



Triage of Two Cultures

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The day I got into medical school my grandfather called.
He said now that you're a doctor I have a question.
Two dying patients come to your clinic, he said
before I could stop him—
a parent and a child.
Whom do you see first, and why?

I'm not a doctor yet! I said.
You're wasting time, he said—
the patients are getting sicker.

Well can I ask some questions? I said.
Questions? he said—
the dying want answers.

The child! I blurted out
in English. The child
has longer to live.

There was a pause—not long, but long enough
to sense the disappointment and to question:
Do oceans mix? How can blood look red
and blue? Will I speak the language
of Oedipus and Laius or of Rostam and Sohrab
when, some narrowed arteries from now,
my immigrant grandfather calls for one last answer.

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