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## The Crimson Fall

Abhinandan Nandrajog

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The weather is transitioning. Winds blow at a pace harder, a temperature cooler and a frequency higher now. Summer recedes from his tanned body into the blue holes placed at the zenith and the heart in his chest boils in the future nostalgia. The longings that feel like déjà vu. The unmet dreams never felt truer. The month of October dawns upon Anuval like an XXL sweater that entraps more of air than his shy torso. The loyal molecules, albeit resembling repairable space, albeit formless, keep him warm like he once anticipated from his formful lover.

His family is small. Well, Just him. And his room. Sometimes his mother. To keep his mother intact, he has to retract his jurisdiction from the already little space he occupies in this world.

Is world really a big space?

His mother is entrapped in a cage that's inside the one Anuval is caged in, that he is so desperately trying to evade. To help his mother, he has to do but help himself.

His room isn't only his haven. His blood runs through the walls, every painting - old, new - every word, every thought imbibed on its white walls is an animation of the bigger life that his room is. The windows, eyes. The doors, seashores. The books, world tour. The curtains of solid Bordeaux colour alternating with curtains of 'heavy rain cloud before storm' background having gardening of burgundy over, eyelids. The guitar with rusted strings with flowers vining around the neck, sprouting unprecedentedly at any fret and hugging the body so tightly as if the wood of guitar with rusted strings has found in itself to bear the love of life, the flowers.

Every evening, he sits reticent, resting his back against the wall, legs folded to the chest, submental triangle propped on the knees, and eyes fixated on the window in the opposite wall. His vision only meets the sun and beyond. The wall that harbours his back culminates at the doors carved out in the adjacent walls on both ends. The wall has a scarlet, dried, rotten - sort of smear - only above where Anuval sits, contemplating. At about a height tad lower than Anuval's standing. Where his dad smashed his mother's head once. The whack had only left a smaller stain of fresh blood with two bulbous realms racing along gravity. An eternal buzz has remained as the aftermath. Ammi's left side of face was saved, only the blood trickling down from bloody damp hairy scalp. Ammi was a strong woman then. Ammi is a stronger woman now. She didn't shed a tear.

Anuval banged his forehead over and over again on the baby smear. Ammi's baby smear was blanketed by an Ammi smear of Anuval's blood.

Small miseries of your caged mothers can be undone by masking them with less smaller miseries of their caged sons, can't they?

Ammi smear over baby smear. One Scarlet blended with another. Yet never so scarlet was the blood of bonds of love, as of hatred structured into the monuments of patriarchy.

Anuval is trying to be stronger, like his Ammi. Only that he's not strong, at least that type of strong. To bear and re-bear. To fear and re-fear. To serve and re-serve. His mask came at the cost of tears from rheumy eyes, blood from banged foreheads and sweat from internalized heat strokes.

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Anuval exited his classroom after clearing the board and shoving his notes into his age-old bag. School was over. Aaminush waited for him at the end of corridor. Anuval's quickened pace conceived recesses, a poise. A smile birthed at the corner of his lips. Eyelids unshuttering only to steal a glance of the waiter. Aaminush, who was already smiling, then cackled.

"Why the fuck do you have to be so obedient? You know for how long have I been trying to press myself against the wall so it could conduct my desperation to your room and choke you with it?", Aaminush says mockingly whilst walking towards Anuval.

"Yeah, that was you?", Anuval acted back, "You bastard! I was about to die."

Both laughed hard. Their kenopsic laughter inundating their vicinity.

"Lucky that you left, then", Aaminush put his left arm around Anuval's shoulders and hugged him close as their walks synchronized.

"Lucky you or lucky me?", Anuval pretended to think out loud.

"You and I

In a field

Full of stars", Aaminush started singing, his head resting against Anuval's, eyes tiptoeing on the ceiling, as if this was their city of stars.

At the end of the corridor, Anuval pulled them to the left. There was a staircase leading to the terrace of the school. Beneath it was a prismatic unexplored hole.

