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THE STORY OF HUR:
A MEMOIR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Hwi Eun Hur
May 2020

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

The primary content of this creative nonfiction thesis includes a collection of three essays of a memoir to be called: *The Story of Hur*. The three essays are titled: “Between a Memory and a Dream,” “Immigrant Churches,” and “With Brother.” Following these essays, a critical essay-- “Writing about ‘Hur’”--explores the various styles and authorial choices of creative nonfiction genre writers along with their influences in the writing style of the respective essays. This work discusses various cultural tensions in immigrant churches that eventually spill into the domestic home.

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WRITING ABOUT “HUR”

My thesis consists of three personal essays that form a short memoir spanning from childhood memories to present-day events. The first two essays display fractures in the homes--geographical, religious, and familial--throughout my life. These disruptions of what I define as “home” begins with my father. As a pastor and missionary, he uproots our family from Korea to Guam, instigating our transitions into becoming American citizens. With this move, I become removed from not only the geographical home but also the familial home that includes my grandparents. Though this removal actually begins all of my memoir’s events, I do not fully engage with it until my final piece because I wish for my readers to experience how I’ve connected these moments in my life in the same order that I’d come to understand them.

The first essay, “Between a Memory and a Dream,” follows a retelling of when I realized that another pastor had choked my father. With that storyline, I wanted to include a child voice that was distinct from a more adult voice that related another narrative throughout the same story in the form of flashbacks. For these differing voices, I wished to borrow from Mary Karr’s depictions of her childhood self in her younger scenes dealing with traumatic and graphic details of her life in *The Liar’s Club* with slight moments of interjections from an older narration voice. Dorothy Allison also uses this technique in her semi-autobiographical novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, in a similar manner. During conversations and interactions with my parents, my hope was for the readers to imagine being “in-scene” alongside an eight-year-old as she/I wrestled to come

to terms with a shattering discovery of the church and the religious home. This is the main storyline that progresses the essay.

Yet the adult voice introduces another line of narrative that interweaves the main story told by the child voice: the signs of abuse within the family. I wished to include these flashbacks as blurred images. In *The Art of Memoir*, Karr states, “Even the best minds warp and blur what they see” (5). Likewise, many of my scenes are blurry. For instance, though I say that my dad is on his knees begging, the scene actually only has a description of shadows against a wall. This scene plays out in my head as I imagine what my parents’ faces and bodies must have looked like. Then I wake up unable to determine which parts were real and which ones I had made up. All the memories of possible instances of my father’s abuse of my mother are imperfect. They’d ingrained themselves into my consciousness before I’d understood their importance. I wanted the readers to also experience this confusion and murkiness which is why I explicitly stated phrases such as “I don’t remember” and “I don’t know” to acknowledge these gaps and to establish myself as a non-omniscient voice. These flashbacks mix with the choking narrative to show how I’ve pieced these memories together into an understanding of how a later familial home came to be.

Wil S. Hylton explores a similar move in his article, “My Cousin Was My Hero. Until the Day He Tried to Kill Me,” when he states, “I was flitting in and out of consciousness, and everything was warped.” His idea of “warped” functions more rapidly than Karr’s because of the difference in length between an article and a book. Since my essays are also shorter, I’ve followed much of Hylton’s structure to organize my

transitions between time. In his essay, Hylton uses the scene of his cousin attacking him to center the various flashbacks of his past experiences in which he analyzes his relationship with masculinity. I also wished to have a scene to ground my readers in the midst of an unchronological array of flashbacks. Time was a difficult factor to consider when writing these essays. So I mimicked how Hylton came in and out of his flashbacks through repetitions of strong phrases during a dialogue.

While the choking scene grounds my first piece, various flashbacks follow hints of when my dad hit my mom, though she tried to hide it. Those flashbacks connect the aftermaths of my father's first experience of abuse with the breaking down of what he believed the church as a stable home to be. Though my father encounters these two events together, I have to connect these two pieces later in life. The structure of my essay parallels this process of connection for me. I chose to use stronger scenes to frame my essays because I had no big adventure like Cheryl Strayed in *Wild* in which she switches back and forth from her memories throughout her journey across the Pacific Crest Trail. So I decided to use specific moments throughout my life to create several narratives. Similar to how Karr separated her memoir by her geographical movements in her life, I also organized my essays by geography--Guam, Florida, and South Carolina--despite the flashbacks also moving across scenes from Korea, Georgia, and North Carolina as well.

