

KIRUN KAPUR

Melon Cleaver

They stood in line to buy a slice of melon—
My father and my uncle, in cantaloupe season.
When the boy in front reached out to pay,
The melon seller waved his cleaver.

This was Lahore in cantaloupe season:
Summer was working up its heat.
With one hand the melon seller waved his cleaver
Over a bright, thick slab of fruit.

Summer was only beginning,
But already the days had grown hot.
A cool slab of sweet melon
Was everything two boys could want.

But already the days had grown heated
When the boy in front reached out to pay.
Chilled melon was all two boys could want,
Or so my uncle claimed.

When the boy reached out to pay,
The melon seller brandished his cleaver.
My uncle paused before claiming,
With the other hand, he stabbed the boy with a dagger.

The melon seller brandished his cleaver,
Drawing all eyes from the fruit.
He stabbed the boy with a tiny dagger,
Putting his other hand to use.

All eyes flew to the cleaver—
The boy fell on our feet.
No one was watching the other hand.
This is how my uncle told it.

The boy fell on our feet.
My uncle's voice was full of wonder.
This is the way he told it—
As if a comet had passed overhead.

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My uncle's voice was full of wonder:
The boy was reaching out to pay.
As if a comet had passed over
My father and uncle in melon season.