"We can hide

From the world

If we want", Anuval took over and pulled them into the benign crevice under the staircase.

"Nuv, what? Where?", Aaminush followed willingly though.

"Interesting", he said finally in position.

"Is it Nush-worthy?", Nuv asked with fingers tapering down from the Nush's collar along the placket, undoing first button before the second.

"As long as it's Nuv-worthy", Nush said with ease in his whispers. His hands on Nuv's waist, who was leaning against the wall.

Nuv drew Nush closer by tugging hard on either side of his undid school shirt. There were small hair on Nush's chest, very symmetrical and his infantile happy trail indeed made a very pleasant appearance.

Their bodies collided.

Nuv carried his mouth to Nush's right ear and whispered, "Any place is worthy of being with you."

“Let’s go to the terrace then”, Nush teased, parting their bodies after pecking on Nuv’s lips. Their once flat zippers bulged invisibly in incomparable proximity, under the veil of each other, which then showed. Two big dome shaped bulges in the pants of two ordinary school going teens. Both boys. One milky white and other with rich capillary beds underneath the skin with meagre melanin. Both loved the Sun, the terrace and October. And each other, or so Nuv thought.

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This is the only time Anuval is alone. Sitting right under his bigger blanketing smear, right between the two doors of his room in the pair of opposite walls other than the walls harbouring Anuval’s prestigious back and the portal to the Sun. The winds enter from Anuval’s right, graze every ang of his body through his XXL sweater and shorts. Re-pairing repairable spaces. Carrying exhausted molecules out through left. The winds carry an indomitable taste of Aaminush.

“Maybe I loved him more than he could bear.” Static Anuval, the winds paced harder from his right to left, his clothes barely sticking to his body, his hair surrendering the inertia of rest and conceding to the purging winds. Meaningful waves crashing the shores but is Anuval still! He gets up and walks to the shore on the right. The dynamics indignantly magnificent. His tears welled up at the brink of lower lids now burn his cheeks and the wise ocean invites clouds of gigantic thunder. The rain from the future travels to Anuval on winds saturated with Aaminush. Baby droplets meet Anuval with a juggernaut followed by Ammi drops. But there is balm in that hurt. The pain equals the magnitude of loss. His clothes undress him. Naked at the doors of shores, clad in the rain of tormented redemption, Anuval screams amidst incessant cries, tears dissolving in rain – drench his pale body and he falls to the ground. The eyes of the room watch the Sun from when it turns red to when it leaves the sky to turn into darker shades of blue. Blue holes at the zenith shudder. Anuval curls up on the floor, falls asleep at dusk.

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“Race you to the top”, Nush called out halfway through the staircase.

With from his head to shoulder blades smooching the wall and rest of the body arching much like the bulge in his pants, Nuv snapped out from trying to locate blue holes in almost dark caverns that exist under the staircases that lead to tops. There was something so wrong about everything so right. He stepped out and followed Nush. On the terrace, the view was beholding. No, not the view except the way Nush glistens under the afternoon sun. He was tall and his milky white skin, then perspired. Sweat on his forehead appeared in the form of mist fashioned drops and in little drops on his philtrum. He looked at Nuv like a question mark, “Are you going to devour me from a distance or what?”

Nuv stepped into the light and holy moly, was it hot for the end of September. He started sweating immediately. Walked towards Nush standing near the edge on the rear side of the school, head down, couldn’t face the sun, and very definitely not the perspiring Aaminush. Nush, on the other hand, had his eyes fixed on Nuv. With every approaching step, Nush’s smile widened and Nuv’s skin got redder. A few yards apart, Nuv raised his head up, locked eyes with Nush, accelerates, pulled off his sleeveless sweater in one swift move and crashed into the intimidated-and-exhilarated-Nush. Clasp his hands on either side of Nush’s head with fingers interlocking at the back of his neck, both of them were swinging in a circle. In Nush’s eyes, Nuv found himself being the happiest of this world, forgot he was in a cage with his trapped mother, dying a thousand deaths everyday. Every wrong action she put up with, every slur that was hurled her way, every question she had to stand the test of for others’ wrongs.

