

Hair unruly, yet immaculately presentable like the restless house I was raised in. My uncle spent hours upon hours detangling, washing, conditioning, combing, treating and plaiting my hair. It was an exercise as tedious and painful as when he taught me how to tell the time, and as my impatience grew, I could tell how much time had passed.

*Detangling:* standing in the shower of comforting warmth. Cold water is relative, hot water is temperamental and usually scalding when it appears. It takes minutes for the water to soak through my hair. It is long and thick and reaches my rear, a symbol of pride and beauty in my family, I think.

Well, I never thought so until I wanted to lop it off and my grandmother demanded the hairdresser return it to her in plastic bags. These bags, probably disintegrating in the humidity, definitely filled with secrets and stories locked within the dead cells of my hair from things I witnessed but was too young to understand or process. I think these haunt my grandmother's house along with her spirit. Hair, like clothing, like skin, absorbs scents and sentimentality, it definitely keeps secrets too.

The hair is finally soaked through and I help my uncle spray *Johnsons & Johnsons* Doremon detangler through this black mat while he gently but firmly combs through the knots, usually yanking my head every time he was successful.

*Washing:* finally, free of my daily trauma, my hair is ready to be washed. It threatens to re-tangle itself in the process and my uncle is patient, methodical. He breathes and I breathe too. I love the smells that are surrounding me and I feel beautiful in this moment. There is care and effort placed upon my hair that some people don't receive themselves in their lifetime.

Maybe my hair has befriended my grandmother's detachable buns in the decades that have passed. Maybe they have shared stories, experiences and wisdom. Maybe they've registered so much more than we know we've even experienced and they've been screaming out for us to listen. Maybe if we paid attention, things would have been different.

*Combing:* Again, after washing. I hate this part. My hair is being yanked every which way and there are tears in my eyes. My uncle soothes me while I hear my mum and grandmother in the next room and I am craning my neck around the corner to see how they are dressed. Immaculately. My mother in gold and emerald. Colours that stop people in their tracks when they see her. As I got older, she'd tell me she's always been plain. I have never understood. My

grandmother, pearls and blue. Calming yet ferocious like the sea. She has never been plain. My hair is down to my butt and I'm wriggling to get away.

*Treating:* Coconut oil to calm the frizz. Settle my soul and make me sleepy yet I am in awe every night they leave the house. In my curls, trapped in the oil, are whispers of beauty and power, of how when you capture the two and find the balance the way my mother and grandmother have, that you can overcome anything. I hope these whispers resurface when I need them the most.

*Plaiting:* Tedious. I am simultaneously ready for bed but I also want to follow these women out into the darkness of night. Watch them captivate everyone the way I get to see every other evening.

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By the time we have emerged from the bathroom I am soothed, my hair in two plaits either side of my head and swinging from the weight behind them. We enter into a flurry of my grandmother adjusting her hair with finesse while my grandfather dotes over her, zipping her *baju kurung* and adjusting the silk to sit just so. My mother in the next room attending to her own make-up, brushes her hair behind her ear so she can focus more clearly.

They both have gigantic matching mirrors, elaborate and ridiculous if not for the significance of their collective beauty and the power it gathers.

The scent of their perfumes fills the entire house, lingering for hours and soothes me to sleep.

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