before because the dust would settle an inch thick in the night, that was the trouble with living so close to the sea. And everything finished by 3 at the latest, except of course the frying of samosas and kababs.

Ambar put the bottle back with the row of dirty ones on the washbasin which she would have finished rinsing by now if she hadn't dropped off – and ran to the bathroom window. The truck had arrived at the back gate.

She peered over it but she was too small to see more than the top of the palm tree which overhung the back gate. She saw and heard the leaves move as if something had swept them roughly aside. Ambar stood on her toes and still could see only the dusty leaves. Then she jumped as high as she could and something white flashed in the sun under the tree and then disappeared as her feet touched the ground. She jumped again and again as if she were skipping rope. Still the something white bobbed up as she jumped, and down again. That's all she could see. She ran to the baby's bedroom but of course the windows there faced the side of the house where it was all quiet. Only the sweeper boy was there poking at the dog with his long hard broom and laughing as it whined, trying to get out from under the broom. But he had it pinned under. He heard the sound at the window, looked up and stuck his tongue out at Ambar who stuck hers out, showed him her fist. At that moment his father came and cuffed him. Ambar laughed and laughed. That made the baby cry in his sleep.

Stupid baby in his cot she thought as she gently patted him back to sleep. How dare he sleep now. Look at him sleeping now.

Ugly fat thing, drinking all that milk, throwing up, getting those stupid bumps, crying all last night, keeping her mother awake. And her mother angry with her instead as if it were her fault that she slept right through it all, woke her up early as she slept on the rug by the cot. Kicked her awake as if it was Ambar's fault too that she was "dropping dead with tiredness, no sleep in the afternoon, no sleep at night, get up good-for-nothing, take this filthy diaper now, now or"

She yawned now watching the stupid baby fall asleep. She raised her

hand and brought it down hard towards his fat cheeks, stopping just short of touching him. She did it again and again. How lovely to pinch him. She wondered what would happen if she did pinch him. Would blood ooze out of those bumps? Her hands itched, she rubbed her thumb with her forefinger, brought it down, touched his face. But he was restless and fretful and even that slight touch made him stir and she immediately returned to patting him and cooing to him exactly like she'd seen her mother do.

"Go to sleep stupid baby, hurry up, oh do," she whispered for suddenly she had such a good idea.....

In a moment she tiptoed away from the cot, walking backwards to keep an eye on the baby until she was back in the bathroom. One of the men servants had been called in to change the light bulb and had forgotten to take back the stool on which he'd stood to reach the light. It was quite high, it had two steps. She pushed it slowly towards the window, careful not to make loud scraping sounds which would wake the baby. She was still too short to see everything going on and because there were bars at the window she couldn't stick her head out but now at least she could see *something*.

And what she saw was Mrs Khan with the spoilt brat Qasim clutching the legs of her shalwar, sucking his thumb like a baby and behind them the whole house standing, all of them there, even her mother and the cook's wife, watching the fun. Except Ambar. All because of the stupid baby. Cook, sweeper and horrid son, gardener with his watering can, even the postman had dropped off the letters at the front gate and cycled to the back of the house.

"..... Sahib's going to be furious too late for all that now going to be furious, delivered to the house instead of the repair shop anyway how many men?" Mrs Khan demanded.

And several voices yelled "Four including driver."

"Good! Because it can't be left out in the open, it's got to go into the pantry. Cook, show them the way, make sure it's the pantry not the kitchen. And since you're all standing here let me tell you once and for all this freezer's not for the servants' quarters, it's not even for the house. It belongs to Sahib's restaurant. Understand?"

And still standing on the stool Ambar turned round first to one side of the bathroom then the other and as if addressing a crowd on both sides said "Understand? Understand?" Then she laughed and laughed.

"..... no one's to so much as touch it - tomorrow it goes..... *careful!*"

And she said "careful" as if she were holding her breath.

Then came a rush of men's voices echoing the "careful".

"Easy, easy does it."

"Watch out oaf!"