All of it alleviated with Nush. Nuv dived deeper into Nush's eyes and found his lips swimming over Nush's. Eyes shut only to see more. There was a rapture – of longing – in space and time. Parting of lips to juxtapose in more intricate arrangements. The kissing mo(nu)ments demolished and built over again. Loops of Parting and juxtaposing. Nuv's hands dampened from Nush's sweaty hair. Their cheeks. Their faces were shining brightly, Nush's glimmering diamonds, Nuv's plump ruby. The dying September had gotten warmer than life itself. Nuv brought his hands to Nush's chest and touched it, hesitantly. Sweaty hands meeting sweaty chest. The mere touch evoked a moan out of Nush.

Nuv laughed. Trying hard to hold it back. Nush opened his eyes to meet an uncontrollable Nuv. Nuv finally let out a monstrous laugh and ran along the edge. Humoured Nush feigned embarrassment and began chasing him. Both were running. Both were laughing. Both were free. The world was a big place.

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"I think you love him more than you can bear", Nuv stopped reading and looked up into the sky. Nush followed Nuv's eyeline.

"I think you love him more than you can bear", Nush repeated, both of them staring into infinity. Legs dangling from the edge, Nush pushed his teenage tuchus against terrace's floor and lands his tuchus next to Nuv's. The molten red sun fused with the horizon and the pole star was trying to usurp the sky. Nuv lost in thought was immune to inertia of time moving forward. Unaware of Nush's pleasing attempt at his neck.

"What is going on here?", questioned a voice appearing from behind. Nuv was only brought back to reality when Nush had yielded to a massive panic attack.

"Nothing, it's Nuv who tricked me to come here", Nush sprung to his feet and stuttered away from Nuv.

Nuv turned to him, unbelievable, he thought, and threw Nush a discordant look.

"Anuval?", the voice asked, pressingly.

Anuval knew in a split second whose voice it was. His brother, Selva's.

It was then that Anuval's heartbeat skyrocketed.

"So all the speculations regarding you being a homo are true?", Selva asked in a matter of fact statement tone before dissing, "Shame on you, *Chhakka saala*". The words stabbed Anuval in the back. He could have died right then and there but he only shed one tear.

"You too?", speculated Selva, facing Aaminush, "You're the Principal's son for God's sake". Disgusted Selva turned around and bombarded, "Everyone will know about this!", as he went on about his business. All the blood drained off from Anuval's face. The pole star dimmed against this solar flare event on earth.

"No. No", frantic Aaminush shouted, trying to catch the slipping-out-of-hand Selva to save his (uselessly and inaptly) convicted ass, "It's your brother who's a faggot. He's been threatening to defame me, leveraging his position as the head boy if I don't put myself on the line for his unnatural desires".



Hearing this, Anuval was infuriated, the arteries in his head and neck, throbbing with rage. But more than that, he pitied himself for he was in love with Aaminush. He drank back the tears that were about to question his very existence and got up. Got up and turned around. Turned around and faced the wrath. Head on.

“Unnatural? All this? Everything that came so naturally, yet unnatural you call it? No wonder you’re trying your hardest to be clean of something so wrong, almost as if it’s a crime. Nush-worthy? Fuck it. I deserve more than a liar, a cheat and a coward. But guess what, you can’t choose who you fall in love with”, Anuval’s voice cracked in the end.

Aaminush put up a flat face, emotionless.

“Oh, shut the fuck up, you lowlife. I wish you were dead. This isn’t any one of your stupid dramas. This is real life and he doesn’t love you or whatever your insides wanted or believed.” Selva’s words ripe with acrimony, “I can’t bear the shame of calling you my brother. Once a scum, always a scum”, escaped Selva’s, Anuval’s own brother’s mouth. His own blood. Anuval knew it then and there that it wasn’t going to be fair. Or easy. Never so scarlet was the blood of bonds of love, as of hatred structured into the monuments of patriarchy.

