



A visual representation of "Contrast" by Tammy Ho

## Contrast

Tammy Ho

He asked me to put the hairs  
in a small yellow box. It was plastic,  
with a catch at the front that clicked  
when closed.

Every Sunday, I looked carefully  
at my father's head  
and plucked out the grey hairs  
that hid sneakily

among the robust black ones.  
He gave me twenty cents for each strand  
until one day, a few years later,  
the box was full

and there were still so many more to pluck.  
Overcome with sadness, I said,  
'Father, I don't want the money.'  
He then began dyeing his hair

and in the bathroom sink every week  
drips of black water  
revealed that father was clawing  
back his youth.

Fifteen years later, he  
has stopped dyeing his hair,  
worried that the chemicals  
might harm his grandchildren

whom he often rests  
on his shoulders,  
proud now  
to highlight the contrast.

"Contrast" first appeared in the Asia Literary Review:  
<https://www.asialiteraryreview.com/contrast>.  
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My artwork shows the contrast between the past and present, old and young, fear and acceptance. At the back, a young girl plucks grey hairs from her father's head, putting them in a small yellow box. On the left, bottles of hair dye stand on the edges of a sink. In the mirror, the father frantically dyes his hair black in an attempt to hide his old age. As time goes by, he accepts his old age. In the front, the father's hair is white as he does not use hair dye anymore. He gently holds his grandchild, resting the baby's head on his shoulder. He has realised that it is a blessing with his grandchildren around.

These three different stages are linked with tufts of hair coming from the old father in the foreground. The hair further away from the viewer is darker, but gradually turns white. This shows the change in the colour of the father's hair from the past to present, as well as his attitude towards ageing, from fear and denial to acceptance and even pride.

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**Positive value(s) and attitude(s):**

Love and respect

**Positive message(s):**

The love in our family is strong and deep, creating sweet memories.