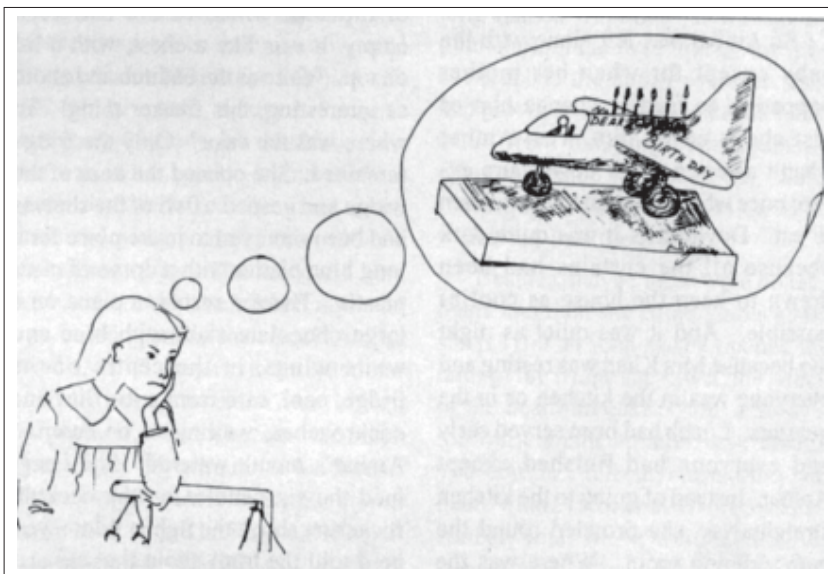
"Plastic's making it slippery."

"That's right Clumsy, blame the plastic....."

Ambar guessed that they were lifting it out of the truck, the freezer, what-

ever that was. Something terribly heavy and difficult to lift like a treasure long buried being hauled out of the earth. Yes big and heavy, and white, that's all she could tell because try as she would, she couldn't see much. And she'd better go back to the bottles because if her mother was out there watching the fun it meant she'd finished washing the clothes, maybe even rinsing them out and putting them out on the line. And when she came up Ambar would find out what this freezer thing was.

But she never got the chance, even forgot to ask because she hardly saw her mother. It was work work and more work for her mother downstairs until 4 p.m. when the party started. What with the old freezer being delivered to the house by mistake that very morning, what with Sahib exploding when he heard that, what with the chicken pox, poor Mrs Khan was in a "state", got such a splitting headache she had to lie down in her darkened bedroom for a couple of hours before the "throng invaded my house." That left Ambar's mother to finish the party favours. The miniature buckets (for boys) and baskets (for girls) filled with gifts for the fifty or so children were nearly ready



anyway, each put together by Mrs Khan herself. She was so artistic! Little scraps of cardboard, satin, silk, muslin, wool and ribbons had been transformed like magic into small buckets and baskets, no bigger than a child's hand. Into them would go whistles and the tiniest of cars and guns for the boys. For the girls small plastic dolls, dressed in long frocks sewn by Mrs Khan herself, complete with jewellery made out of old buttons and beads and tinsel. But the bald pink heads still had to be covered with strips of black wool. Ambar's mother would have quite a job doing that especially since the "hair" would have to be plaited and tied with ribbons matching the frocks. Mrs Khan would not dream of disappointing her little guests with bald dolls! No detail was to be overlooked. The homemade toffees which the cook had made the day before – Ambar had been given the first two because the shapes had been a little irregular and had stolen two more – also had to be wrapped individually – blue tissue paper for the boys, pink for the girls – and placed in each basket and bucket. Mrs Khan would inspect each and every one of them herself when Ambar's mother had finished so no question of a quick sloppy job.

So Ambar was left alone with the baby except for when her mother popped in to feed or change him or just check up on him. Yes, Ambar wasn't allowed to go downstairs except once when she went to the kitchen to eat. Downstairs it was quite dark because all the curtains had been drawn to keep the house as cool as possible. And it was quiet as night too because Mrs Khan was resting and everyone was in the kitchen or in the quarters. Lunch had been served early and everyone had finished except Ambar. Instead of going to the kitchen straightaway, she prowled round the empty dining room. Where was the

cake? That's all she wanted to see. Not the green paper streamers and red flowers wound so skillfully round the ceiling fan it might have been a tree with branches, leaves and flowers, planted upside down and hanging over the dining table. Or the dozens of multi-coloured balloons pretty as soap bubbles and soaring like them to the ceiling. She must see it, the cake, at least see it. Even if Mrs Khan remembered poor Ambar, even if she got her piece of cake, even then she'd never believe anyone, not even her own mother, that the cake was shaped like an aeroplane, with wings! With a fighter pilot inside! How could that be? She'd have to see it to believe it before they cut it. Maybe the brat was lying. It wasn't on the dining table either which had been cleared of everything. Perhaps the side-board but no, the same old dishes and plates there. She even tried the tea-trolley, lifted the tea-cosy knitted in the shape of a rooster by Mrs Khan herself. But only the tea-pot there.