“Take it”, Selva asked Aaminush, offering him a pocket knife, “Avenge yourself. Cut the faggot the number of times he touched you with his scum thoughts.”

This was all getting too much for Anuval to wrap his head around. From unprecedentedly gigantic betrayal to his own brother turning into a homicidal bitch. He closed his eyes.

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The weathering winds exceed the inertia of ever running time, pulling and pushing Anuval off the present. Anuval finds himself affront an ocean grown dull at dawn. The skies don’t harbour kind clouds anymore. A roar in the distance nears.

“You little fucker”, a furiously small, stout man appears at the door opposite to where Anuval slept the night. Naked. Redeeming.

The man is his father, by blood. His dictator is more pragmatic, a relation. Scrutinizing and walking towards Anuval with a wretched look, “So you’ve begun your *dhandha* by flashing from your room only, huh?”, he says grabbing Anuval’s hair and pulling him up. Anuval howls in pain and resists feebly to free his hair from his dad’s hands.

“Do you scream like that when boys fuck you, slut?”

The rumours are doing rounds and dad has picked on one good one. He thrusts Anuval against the wall with a thud. Something cracks in Anuval’s chest and he groans.

“Ayee!! Leave him alone. He hasn’t done anything”, Anuval’s mom comes running for the door.

Dad drops Anuval instantly, shuts the wooden door and bolts it. She bangs on it twice from the other side but an eerie silence follows. His dad looks like he suddenly learnt something before he runs to close the other door but is stopped in his tracks by the naked, dead-looking Anuval. Dad kicks Anuval’s face with his *chappal*-donned feet. Another crack. A broken nose. Blood flows. But no sound from Anuval. He inhales through his mouth and with all the might, at the top of his lungs, cries, “*Ammiiii*”. His macabre voice crushes Ammi’s heart. Alas, the other door bolted too.

Too weak to even get up, let alone speak, he lies below the smear, naked in the pool of his own blood.

“You must kill yourself”, dad says grabbing and pulling Anuval’s blood-soaked hair again, “or wait, let me give you a hand”. Strangling Anuval with his right hand, dad drags him up the wall, the bloody trail ascending accordingly and once Anuval’s head is in line with the double layered smear, his dad tightens his left hand’s grip on Anuval’s hair and starts hammering it against the wall, a third layer coming. Anuval has stopped resisting. A dead toy his dad is playing with. And once he gets bored, he throws Anuval away like trash.

Ammi’s incessant cries, “*Darwaza kholo*” and failed tries at breaking the ‘*darwaza*’ fetch her no response.

Exasperated, she sits at the door only, listening to sound of silence and indecipherable thuds coming from behind the door.

“Well, you’re dead anyway, if not today, tomorrow. Why not let’s do each other a favour?”, asks dad from Anuval, who is slipping in and out of consciousness, the waves seldom hitting the shore, the tide low.

Dad picks him up and places him on the bed, Anuval’s back facing the roof. He tears a page from one of Anuval’s books and wipes the blood off of Anuval’s bottom. He unbuttons his pants scraps them down. His penis towering above an oblivious Anuval, unaware of what’s coming onto him.

The world is a small place. Where Dads kill their sons and rape them, oh pardon, favour them thereafter.

No blue holes at the zenith. Oceans dried up. The only Sun smothered. The flowering vines loosen their grip from over the guitar with rusted strings. Life is retracting its tentacles from Anuval’s room. Slowly and steadily. His only haven turns into his death rink.

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Dad unbolts the door on the left and finds his terrified wife, or truly, his toy slave.

“Tell your wretched piece of a son to learn from his faggot friend’s actions and do himself a favour”, dad advises her and walks away, zipping up his pants.

Ammi stands up and gasps at the first sight that meets her eyes. She’s frozen dead, her incapacity to take in the cruelty wreaked out on his son alone. Her trembling body takes heavy steps towards an extinguished life on the verge of entering a new, perhaps better, dimension.

