

POETRY | SPRING 2019

## Heirloom

By Usman Hameedi

Not sure who had it first, but I know  
we are a family of patients.  
Passed down from generations,  
are veins filled with thick molasses,  
hemoglobin dipped in sugar confetti.

Glucose is a 6-carbon sugar  
and my heirloom is never 6 degrees of separation afar.

My uncle died with syrup blood,  
leg hardened into sugar cane,  
foot black like a rotting banana,  
sap leaking from limbs.  
He the maple that didn't drip too far  
from the amputated family tree.  
He joined the family plot, a graveyard  
sprinkled with sugar crystal tombstones.

Syrup sinks in water  
but still crosses continents.

Here in America,  
my mom wept saltwater  
when her brother died and  
then pricked her finger to feed the glucose monitor.

I have never known my dad  
living without insulin.  
He taught me the proper injection procedure,  
did his best to give  
me clinical exposure for medical school applications.

But the more I learn about my family,  
I can't help but wonder if  
he was also preparing me  
for a day when our heirloom  
becomes my own.

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**Usman Hameedi is a Pakistani-American scientist and poet. Since 2008, he has competed in and coached for collegiate, national, and international level poetry slams. Most recently, he was ranked 15th at the 2019 Individual World Poetry Slam and was invited to open the Final Stage Slam. He has been featured on *Upworthy*, *Huffington Post*, and the *Story Collider: Storytelling for Scientists* podcast. In addition to his spoken word background, Hameedi has contributed to academic and industry laboratories with an array of research focuses, including protein crystallography, mitochondrial dynamics, cancer cell metabolism, and drug discovery. Of all the things he has done, he is most proud of inspiring others to dream big and see the greatness within themselves!**