

THE LETTER

Anup Sharma

M.Phil Scholar, Sikkim University

The sun had already kissed the window sill filling the whole room with its rabid energy. The room was in total shambles. Empty packets of food lay on the grimy floor; clothing abandoned in fury last night had soaked drops of rain water that leaked through the damp roof; a stench of rotten fish devoured the whole space. Hell was perhaps better than that. But it was not. He could not run away to it. He was on the earth, living a horrible life days on end. His phone registered the hundredth missed call and each time it rang it went unanswered. A disturbing silence hit the room like a boat sailing on calm waters before it capsizes in the deep blue sea. The room spoke in the multiple layers of its disfiguration. It was a quiet, peaceful space before something might have happened. Something terrible or worse than that.

It was noon and noisy. A murder of crows flew in for a feast on top of a building. It was a dead rat, torn to nothing by the rapacious birds as they clawed the rotting meat. The sun now was in its complete glory and hawkers ringed their presence all around the locality. He was awake and yawning. His mouth a burnt red, a clot formed on one of the lips; head swollen on both sides. He woke up as if like a dead man born again, although unwillingly. A joint cracked as he turned his head trying to stand almost collapsing on the floor. His eyes sunk low. Tears mixed with sweat trickled down from the sides of his head. He was still for a few minutes and then walked towards his study table. A crumpled letter lay there, wet and soft, a touch alone could perish it to bits. He carefully straightened its edges and left it near the window to dry. He waited. His body like a punctured tyre drooped back to the bed. Every move struck him like bullets piercing through his veins. Finally, the letter dried and gradually soaked in tears welling out profusely from his eyes. The letter, its every word, stung him, like a million ants biting through his skin. His family was no more. His father had consumed poison and so had his mother who gave it to his sisters. The

year's harvest was nil and the burden of debt had been too heavy on their lives. Poverty, disease and hunger were not new to him but this news definitely was. He had tried hard to follow them the other day. Self-mutilation was the easiest way. Every hard surface in that little room was tried. Death eluded him yet he had no intention to live. Not a single moment. His life had come crashing down his feet. There was no straw to clutch on to. No glimmer of hope to live by. He dragged himself like a zombie---his legs unwilling to move. The sharp pain all over his body fueled an anger of a thousand watts. It was an anger of submission, of helplessness and desperation. He reached the terrace and slowly headed towards its edge like an excited child eager to discover something. He was dead already yet there was something that kept reminding him of it. He wanted to put an end to that. He crept slowly to the unwalled edge. A jet of hot air rose inside him and passed through his hair as his toe touched the precipice. There was a sudden shout from behind. He turned back to see.

He slipped!