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## **Cold Showers**

The air's humidity called for cold showers,  
twice a day.

You stood tall,  
your short grey white peppered crown  
wet as I washed you:  
washed you just as you washed me  
when I could barely walk,  
barely run, and barely love.

Your sagging husk wrapped you like dirt.  
I saw the blossoming bruise you could no longer hide  
rotting decaying at its final stage.  
The dancing colors mesmerised my gaze  
like your motherly twinkle ("chew with your mouth closed," you tell my *ma*),  
your grandmotherly sparkle.

*How does one's downfall look so ravishing?  
Like autumn leaves at its peak embered flames.*

I moved the bamboo chair closer to you  
as your hands dropped the red water pail.  
I held on to you as I foamed you up  
through your arm's intimate crevices  
like wrinkles of diminishing time.

Unclothed, I could still smell your pickled cucumbers,  
the patch of chilli spiced into your blouse.  
"My mother's mother taught her to make *otak-otak*,  
one day when I'm gone, you'll teach your daughter's daughter to make this," you said.  
"Too much work, grandma...Also, you're going to live on forever and ever like a star."

*Forever and ever like a star, wearing all the recipes of my happiness.*

You smell clean now.  
Like the *Tambun* waterfalls next to your old bungalow,  
quiet, unassuming, crisp.  
I lost my voice  
when you turned to tell me  
a secret—your coming arranged marriage with death.  
You tried to convince me it was a love marriage,  
as your body spread cancer cells  
and your mind spread death spells:  
“It’s meant to be.”  
“I don’t need surgery. I’m old, I’ve lived a full life, I don’t want to be a burden to anyone.”

But as I washed you that day and  
saw you tilt your head to look  
over your shoulders  
to see if your sons and daughters overheard you  
your body tensed, your eyes wearied—  
it was then I first knew the smell of stifled love,  
*muggy*  
*smothering*.

I felt my insides sanitized,  
like alcohol swabs  
as I tried to remove the unfading dyes of what you said.  
Unfamiliar, I knew and I knew  
as I wiped you dry with  
your hanging towel that afternoon,  
you left me *forever and ever with a scar*.  
“Don’t cry with your mouth open. It’s unbecoming,”  
I hear you radiate from the fresh bamboo casket  
only leaving us with sweltering wintry memories  
which wreck us clean  
like cold showers on a hot day.