

The Fruit Platter

by Aleena Touqeer

It's a new day and the clock strike eight again. It is the usual cycle of this family. The father calling out to all five of his kids individually, "Sally, come out. Evans come out. Mary come out. Josh come out. Rebecca come out", each within a five seconds difference and the loop repeats until everyone is out.

Sally grumpily comes out in frustration because she has been distracted from watching her TV show. Evans is tired but always goes before the third call comes. Mary is quick to go if she is not totally immersed in texting her friends at the time. Josh is always glued to the screen, but is sitting out most of the times. Rebecca is the most obedient, or maybe it's because she loves eating fruits the most. Once everyone is out, the mother comes out from the kitchen, finishing the dishes after dinner. The mother is responsible for taking care of everyone's appetite, except for the fruit-that is the father's duty.

The time eight on the clock is fruit time and this ritual has been carried forward since the children have been born. The father starts cutting fruits according to each kid's preferences. He makes sure that the fruit basket is always full. There was one time Josh complimented the taste of oranges, "they are very yummy", and the next day, the basket was full of oranges. The father worked from 10am-5pm but still managed to make time for this ritual and never went on with his day by omitting it no matter how tired he was.

The TV behind them is loud with political disputes going on in the country. However, more than anything, there are two times in this house that everyone comes together as a family without the intrusion of their phones-the dinner time and now, the fruit time.

The father cuts the fruits and lays them fancily in a plate. Once done, he places the plate between the children and asks them to eat. Everyone starts having their favourites, and the mother waits for the father to cut the mango for Rebecca and give her the seed. She sucks the juice out of that, before getting any leftover mango from Rebecca that she can swipe clean. The father waits, fulfilling his hunger with political crisis going on in the country. He hums while the children eat, his white hair flashing as he moves his head in an upward and downward motion. First glancing at the plate then on the TV, keeping watch of both of these situations, as if he was the saviour of both lifeboats.

Mary finishes her watermelon and sees everyone feasting on their fruits like they have been hungry for a while. She observes her siblings eating hastily and the fruit platter simultaneously being smaller and smaller. Then she sees a shadow of the hand that cut the fruit, sitting there idle. She keeps her eyes glued to that hand—the thin flesh with prominent green veins rests the knife under his care in case the children ask for more portion of the fruit.

Once everyone is full, they leave for their respective rooms, but Mary stays. She wants to break the mystery of the hand. Despite studying theories about everything, she was astonished at how none of them could break the mystery of this hand. This new profound enlightenment made Mary think, *What was it about the hand that was so hard to comprehend?* Mary's bubbles of thoughts are soon broken as the hand speaks, "Do you want more of the other fruits Mary? I see you left the watermelon. Is there anything else you need"? For a moment, Mary fails to recognize the voice, then she looks up and sees her father ready with a fruit in hand.

"No father, I am very much full". She sees the hand with the fruit slowly retrieving from the action of cutting. The last pieces of watermelon stays in the plate. The father brings the plate in

front of the mother, but she refuses the offer as she is busy eating the leftover mangoes from the clumsy eating of Rebecca.

After waiting for this moment for all this while, Mary sees her father's hand reaching the plate. He grabs the last two pieces of the watermelon and eats them. By his expression it seems like he is full.

Mary finds it very strange yet it was like an eye opener for her. She realizes how their father sacrifices his wishes and desires in order to fulfil his children's. She sees love and care in the small gesture of not consuming the fruits as it will mean one less for the children. She sees how being tired or on the phone could never repay this kind of love that their father projects for them. Not only the father, but she looks at her mother, scraping leftovers of Rebecca to fulfil her desire to eat a mango. This is love. Parents preserve every best thing for their children and children fail to acknowledge them. The smallest actions make the largest proportion of love.

Mary finally understands that the hand's struggle and resistance meant love. Every echo of the five names was love. The father eyeing the plate so it will not be left empty was love. Parent's presence and their callings were love. The fruit platter is a manifestation of the struggles of binding a family and a reason for them to come together.

Mary then leaps across the divider, which is the plate, and gives a tight hug to her father and mother, muttering "I love you" in a quick motion, as if she was breathing these words in that moment of embrace. It was the first time she really understood the deep-rooted love of her parents' actions, and the barrier of love and communication between them broke as the fruit platter emptied. The juice left in the plate is full of proof that parental love can never run out.