

## Re-verse

INTRODUCED BY CLAIRE ORCHARD

**About the poet:** Yazan El Fares attends Mana College, where he has been part of the student council, and enjoys playing football. He is from Syria, has been in New Zealand for two years, and hopes to one day study dentistry at university.

**Why read it:** The first stanza is a delicately wrought depiction of a family evening. The courtyard with the grapevine, the mats on the floor, the details of the grapes and watermelon provide access into the scene. But the poet is careful to maintain a balance between what he reveals and what he keeps from us. We can see the tableau clearly, and yet the names and relationships of the family members are not mentioned, the title of the TV drama not given. This shift from the specific to the indistinct helps show this scene as one that could be unfolding in many families. Maybe something similar is going to be happening at your place this evening.

**Why I like it:** At least partly because it connects to my own experience of family; with the minor substitutions of biscuits for the fruit, of a warm sitting room for a grapevine shaded courtyard, this is a spot-on depiction of how evenings with my extended family often play out. We lounge about watching TV. We discuss and debate what we're seeing on the screen, or what we've read or heard out in the world earlier in the day. And sometimes, 'when there are two sides', our 'voices go up.' In the end, we agree, or we agree to disagree. You'd imagine, at the end of such evenings, it would only take 'five minutes to say goodbye'. But of course, as the final stanza highlights with quiet humour, this is not the case. The rituals of departure always take much, much longer. The deeper delight I take from this poem is the way that final stanza reminds me of the unspoken deal families have going for them. Whatever we say or do, we remain family. And at least a part of what we're communicating with our extended leave takings is that we know we're the lucky ones; the ones able to be all together.

**More like this:** This poem is from an impressive collection of poems, *More of Us*, a stunning selection of poetry about the migrant and refugee experience by a range of writers, from first-time authors to well established poets, recently published by Landing Press. I recommend getting your hands on a copy and, when it leaves you wanting more, the good news is it has a companion volume, the equally engaging earlier collection *All of Us*.

### WHEN MY FAMILY IS ALL TOGETHER

We sit in the courtyard  
in the shade of the grape vines.  
We put mats on the floor,  
we have tea and fruit –  
grapes and watermelon.  
Sometimes we bring the TV outside  
and we all watch our favourite drama.  
Some are sitting, some are lying,  
some are talking, some are listening.  
They get into the talk, they discuss,  
they get excited about their talking,  
and when there are two sides, their voices go up.

At the end when we finish  
it takes five minutes to say goodbye  
and another five minutes  
and another five minutes  
and another five minutes.

By Yazan El Fares from *More of Us*, edited by  
Adrienne Jansen (Landing Press, 2019)