She opened the door leading into the pantry and banged her knee on something sharp. Stifling her scream of pain she looked down. Something huge nearly filled the space to the right of the door which before had been empty. It was like a chest, with a lid on top. White as the bathtub and about as interesting, this freezer thing! So where was the cake? Only the fridge remained. She opened the door of the fridge and gasped. Two of the shelves had been removed to make place for a long blue platter with a dome of clear plastic. There it rested, a plane on a large chocolate slab, with blue and white wings, in the centre of the fridge, cool, safe from ants, flies and cockroaches, waiting to be eaten.... Ambar's mouth watered. She imagined the six candles on the cockpit, flickering above the fighter pilot – yes, he'd told the truth about that too.....

Then imagined all six being blown out as later she sat upstairs alone with the baby, listening to the party sounds. At first they came from the dining room – shouts, singing, clapping, laughter. Then from the garden the same sounds but now with music starting, stopping, starting again, as child after child was declared "out" in the game of musical chairs, loud clapping for the winner. "Smile smile"! The father's voice was loud, gay as he moved round taking pictures, his bad temper over the freezer quite forgotten. She heard it all, even – she'd swear – the balloons popping, the click of the father's camera.

And she was missing it all.

"I hate you!" she cried this time with tears as she stood over the baby's cot. "Monster! All because of you!"

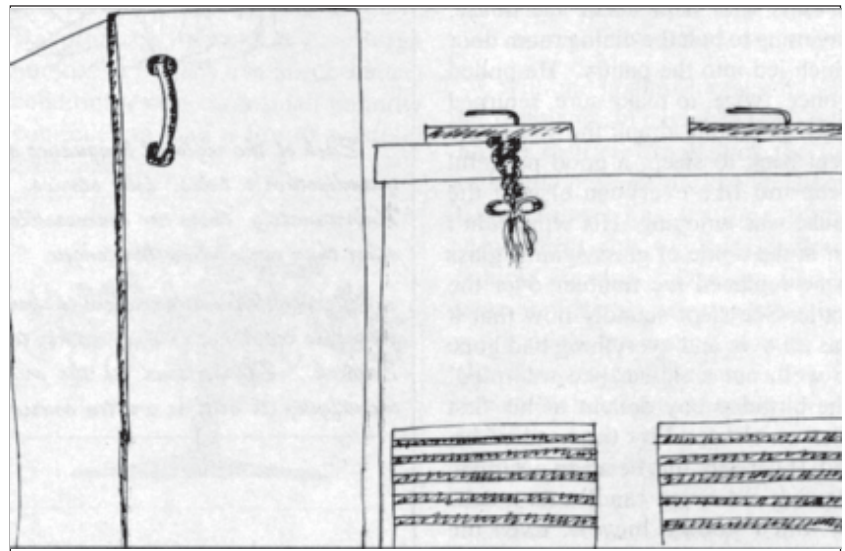
All his fault! They'd all eaten, all forgotten about her, even her own mother. They'd finished it all, she wouldn't get her piece of cake now, not a crumb, not even the wheels which no one really wanted and which she hadn't quite managed to see because Cook had come into the pantry for something, caught her gaping, squatting by the open fridge door and hurried her to the kitchen for her lunch. There were sandwiches to be cut, didn't she know, samosas to be fried, potatoes to be peeled and no one to help the cook who as usual had to do all the work. Ask the bearer and he says he has no breath left in him after blowing up dozens of those balloons, ask Ambar's mother and she's too weary to even say not me, not me, just shakes her head.....

But everyone seemed to know how poor Ambar's mouth was watering as she sat upstairs missing it all because she got not one, but three pieces of cake. First her own plate loaded with party food, sent up by Mrs Khan who, as her son had told Ambar, really was kind to servants and didn't

after all forget Ambar. Far from it, she sent the bearer up with Ambar's plate as soon as he could be spared, first thing after musical chairs. And it wasn't the wheels which no one wanted, but a very large slice just like all the children had eaten. Then her mother who'd been so cross with her all day brought up her own share of the cake, patted her on the head for behaving herself so well for so long. And finally, even the spoilt brat Qasim remembered poor Ambar and sneaked up with two squashed wheels, one rolled up in each of the frilly cuffs of his shirt. He bit at one, spat it out, made a face and shoved the rest at her without a word. He emptied the pockets of his shorts which were crammed with toffees and lollipops on the carpet. Then he stood on his toes, his arms raised high and flapping like wings, blew the two whistles in his mouth at the same time, jumped into the air, vanished as suddenly as he'd appeared. Ambar finished the wheels, every bit of them, even though it was true what the boy had said – the wheels made of nuts weren't as good after you'd eaten the chocolate coating, not when you compared them to the other soft, sweet, moist pieces. Still, she licked her fingers again and again.

