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Mother at Bath

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MIA AYUMI MALHOTRA

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!