

SYEDA ANILA RIZVI

Rain

In a semi-desert climate, rain is life. It was a bright summer day and the sunlight dazzled my eyes. While driving my father to my uncle's home, I saw dark gray clouds on the horizon and felt happy that they covered the sun quickly and filled the earth below with their cool shade. The first raindrop hit the windshield, but the intense heat evaporated it quickly, leaving a muddy mark behind. Raindrops have always fascinated me, I remember as a little girl I tried to hold them in my hands and loved their freshness. My father said, "It will rain heavily."

Being the elder brother, my father had a routine of visiting his younger brothers once a month. My uncle Ahmed owned a date orchard, perhaps the biggest in the area. He was looking anxiously at the cloudy skies. "Oh, I don't want rain during these days! I wish rains are delayed for a couple of weeks." He was returning from his farm in his jeep, and these were the first words he uttered when he saw us. My jaw dropped at his strange wish; how could someone not want rain in such a hot and dry weather? Then I remembered why: We live in a small town, on the periphery of the desert. Contrary to the country's fertile plains, where people enjoy four seasons we have only two — long summers and short winters. The dates ripen during summer and his dates were ripe. Sweet. Ready for picking.

Uncle Ahmed continued that whenever he looked at his fruit laden trees the fear of rain gripped his heart because a slight drizzle would spoil the ripe sweet dates. He reminded us about last year's incidence, when his date palms were laden with fruit, the dates were ripe, the harvest was ready — "I had hired the labor for cutting the bunches of dates — only two days were left in the harvest — one night my sleep was disturbed by severe thunder and blinding lights — I ran to my courtyard — A thick dark cloud was overcasting the skies — My heart sank at the sight — I rushed to my orchard — in the meanwhile drizzle turned into torrential rain that lasted for many hours" — He closed his eyes tightly, perhaps trying to block the vision of the rain-spoiled dates from his memory. With a deep sigh, he continued, "I don't want the same fate this year." As long as we stayed there, my father did his best to calm him.

My second uncle, Omar, lives in the same town and his house was our next stop. He is a farmer and grows wheat and rice. He welcomed us with a beaming smile. "Omar, how is your farming faring?" asked my father after his usual greeting.

"The crops are fine, but I am anxiously waiting for the rain. This year the precipitation is unusually low; if there are no rains in the coming few days the crops will wither." He reflected for few minutes and said, "I wish it will rain."

Father said, "Omar have you looked at the sky? It may..."

Father held his breath.

Uncle Omar jumped from his chair, hurriedly went out and returned, his eyes were beaming with joy. "It may rain today."

We wished uncle good luck and came out of his house, while taking his seat in the car father said, "Who can control the rain?"

The same afternoon, it started raining. I was excited to see children running and playing in a heavy downpour. The rain was a blessing and brought life back to the dry and parched earth. From my study, I was looking out of the window and watching the drops of water majestically falling down and producing transparent bubbles, I imagined my uncle Ahmed's face and tried to reflect what he might be thinking, and remembered my nursery rhyme, "Rain, rain, go away, come again another day." I smiled and spread my hands to gather the drops of rainwater and feel their coolness.