The funny thing was that each piece of cake only seemed to make her mouth water more. Maybe there was still some left she kept thinking even after everyone had gone to bed and the house had fallen silent. She had a stomach ache, even felt somewhat queasy and still she longed for more. She lay by her mother licking her lips again and again as if the sweet taste still lingered. She licked the toffee wrappers she'd saved, ended up chewing the paper. She closed her eyes trying to sleep. But the harder she tried not to the more she thought of it.

Bound to be some of it left, Mrs Khan always had too much cooked. And it wasn't as if Ambar was thinking of stealing a whole slice. Mrs Khan was kind but she kept an eagle eye on food and she'd know the instant she looked at it, that someone had polished off a whole slice of the leftover cake. And that the someone was Ambar whom she'd caught once standing by the tea-trolley, sugar bowl raised to her lips, head tilted back as if she were *drinking* it, pouring a full bowl of sugar down her throat!



Ambar shuddered at the way her mother had taken her upstairs and thrashed her. She'd take her hide off, beat her to a pulp, damned if Ambar was going to grow up a thief too, even if it was in her blood..... And the brat Qasim had followed them and stood there enjoying it until it her mother started to cry too. The more she beat Ambar the more she sobbed until she was howling more than poor Ambar herself, as if every time she lifted her hand to beat Ambar she was hitting only herself. Then it became too much even for the boy who ran to his mother to say stop it, please make her stop it and it took Mrs Khan herself to separate mother from daughter.

Ambar pressed her palms on her eyelids forcing them to remain shut. But it was no good, and anyway what was the harm in *looking*, just seeing if there was any cake left over. And even licking the edge of the platter didn't count as stealing at all. That's all she was thinking of doing, that's all, she told herself as she quietly let herself out of the room, walked down the stairs, holding onto the banisters because it was dark, only the lights outside casting a glow through the long glazed windows. It was nearly pitch

dark in the foyer but by the time she reached the dining room her eyes had grown accustomed to the dark and aside from bumping once against a chair she made it through the dining room quite easily, unbolted the door which led into the pantry.

Besides, maybe there were no leftovers and then she could go back and sleep. But as soon as she opened the door of the fridge she saw it, the wreck of the beautiful cake. Quite a bit of it too on a smaller platter now though you couldn't tell anymore what had been what. Not that it mattered to Ambar, what was a wing or a tail or even a wheel. She wasn't going to eat any of it. Just reach out a hand, and

lick the edge of the plate and nobody could call that stealing....

But she drew her hand back sharply. The click of a light at the entrance of the dining room sounded like the crack of a whip in the silent house. Then came the footsteps.

Mr Khan took a bottle of cold water from the fridge. The servants had been careless tonight, the bearer forgetting the thermos of cold water which always stood on his bedside table and the ayah, the only one of the servants who slept inside the house, forgetting to bolt the dining room door which led into the pantry. He pulled it once, twice, to make sure, returned to his bedroom, drank the water and went back to sleep, a good peaceful sleep too like everyone else in the house was enjoying. His wife didn't stir at the tinkle of glass against glass as he replaced the tumbler over the bottle. She slept soundly now that it was all over and everything had gone so well, not a flower-bed trampled! The birthday boy dreamt of his first bike which stood by the head of his bed. He dreamt that he was a postman, blowing out seven candles on a cake on which stood a bicycle. Even the cranky sick baby – surprisingly because this had never happened before – slept right through the night. Perhaps that's why Ambar's mother after so many disturbed nights fell into a deep dreamless stupor. Such a deep stupor that she like the others in the house never heard the milkman's cycle bell nor the cook unlock the kitchen door from the outside, only his scream when he went into the pantry and saw Ambar's plait hanging out from under the lid of the freezer. □

Talat Abbasi is from Karachi, but has lived in the U.S. for about 20 years. Her stories have been published in numerous literary magazines and one was recently broadcast on the BBC World Service Short Story Programme.

Tell us a Story

Each of the regional languages of India has a vast and rich repertoire of grandmother's tales, folk stories, poems, sayings, jokes, witticism, etc. Unfortunately, these are inaccessible to those of us unfamiliar with languages other than our own mother tongue.

We invite Manushi readers to share with us what has struck you as significant from this repertoire in your mother tongue, that has not previously appeared in English. Please send us the original with a fresh English translation, identifying its oral or written source.

Women Bhakt Poets

Available in an attractive hardbound edition with laminated jacket. Contains accounts of the life and work of Mirabai, Andal, Avvaiyar, Muktabai, Janabai, Bahinabai, Lal Ded, Toral, Loyal and translations of their poetry, many appearing for the first time in English.

120 pages, profusely illustrated.

Price: Rs 100

Overseas Price: US\$ 20

Send advance payment to the **Manushi** address.

Makes A Beautiful Gift