With my second essay, I switched to a slightly different approach. Unlike the first essay, which began with a description of the grounding narrative as a set-up, this piece opens in-scene. There is only one main event, or narrative, to follow: the church fight. And the few flashbacks in the essay mostly function to explain events directly relating to

the fight. Rather than connecting events in my life to understand an aspect of myself, I use this specific scene to analyze the immigrant church and its use as a home for people between borders and identities. Through this piece, I aim to understand the people who have torn down the church as a religious home for me through their attempts to transform it into a middle-ground safeplace for their national and cultural identities. I wrestle with the bigger questions that I'd come to ask myself after moving through various types of immigrant churches and watching similar conflicts unfold in each church. The fight in this essay serves as a representation of the many church fights that my parents and I have witnessed throughout the years. These fights in the church are crucial factors of my father's abuse in the first essay. With increasing church disputes, the frequency of his abuse also increased. It displayed, to me, a direct correlation.

Though every church has its own set of church politics in the background, immigrant churches must also face factors of social and cultural displacement issues among the members of the church body. Power struggles become a prominent factor in this essay as I expose the various layers of power dynamics within the Southern Baptist Convention and among immigrant families to examine what happens when the two are combined into an immigrant church setting. What happens when people move from one country and culture to another? What happens when they experience the bottom of society in a different country? Where do they go to find the respect that they so desire? (This respect may also be what my dad desired in the familial home through his abuse of my mom.) What happens when the church no longer becomes a religious gathering but, rather, a place of cultural haven? These are some questions that will be explored.

With these deeper questions, I hoped to engage in some literary theory. “The ‘autobiographical example,’ says Saidiya Hartman, ‘is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it’s not about navel gazing, it’s really about trying to look at historical and social process and one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them’ (Saunders 2008b, 7). Like Hartman, I wished to examine my experiences and analyze the “social and historical” influences that have shaped them. I wanted to explore the different identities--national, religious, and familial--that I both identify with and against, and I wanted to explore how the effects of these identities on other immigrants inevitably shaped my life as well. In doing so, I hoped to discover the grey area of borders, or margins, between these identities that have made my homes feel so precarious in the first place.

This second essay served as more of a background piece. The one fight scene represented all the church fights my parents and I have witnessed and been a part of. The immigrant identity also functioned as a category that I belonged to--yet wished to distinguish myself from. Without this piece, the reader can only understand a very superficial aspect of the first and last essays. As for the timeline, the scene depicted in this second essay occurs at a climactic point. This fight brings about the final instance of my father’s abuse and connects to my mother’s revelation of this history in the first essay. They are all interconnected.

My third essay follows a similar structure to the first. There is a specific narrative--moments of Evan and me--that sets the flow of the piece while other flashbacks--mostly uncovering my relationship with my mom--weave through that main

storyline. For this piece, I again consulted Karr and Hylton's works for many of the structural choices. However, I also wanted to borrow a lighter tone employed by Patricia Lockwood in *Priestdaddy*. If the first two essays discussed more serious issues and portrayed a gravity in certain moments of my life, I wished to show more everyday images of my family.

Like Lockwood's underwear-sporting priest daddy, I included descriptions of cheeky and light-hearted interactions with my parents. I wanted the characters to have more dimensionality than simple stock characters. With this piece, I focused on creating more layers of complexities for each family member. Because of this desire, however, I struggled with choosing which scenes

to eventually include. I wanted to incorporate more scenes to tell a more complete version of these events. In the end, though, I had to leave some scenes out.

The first essay introduced the first sparks of abuse and the direct effects of it. The second essay described the underlying factors that contributed to those acts of abuse. The third essay followed the aftermath of that first abuse. I would not describe these events as a cycle but, rather, as an interweaving of various issues that contribute to and influence the other. Even in this third essay, I tried to include moments of emotional instability when raising Evan. The conclusion was not meant to provide closure by any means. I wanted the readers to also arrive at and share in this temporary feeling of peace while still experiencing the uncertainty that I have about the future.

