

## **The crowd**

***A short story by Brahmanand S Siingh***

The toast was served by a boy in the basement. The restaurant smelled as if someone had done the toilet in it five years ago, and not flushed, and left the window locked. The plates looked as if they'd been washed half-heartedly and some of them still had food stuck at the edges and my plate appeared damp from the hasty wash between me and the last person who had eaten off it.

A crowd had gathered at the end of Grant Road. They normally have no time to stop, but the sight of people flocked together compels them to take a peep. Nothing better to do than to see what the others are looking at. A sergeant is holding a sixteen-year-old boy by his collar. He must've done something. Pushing something, maybe. Look at him, he can't stand. He's footless, it's a rough life, poor thing.

A crowd of people always knows something. They know he's very young & what he does. They know where the bargains are made ... what's it like to be on the street, on your own, in a crowd, under illusion, inside the law. Behind young men and girls. Beyond help. Overlooked. Ambitionless, self contained, unattached and round shouldered?

A crowd forms of the longing to remain separate. People speak to each other to keep their distance. They flock and divide into a crowd of individuals. They collate and stand so as not to be looked at. So as not to be recognized, to remain inside that most excessive form of anonymity. They watch somebody arrested for a sense of dignity. A man joins the crowd so nobody will know he's just got a haircut. Another woman adjusts her bra and nobody notices it. You need a crowd to forget yourself.

While a sergeant holds out his arm in the crowd, someone dances beneath his intentions. If it is some girl, a woman asked her husband for money. She doesn't have the change. You watch the girl while you're in a crowd. You're in the crowd to confirm you're not the only one. People stand in the street because they're more at home. As the boy pleads innocence, under the grip of the police, people gather to hide their guilt.

A man stands mute and inert, watching this boy in the grip of the police. A man in the crowd says, but he's so young, another says, they're taking him away. People in the crowd instantly whisper and forget their own pain. He must've done something, somebody says. While her friend say nothing, another adds, they're taking him in the jeep. I am also the part of the crowd but I'm unable to say a word because someone in the crowd has already said it.