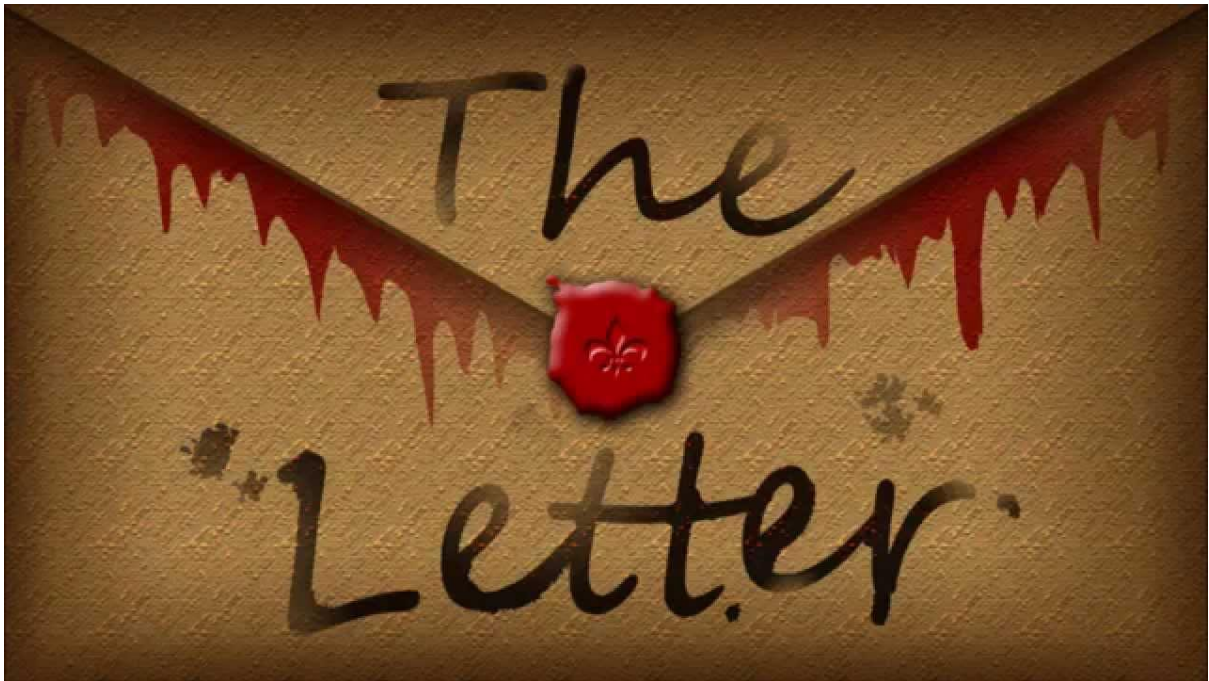


The Letter



Ali had been a brilliant hunter who derived pleasure from the terrorized faces of the young ones of the dying birds. After his daughter's marriage, he was left alone. His daughter, Miriam left home with her husband, a soldier in a regiment in Punjab. Having understood the meaning of love and separation, he could no longer enjoy hunting. Since then, he had been regularly visiting the post office in the early morning, expecting a letter from his daughter Miriam. However, it never came and he would return back disappointed. The post office staff often made fun of him. The clerk even called out his name jokingly even there was no letter for him. Suddenly, for several days, Ali did not come to the post office. Everyone was curious to know the reason behind this. At last, he did come. But now it was difficult for him even to breathe and there were clear signs of his

nearing death. Finally, he met the postmaster and asked him for Miriam's letter. The post master scolded Ali because he was very busy. Consequently, Ali called a clerk and gave him five golden coins and asked him to deliver his letter, if it would come, to his grave. Then he slowly left and was not seen after that day. One day, the post master's daughter fell ill and he was anxious to hear from her. He searched for the letter from his daughter in the pile of letters and picked up a letter, the kind he expected. It was addressed to "Coachman Ali". Now he realized his mistake. He called Lakshmi Das, a clerk and asked him to find out Ali. That day he did not receive his letter and decided that he would hand over Ali's letter himself. In the post office, the next morning he opened the door and saw Ali leaning on a stick with tears in his eyes. His eyes had a light so unearthly that the postmaster got scared. But, suddenly he disappeared. Lakshmi Das, the clerk was shocked to hear the postmaster call out the name of Coachman Ali who had now been dead for three months. The letter was found near the door. Lakshmi Das tells him about his last meeting with Ali to convince him. That evening both of them went to place the letter on Ali's grave. The post master repented for his attitude and thought that he should have been more sympathetic and helpful towards Ali..