

10th Standard

English

The Letter Summary

Ali's going to post office in early morning

In the early dawn, stars glowed as the old I man went. He recollected the happy memories of his life. He was walking through the town. He was pulling his torn clothes tightly close to his body as it was very cold. He heard the sound of grinding stones from the houses. There also came the bark of a dog or a chirp of a bird. Most of the residents were still asleep in that intense cold. The old man shivered. He walked wearily supporting himself on his old stick..

Scene when post office opens

After some time, he reached the building of the post office. He felt happy like a pilgrim when he reaches the destination. He sat quietly on the veranda. He heard the sound of some people coming to him. A voice called 'Police Superintendent'. It was the voice of the post office official. He was calling for the person to receive the letter for this police official. The old man was startled at the sound but composed himself to wait.

Calling of names by the post office clerk

The clerk in the post office read names after names. These were of the Commissioner, – Superintendent, Diwan Sahib and he flung the letters out. Someone called 'Coachman Ali' out of a joke seeing the old man Ali. He got up and went to Gokul Bhai, the post office official. He told him that he had called his name. He ' was there to receive his letter. But the clerk retorted.

He told the postmaster that a mad man (the old man Ali) came there every day and worried them. Ali went back slowly to the bench. He had been coming to sit there for five years.

Ali's past

Ali had been a clever hunter. He had become very skilled in and habitual of hunting. It was difficult for him to remain without it. He used to take out a partridge or a hare from a bush which had not been seen even by the dogs. He was a fine points man also. But now the evening of his life was drawing in. He had left his old ways.

Ali's loneliness

Ali's only child Miriam had married and left him. She had gone with her husband who was a soldier in the army posted in Punjab. For the last five years Ali had no news of his daughter for whom he had been living now. He was like the young partridges without their parents. He could no longer enjoy the old pleasure of his hunting days. Obviously, he had felt the realities of life and understood them.

Ali's coming to post office daily

He had been turned lonely in the going of Miriam after her marriage. He reflected deeply lost in the admiration of the green fields. He concluded that the whole universe is built up through love. But the grief of separation is also inescapable. He wept bitterly thinking of it.

From that day he used to come around five every morning to the post office to receive a letter from his only daughter Miriam.

In his whole life he had not received even a single letter. Yet he came daily to the post office hoping that he would receive it. The post office building had become for him a place of pilgrimage.

Comments by post office officials on Ali's coming to post office

While Ali waited, peons would talk about their masters' scandals. They used to come to receive letters for their masters. The postmaster would sit lifeless with a wooden face. One day when the peons from different offices had gone with their bosses' mail, Ali got up and saluted the post office as if it were a relic. The post-master asked if Ali was mad. The clerk told the postmaster that he had been coming there everyday for the last five years. But he hadn't got any letter.

Post office officials' indirect comments on Ali as mad

Then there arose a discussion among the postmaster, the postman and the clerk. They commented differently on madmen meaning indirectly that Ali was a madman. The postmaster talked of a postman in Ahmedabad who would make little heaps of dust. Then they talked of madness. They said that the mad lived in the world of their own making. The madman's world is like the poet's world, commented the postmaster sarcastically.

Ali's insult by postmaster

For several days Ali didn't come to the post office. At last he came again one day. This time he couldn't even breathe properly. He went to the postmaster and asked him if he had a letter from his Miriam. The postmaster replied angrily. He told him to write his name in case he got a letter from Miriam. He hoped that the postmaster would deliver his letter.

The postmaster lost his temper and asked Ali to get away. Ali came out but his eyes had tears of helplessness. His patience had been exhausted.

Ali's giving money to post office clerk

Ali saw a clerk coming behind him. Ali talked to him. He offered him five golden guineas and asked him to do him a favour. Ali told the clerk in Allah's name to forward his Miriam's letter to him to his grave. He told him that that day was his last day. There were tears in Ali's eyes. He was never seen again there. Also no one troubled to enquire after him.

Illness of postmaster's daughter

One day, trouble came to the postmaster. His daughter lay ill in another town. He was anxiously waiting for news of her but there was no letter. Seeing the mail, he found one letter addressed to Ali. He dropped it with a shock. He felt that it must be from Ali's daughter Miriam. He called the clerk Lakshmi Das and told him to search for Ali and give that letter to him.

Postmaster's worry

The postmaster did not receive any news of his daughter. He worried all night. He got up at three at night and went to sit in the post office. Now he had understood Ali's heart and soul through his own pain.

Ali's ghost before the postmaster

At five, he heard a soft knock at the door. It was Ali. The postmaster rose from the chair and opened the gate. He saw Ali leaning on his stick and asked him to come in. He had tears on his face. But he seemed unearthly. The postmaster shrank back in fear and astonishment (at Ali's ghost).

Truth about Ali's death

Lakshmi Das had heard the postmaster's words as he came towards the post office from another side. He asked the postmaster if that was Ali. But the postmaster continued staring at the doorway from which Ali had disappeared. He told Lakshmi Das that it was Ali. He wondered where he might have gone. But Lakshmi Das replied that Ali had died three months before.

Change in postmaster's mind and heart

The postmaster was bewildered. Ali's image was still before his eyes and Miriam's letter was before him. The daily routine started in the office but the postmaster's heart was elsewhere. He heard the clerk calling the names of Police Commissioner, Superintendent, etc. Now the postmaster didn't treat their letters as envelopes or postcards. He treated them as something which had been coloured with humanity.

Ali's letter delivered at his grave

That evening both the postmaster and Lakshmi Das went to Ali's grave. They laid the letter on it and turned back. The postmaster asked Lakshmi Das if he had been the first to come to the office that morning. Lakshmi Das replied that he was. But the postmaster couldn't understand anything about Ali's coming. He now realised and understood Ali's anxiety. He was tortured by doubt and anxiety as he sat in the glow of the charcoal sigri. He sat there waiting for his daughter's news.