

She dips her fingers of her other hand into the puddle and smooths about half of the lotion onto her arm starting from her freckled shoulder down to her wrist. Her other arm gets the same treatment with the remaining lotion in her palm.

She then places her right foot on top of the sky blue toilet lid cover and lifts up her nightie until the top of her thigh is revealed. I pump three more squirts into her palm. She starts at the front crease of her thigh and briskly works the lotion down her leg until she reaches the ends of her toes and then repeats the lavish process on the back of her leg. I pump out the Jergens again so she can treat her other leg to the same cool massage.

She rubs the residue of the cream into her hands making sure every finger and line etched in her skin is covered.

My mom looks down at me and cups my cheeks with both of her palms. Her hands are warm and soft and I breathe in the floral scent of Jergens, as I close my eyes. She plants a tender kiss on my puckered lips and then messes

up my hair.

"Go to bed now, Amaya. I'll come and tuck you in."

My mother was diagnosed with diabetes just before she reached retirement age. I suspect she had it long before she was rushed to emergency that night, where she lay comatose in the intensive care unit.

Her right eye is almost blind and her vision is blurred in the left one. She now cuts her brittle grey hair herself—short, blunt and uneven—instead of going to the Chinatown salon for fancy, smelly perms.

Today, the woman in the photo doesn't wear make up anymore because she's afraid to mess up her face because she can't see the details of her reflection clearly.

She still owns high heels from the '70s, but now she only wears shoes with Velcro. She keeps the old pumps next to her favourite red slippers. When I visit, sometimes I blow the powder off of those dusty high heels she wore in the Polaroid and slip them onto my feet. They're still too big for me. I know that if I snoop in her dresser drawers, I'd find that same blue and yel-

low swimsuit she posed in so many years ago, along with every silk and satin scarf she ever owned.

Today, my mother never wants to have her photo taken, even at special occasions. When I ask her to smile at the silver Canon digital camera held in my hands, she grimaces and looks away. I tell her that she is still beautiful and has wonderful skin.

"I-yuh. That's not true. I'm so tired now when I look in the mirror. Who wants pictures of an old lady that is so ugly?" She's wearing a red sweater and a pair of blue track pants. It's not like the days of the Kodak Polaroid for her anymore. She tells me that when she looks in the mirror after she removes her dentures, it surprises her to see an old woman staring back at her.

My father ladles out three bowls of fish congee and sets them aside, spilling puddles of the creamy white mixture onto the table as he does so. I pour three cups of chrysanthemum tea. My mother waits at the head of the table.

My father sits down to her right and faces me. With my hand resting on

the brown box, I ask him, "Why did you decide to give this to me today?"

"I just found it. And today, I remember that you are the same age your mother was when I took it."

"When you took what? When can I see this box, this gift? Why you wait so long to show me?" my mother asks.

I take out the Polaroid from the box and place it in front of her. She lifts the photograph close to her face and squints.

"Wah..." she says. "So beautiful. Oh—I remember I have a bathing suit just like this. So funny—some styles don't change. Always stay the same after so many years. Such a pretty young woman you have grown into, Amaya. You are so nice

looking in this picture." She hands me back the snapshot.

My father and I look at each other and laugh.

"What? What is so funny? It is true. Bathing suit style is the same—nothing change. But, Amaya—don't you dare wear those high heels with your bathing suit outside the house. Too sexy. Much too sexy."

When I take a breath and stop laughing, I tell her. "Mom—that's not me. It's you. Don't you remember—back in our old house?"

She snatches the photo from my fingertips and studies it under her magnifying glass.

"Wah...this is true. Such a long time ago—so hard to remember. Now I see. So young and strong."

"So beautiful," my fa-

ther adds. "And skin so nice—even today. Not too much wrinkles." My mother is smiling. She has the wrinkles of a much younger woman and when I touch her cheek, it's as smooth and soft as I remember.

"From the Vaseline," she responds with a giggle. "Make you stay young."

I lift up my mother's hand to kiss her palm. I close my eyes and feel her skin warm my lips. She laughs and when I place her hand back onto the table and open my eyes, she's still smiling.

We all take our first sips of the flower-scented tea. My father hands out the three warm bowls. My mother sets down her teacup, raises her left hand and squeezes my right cheek.

It feels good to remember.

Encouraged by her Grade 3 teacher to create stories from her vivid imagination, Mary Chang has been writing since she was eight years old. She pens poetry, scribbles in her journal during times of pain or passion, and is currently working on a non-fiction piece. After taking a thought-provoking creative writing class last spring with teacher and writer Anne Rayvals, Chang was inspired to write fiction again. This contest entry is her first publication. Chang devotes her free time to writing, fitness and nature. She misses the days of the Polaroid.



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