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## Poetry and prose

### In passing

The last time I saw my grandmother *Po* alive,  
she wore brown twill slacks, a thin apron,  
perfume of water lily, ginger, jasmine.

Now her face is bloated, rounder than I remember.  
Hair white at the roots, tips still purple  
from her do-it-at-home dye kit.

Tubes removed from her throat; the army of machines  
stands down. My grandfather bent over her body,  
anointing her cheek with tiger balm,  
repeating *yesterday we were shopping,*  
*yesterday we were grocery shopping.* I imagine them  
pushing a cart down an aisle of apples.

Grandfather's fingers trace the deep lines of *Po's* hands,  
the words come softly through his lips  
*won't be long till I am walking with you.*

I see first *Po's* bound feet under the sheet:  
crippled since infancy, finally resting.  
Obsolete relics, long abandoned.

How many times I unwrapped layered strips  
of cotton to wash her toes with mild soap,  
soaking them in warm water and chamomile.

Tonight, in the bathtub, I will bend my toes under,  
imitating *Po's* bandages with a wet washcloth, releasing  
my feet back into the steaming water like freed fish.

Later I will learn how the doctors shocked *Po's*  
fragile body on the count of one, two, three,  
the way she rose into the air, for a moment suspended  
like flying,  
like falling.

I am too young to know complicated tears.  
Motionless at her side I do only what a grandchild  
does for a grandmother before parting—  
I lean down to her cooling forehead  
and kiss it.

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