

My father eats grapes with *roti*
late one March night,
chasing each verdant orb around
the plate with a torn *roti* piece,
pinching each grape
with the same delicate insistence
that he uses with forceps
during surgery.

He recalls his mother
telling him to eat such
scraps
when there was no meat for
saalan,
which upset him then,
the same way *dada abu* did
when he beat *dadi ami*
for the lack of meat,
but satisfies him now,
like when he recollects
his *agha* sitting in the Pakistani
monsoon,
eating iced mangoes
from a bucket.

I imagine *agha*—
who loves by helping to heal,
reinflating lungs,
unclogging arteries—
on his final visit to his father,
starting cigarettes
for my bed-bound *dada abu*,
whose joviality was enough strength
to recite *ghazals*.

Through the rickshaw blare of life,
I spy the serenity of simplicity in my
father:
the bread, fruit, rain.
Though he does not light any more
cigarettes,
the *ghazals* he can sing.

Akas Siddiqui

Glossary of Urdu words: *agha* = father; *roti* = soft, round flat bread; *saalan* = curry; *dada abu* = paternal grandfather; *dadi ami* = paternal grandmother; *ghazals* = genre of Urdu poetry.

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Agha