

## Thoppil Bhasi

I didn't know any names for fruits in Malayalam,  
and he didn't know them in English, so I ran  
up and down the stairs with every kind of fruit we had,  
until we discovered it was strawberries he'd been wanting.

He was famous back in India,  
a playwright, I think, or a poet. This was 1989;  
I was 10. I was used to Indian celebrities—  
movie stars and dancers—but this was the first  
writer who stayed with us, as a guest of my father's club.  
His thinning, white hair didn't hide his brown scalp.  
Thick, black glasses framed his eyes.

I asked him to sign my autograph book,  
and he covered a whole page with his native script,  
blue ink on light pink paper. The bulbous letters  
my father had taught me to read were a mystery of loops  
in his fluent hand. I could make out only the top line,  
the familiar characters of my name repeated twice:  
*Sneha-mulla Sneha-mol*. Loving daughter Sneha.  
I wonder what else he wrote to fill  
an entire page for a girl who brought him fruit.

SNEHA MADHAVAN-REESE