Anuval half hangs from the edge of his bed, painted ruthlessly in blood. A peculiar white fluid oozing out from his butthole, dripping down his left thigh. Ammi can’t absorb it. She runs to the bathroom and vomits. Slaps her hands on the floor and whines like a deadly beaten cat.

In the very next moment, like lightning, she stops grieving, and runs to get Anuval to the bathroom. She picks her 17 year old, wraps his left arm around her shoulders and puts her right arm on his waist to support him up. “Not losing my beautiful son to this small world”, she says to herself and takes themselves the bathroom. She bathes him clean, tends to his wounds. Her brave boy had taken the hard blows with little damage. She wraps a bandage over and around his forehead. Dresses him in seafoam coloured sweater and black shorts, puts his favourite cologne on him. She cleans the

floor of his room, changes the sheets. Only the Wall of Fame looks more brilliant now. By evening, Anuval is out of his comatose situation.

“Ammi, I’m fine. Please give me some alone time”, Anuval pleads and Ammi leaves her son to be, without an argument.

Anuval sits restlessly at rest, at the very point of his crucifixion, playing with the now Aaminush’s pocket knife. Dripping sun’s light graze Anuval’s brutalized body, through the crevices in the iron bars put against his glass window. Sun sobs and melts into crimson all across the horizon this evening. Redder than ever. The whole evening sky carried the guilt of lives lost and lights extinguished.

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Anuval recalled all the gilded memories in the prestigious cracks of his mind, like a quick album and unveiled his eyes to find a reality so different, altogether separated from history of events. Aaminush racing towards him like a bull with the pocket knife as the horn at front. Anuval positioned himself for the anticipated combat. The collision of (unnaturally) unlawful lovers. The knife pierced nobody but Nush was trying to drag their collided bodies to the edge. Nuv resisting his hardest. Nuv could see Selva’s inhuman face lit up with smile. Selva lived for this spice. Nuv pushed back harder but Nush eluded Nuv’s friction and let his momentum carry himself over and off the edge. Nuv spun around to grab Nush’s hand but could only steal the pocket knife off his hand. For sweaty hands can’t down-regulate the inertia of impending doom. For an entire life must be stolen to avenge the theft of Pocket knife. That’s justice. Those are the rules of this Real world.

Anuval watched Aaminush fall to ground from the fifth floor, his teary-eyed face distorted from the havoc that his little life had saved for him at the last. Aaminush hit the ground at dusk. A scarlet smear bigger than his double layered, ripened on the white marble floor at the back of the school.

Anuval rotated his head around to witness a fleeing coward and the real criminal.

On the edge, over the edge, off the edge. Worlds come together and fall apart. One can look but can’t touch.

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There is no wind today. The moment of inertia is yet the highest, for a force is conceiving inside Anuval. He gets up and climbs to the terrace of his house. He will not live in enslavement anymore. He will take the leap of faith and touch the palpable after-world that he brushed his hands with last evening.

Anuval perches up the parapet and looks into the sky. The drowning sun and adulating pole star have chosen their battles. So has Anuval.