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BETWEEN A MEMORY AND A DREAM

When I was eight, a pastor choked my dad. I wasn't there, but I know it happened. I heard them talking about it. I heard them all talking about it. And I saw the scars on his neck. I saw it everyday, even in my dreams.

As a child, I liked posing for pictures. The sight of a camera stopped me from crying during family vacations. I took so many photos that I had a pile of albums stashed away from my grandmother's house in Korea to my dad's library in Guam. After my dad was ordained as a pastor, my parents and I became missionaries under the Southern Baptist Convention. We moved a lot, and the albums moved with us. Guam was our first stop.

While playing in my dad's office, I browsed through one of these photo albums. I had compiled this specific one and chosen its cover--a sparkly, pink, flower. I flipped through it when bored, which was often since I was an only child. The photographs soothed me. There was one where my mother and I sat on a park bench. She smiled in her suit and full makeup while I slyly pouted in her favorite sunglasses. But the next page was odd. The photos were not neatly slipped inside the clear plastic sleeves like the rest but, rather, jammed in. I did not recognize them. They reminded me of those pictures taken by accident, fumbling with a camera. Both pictures were close-ups of someone's skin—an unfocused image of prickly, yellow-pale leather encircled by a thick, red line. It looked like a rash, perhaps an allergic reaction.

I don't know why my dad had placed them there. He, being the scatter-brained type, probably had not given much thought to them as well. When I ran out to the living room with the photographs, my mom glared at my dad. They were sitting on our "holy couch"--it was white and, therefore, holy. No one was to eat or sleep on it lest it be dirtied.

"Where did you get these?" asked my dad.

...

I remember a time when I was nine. The scene feels like a dream, and honestly, I still can't determine whether it really happened or not. The entire memory feels blurred.

I woke up in the middle of the night. My parents were talking in the other room. Someone was crying. I knew they would never tell me anything, so I sneaked out into the hall. A light from my dad's office shone through where the door was left slightly opened. I had tiptoed around the house before. The wooden floors creaked excessively; so I had to test out my next steps by slightly applying pressure with my toes before committing.

When I made it to the side of the wall, my parents' voices turned from mere sounds to actual words.

"Never again... I'm sorry... I," my dad said.

I couldn't get myself to peep inside the room. It was too dangerous. They'd see me. But from where I stood, I saw their shadows--they stretched out into a giant projection on the wall. One dark blob hovered over the other.

My mom sighed. "If this ever happens again," she said, "I won't let it pass." Her voice quivered. She must have been the one crying.

What did he do, though? I thought they would be fighting, but this was like when I would get scolded. I thought of my mom staring down at me with her arms crossed while I cowered on my knees. Then I imagined my dad in my place, head down with sweaty palms flat on his thighs.

“I know,” said my dad. “I know. It won’t happen again. Really.” He paused and sniffled. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I really am.” I guess he had been crying too. That was harder to imagine, though, since I’d never seen it before.

I wonder what would have happened if my mom hadn’t forgiven him then.

...

“Where did you get these?” asked my dad. He motioned for me to hand the pictures to him. Then he shook his head slowly and chuckled.

“In my photo album,” I said. Since he had laughed, I kept smiling too. It must have been some adult joke, so I pretended to understand.

“Why were you looking through the album?” he said.

My mom snatched the photos from him and sighed. “Can’t you just tell by looking at it that it’s hers?” she said. We all stared at the very pink and flowery cover.

“How was I supposed to know that?” said my dad. “I just put it there since it seemed like a place where pictures go.”

I didn’t understand why they were bickering. Was I not supposed to see these? I didn’t mean for them to fight. That meant that I’d have to play by myself again. When my mom’s hand landed on her hip, though, I knew it was time for me to leave. Before I left, I turned back to glance at them. I don’t know why. Maybe, I wanted to check

something. Maybe, I was clinging to a hope that they'd make up. Whatever the reason was, I ended up seeing what the picture was of. I saw my dad's neck.

