Spring 2013

Mother at Bath

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Recommended Citation

Malhotra, Mia Ayumi (2013) "Mother at Bath," CutBank: Vol. 1 : Iss. 78 , Article 41.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss78/41

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MOTHER AT BATH

At the end she mostly slept, had little to say. They swabbed her skin to fend off fever but still her tongue cracked like old leather. Still her lips peeled, hips thinned, legs shrank in their sockets and turned to baggy, flesh-colored stockings. They cut a slit in her nightgown—pink, puffed sleeves, washed and returned her to sleep.

The afternoon she died, she was lying on her side when, from beyond the frame of body and bedside came a glow that bathed her skin with an uncanny luster. Sprays of light from the cut face of her wedding ring, gold flecks sent spinning across the ceiling.

What they remember: her eyes, opening, blue-gray and rheumy with wonder. Ah! she said, like a child, pointing at the wild inflections of light as they lept harum-scarum across the room. Washbowl to Vaseline jar to windowpane; look! she said, hands flying through air, and again, look!