

Face It

Julian Matthews

So the kid in the LRT calls me Uncle and offers his seat. I despair. It isn't the first time. I relent, nod and give in. I sit on the seat with the little white icons: the pregnant woman, the woman with a baby, the old man with the cane, the OKU. Disabled. "*Stesyen berikutnya: Dang Wangi*". The train pulls into another stop — not mine. Then it pulls out and I spot the warped, skewered reflection of my face in the opposite window. When did my hair go so gray? — the obvious giveaway for my uncle-ness. How did my face get so ruddy? — the ravages of a pimply teenage-hood. A reminder when appearances and blemishes mattered. And I was my own Dr Pimple Popper. Now it's the surface of a moon. Not ours, but a distant forgotten asteroid-scarred one. A dirty, brown one, like the moons off Neptune or the demoted Pluto. Or maybe Uranus — or mine. And when did the shape of my face lose its roundness, that clean, polished, cherubic look, the kind that aunties would pull me closer as a child just to pinch my cheeks. Now it's longer, sullen and cheerless, the side of a granite hill, a calcified limestone face that has been quarried and blasted. Or the kind paleontologists chip away at to look for fossils. And right smack in the middle is this large bulbous monstrosity, something Neanderthal, something from a horror movie, a clown's nose I could just paint red and show up as the entertainment at a children's party. Sniff...sniff. And those lips, dry and wilted, not smiley, hopeful as before, lips that parted way too much for always speaking my mind. And those cynical, faraway eyes. No longer bright, optimistic like the child I once was. I heard a writer once say: "I'm every age I've ever been." Ditto: I am every age I ever was! Maybe not on the outside, but on the inside. Then the train announces the next stop: *Taman Bahagia*. And I get off.