My dad wore a faded-yellow polo shirt that day. I'd thought it was weird since he usually wore a stretched-out t-shirt in the house. I mean, he still wore his checkered pajama bottoms. But I didn't think much else about it until I'd turned to look back at him. He fumbled with his collar, pulling it up. Everytime he moved his arm, though, the red lines across his neck peeped above the collars.

"What's wrong with daddy's neck?" I said, pointing at his collar. My parents froze. I thought his collar must have been too tight. He had gained some weight since we'd arrived in Guam, and his neck was thicker--and shorter--than most. "If your shirt is too small," I said, "why don't you just wear a t-shirt like you normally do?"

I meant nothing else by it. I was eight. I just noticed an irregularity and wanted the comfort of what felt normal. My little brother still reacts the same way and tells me to put on my "home clothes" when we return to the house much like how a puppy thinks its owners will leave if they start putting on a coat.

"What?" my dad said. He fixed his collar again. "No. No," he said. "I'm wearing this shirt because I like it." He popped his collar up completely.

"Daddy," I said, "is that you in the picture?"

He smiled. "Well, it is," he said. "But it's not something that hurts. Daddy's fine." He bent down and stretched his neck towards me. I reached out to touch it. "See?" he said. "It's nothing."

I grazed my fingers along the red line. “Why’d you take pictures of it then?” I said.

He shrugged. “No reason,” he said. “Just because, I guess.”

“Don’t worry about it, honey,” my mom said. “Your dad probably just wanted to take a picture to see what he looked like and forgot to throw them away.” She handed the photos back to my dad and shooed him away. He patted my head and left. My eyes followed him to his office. He didn’t throw the pictures away.

My mom crouched down in front of me and cupped my face in her hands. She smiled and used her nice voice. “Is my baby hungry? What do you want to eat? Mommy will make anything you want,” she said.

...

I remember another time she did this. When I was thirteen, I returned from school to find my mother at the door in her apron. We were in Atlanta at the time following our five-year mission period in Guam. The smell of pork kimchi stew filled the hallway. It’s not that my mom never cooked for me. In fact, she cooked often. But there are certain moments that, when looking back, feel overly-doting of her.

“Come in quickly,” she said, smiling widely. She motioned me to hurry inside. My dad had picked me up from school, but he lingered inside the car.

I turned back to him and waved. “Come on, dad,” I said.

He told me to go on first, and my mom pulled me inside. As the door slammed behind us, she wrapped an arm around my shoulder and led me to the kitchen bar.

“I made all your favorites,” she said as she stood over the stove, stirring the pot of stew with a ladle. The rice cooker whistled in the corner. I sat on the stool across from where my mom prepared our early dinner.

She wore a tight grey t-shirt and jeans under her apron. I wondered why she was in such a good mood. I watched her as she scooped the steaming rice into a bowl. Her arms were so pale and hairless. I’d always envied that. But my mom was a clutz, which meant that her perfect skin also had some sort of scar or bruise from bumping into something or cooking. Once, she walked straight into a wall right in front of my eyes. She had a huge purple lump on her forehead for a week after that.

When she placed the clay pot of stew in front of me, I noticed a new bruise on her upper arm, just below her left shoulder.

“What happened this time?” I said.

She covered the purple blotch with her right hand. “Oh,” she said. “I just bumped into the staircase. You know how clumsy I am.”

I laughed. “Again?” I said. “Mom, you’ve got to be more aware of what’s around you.”

She sighed and smiled. “Yeah...” she said. Then she looked at the floor for an uncomfortably long time. “But you know,” she said, “you don’t have enough sense sometimes.” She raised her head and stared at me for a whole minute.

“Mom?” I said. I needed to break the silence. The mood had shifted so quickly, and I had no idea why. “Mom, what is it?”

She laughed softly. “Nothing,” she said. Then she shook her head. “It’s just... you believed me so easily.” Though she smiled, I thought I saw her eyes tear up.

“Were you lying, then?” I said. Had I missed something?

“No,” she said. “No. It’s nothing. Hurry up and eat. The food’s going to get cold.” She pushed my rice bowl closer to me.

I grabbed her hand. “Mom, what is it? Did you get bruised from something else?”