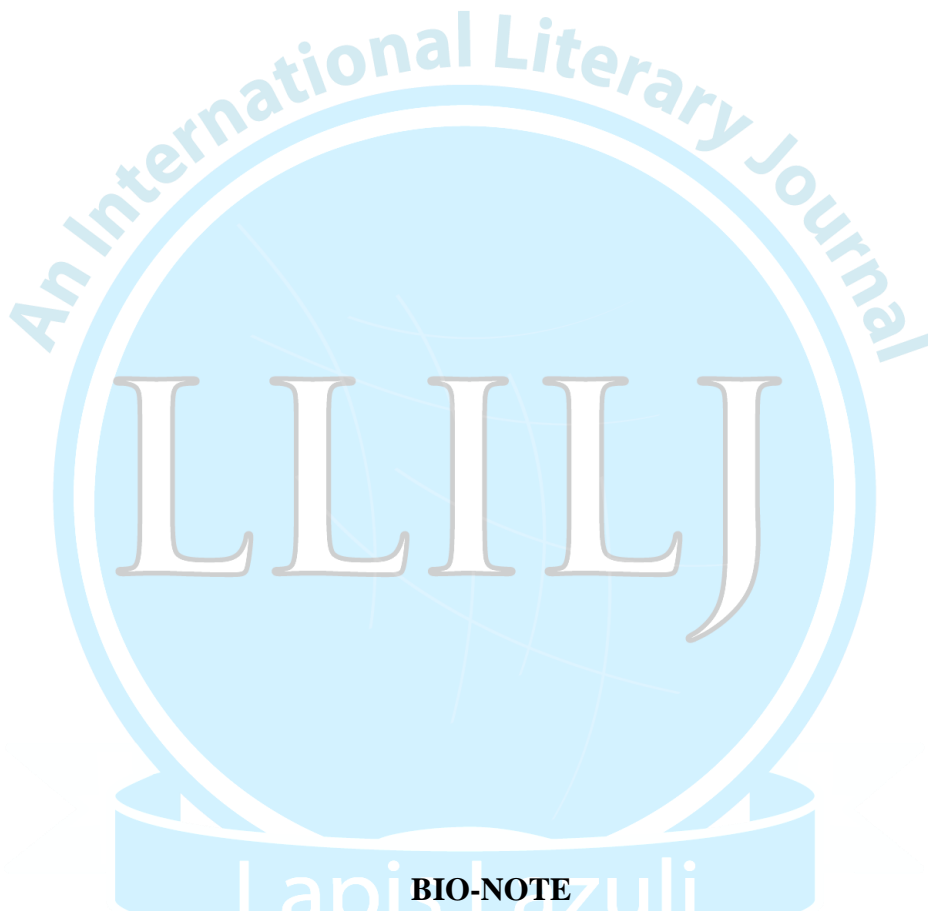
“*Nahi putt*, you’re not meant for this. You’re more worthy of this world than anybody else. This world doesn’t deserve you. But you deserve it. Don’t give them your death. Give them your life. Your big life. That’s what they deserve. Give them your fiery wrath. That’s what they deserve. Give them a new life. That’s why you have to live.”, Ammi keeps speaking and Anuval keeps listening. “Give me your life and I’ll be free. Keep yours to yourself and you’ll be free.”, Ammi slowly places her hand in Anuval’s and Anuval retraces his path of recent past actions to sit outwardly on the parapet facing the sun bidding farewell. The azure starry blanket clads Anuval in its new embrace.



“You wouldn’t let your son be a man. At least he was dying a man’s death. Shame that I’ll have to kill this wretched son of a wretched mother myself”, dad says walking towards Anuval. Ammi crosses his path and tries to stop the heinous monster that her husband has been. He blows Ammi away like every time. And raises his arms to push Anuval off. Anuval, strategically planked on the parapet receives conscious signal, attempts disposition and swirls his right arm with a riveting torso all the way around, with meticulously positioned pocket knife in the right hand. A clean slit in dad’s throat before dad’s hands could even touch his seafoam coloured sweater. Dad falls to the ground. Anuval jumps over him and lends Ammi a hand and picks her up. They walk down the stairs, Anuval leading the way, his hand in Ammi’s. The prisoners of war liberated. The persistently toxic social fabric torn to shreds. Once and for all.

This battle is won. But the war is still on.

Their Suns rise at sunset.



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**BIO-NOTE**

Abhinandan Nandrajog is B.Pharm student at University Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He believes in multidimensional exploration of science through literature and tries to write for manifesting a better world. By addressing the veiled yet omniscient vices of today’s world, he audaciously attacks the glorifying dappled system, so the newer architecture for tomorrow can be built, upon kindness, empathy and excellence. Via his association with societies in the locale, he guides and leads lesser privileged kids to have a vision by teaching them and celebrating with them their little joys and successes.

**E-mail id:** [abhinandan1910@gmail.com](mailto:abhinandan1910@gmail.com)