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, unclugging 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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