

MONA ATTAMIMI

Betel-Nut

The gods do not make great-grandmothers
like they used to. Mine reeked of damp earth, nutmeg,
grew betel vine to feed her habit, chewed and spat
betel-quid till her lips ochered and teeth blackened.

She reeked of damp earth and nutmeg, plucked vine
leaves at *subuh*, wrapped them into quids, chewed
and spat them till her lips ochered and teeth blackened
five times a day, like the ablutions before a prayer.

At *subuh*, before she wrapped and chewed a quid, she
smeared the leaves in lime, spices, nuts and resin. Five
times a day, like ritual prayers, she wrapped, chewed, spat,
to freshen her breath, purge childbearing and labour pain.

A bitten quid stuffed with lime, spices, nuts and resin gripped
by reddened fingers glided across tawny lips and black teeth
to freshen her breath, purge childbearing and labour pain,
and relax her neck as she read the Quran from right to left.

Red-stained fingers glided across her tawny lips and black teeth.
A loose scarf, draped over her silver hair and yellow skin, shaded
her from the world, as she read the Quran from right to left,
and masticated a quid like a gazelle feasting on sugar-grass.

A loose scarf, draped over her silver hair and yellow skin, shaded
her from the brood's glare, as she spat black mucous into a tin-can,

and masticated like a gazelle feasting on sugar-grass. So much chomping on betel-nut melted her face into a black-bloody smile.

Her brood glared as she spat black mucous into a can.

A leaf wrapped into a quid and chewed, numbed her mind, melted her wry face into a black-bloody smile. The gods do not make great-grandmothers like they used to. Mine reeked of betel-nut.