“No,” she said. “It was the staircase. You know how I am.” She pushed my hand away and shoved a spoonful of rice in my mouth. “Doesn’t it taste good?”

“Uh-huh,” I said, half-chewing.

Before I could ask more, I heard the front door close. My dad walked through the kitchen, and I asked him if he wanted to eat too. He glanced over at my mom and shook his head. “You go ahead and eat. I’m not very hungry,” he said and went upstairs.

I looked at my mom. “Did you two fight?” I said.

“No,” she said. “Nothing happened between us. Keep eating.”

“But what about dad?” I said. There was no way he didn’t want to eat. He’d never turned down fresh, hot stew and rice before.

“He’s fine,” my mom said. She raised her voice slightly. “Your dad will figure out his own dinner by himself.” She meant for him to hear that.

I knew they’d fought. But they usually complained about each other to me afterwards. So why was my dad acting so passive... almost submissive?

...

“Can I keep the pictures?” I asked my dad. I had followed him to his office while my mom cooked kimchi stew in the kitchen.

He was sitting in front of the computer, writing an email. “What?” he said. “You want to keep them? What for?”

“It’s a picture of you,” I said. “We can put them in the album. There’s plenty of empty space in the back.” I held my hands out for the photographs.

He laughed. “Okay,” he said. “Then don’t lose them, alright?”

“I thought you said they were trash,” I said.

“Ahh,” he said and chuckled. “I did. Didn’t I? Well, maybe they might be useful. You never know.”

That night, I pretended to sleep until I heard my parents’ door shut. Then I went on my first eavesdropping adventure. I crouched by the wall near my parent’s door, hugging my knees to my chest.

“Do you think she knows?” my dad said.

“Probably not,” said my mom. “I mean, who would even believe that something like this happened in the first place?”

“I could’ve fought back,” said my dad. “But what good would that do? He’s nearly sixty!”

“It’s Pastor Kim,” my mom said. “If you had fought him off, then he could tell people that you attacked him. You’re younger and stronger, so people would have sided with him. That’s what he was trying to do.”

“Well,” my dad said, “since I didn’t play into his plans, he’s going to try any other method he can to get rid of me. He knows that now he’s at a disadvantage. He choked me, and I didn’t do anything.”

“I wonder if this is how he ran the other two pastors off before you,” said my mom. “If he doesn’t want the convention to send over assistant pastors, then why doesn’t he just say so? We gave up everything to come here.”

“What’s done is done. We have to talk to Pastor Tommy tomorrow,” said my dad. About an hour later, my dad started snoring.

When I stood, I almost screamed as the blood rushed through my legs again. Both my legs had fallen asleep, so every step back to my room was painful. I didn’t know what choked meant. I just knew that Pastor Kim had been mean to my dad. Why, though? We had even stayed at his house the first month that we were in Guam. And he was a pastor like my dad. All my dad’s pastor friends were nice.

The next day, my parents and I visited the Wallaces’ house. Tommy Wallace was the pastor in charge of missions. So he was in charge of my dad and even Pastor Kim. The Wallaces were from Arkansas. They had three children, one of whom--Will--was my age. We played together often, and we learned english from them.

While the adults talked in the living room, Will and I played in his room. We jumped from his bunk bed to a pile of pillows on the ground.

“Hey,” I said. “What does choke mean?” I jumped off the bed and almost kicked Will in the face.

“Choke?” he said. “Well...” He wrapped his fingers around his neck. Then, jerking his neck back, he pretended to roll his eyes and gagged.

“Gahh...kk...ka....ahh....Gah!” He got up and laughed. “That’s choking.”

When we passed through the living room to grab some brownies from the kitchen, I heard my parents talking.

“He said that I talked back to him. He asked if I was trying to become the senior pastor. Then he started yelling and went for my neck,” my dad said. “One of the elder deacons was there too, but when I didn’t fight back, he stopped Pastor Kim.”

“They were probably trying to create a witness, thinking that you would...” Tommy said.

Will tapped my shoulder. “You alright?” he asked. I had stopped walking.

“Yeah,” I said. “Just curious.” We walked back to his room.

“They’re going to talk forever,” he said. “You know how adults are. We’ll all be standing in a circle saying goodbye, and they’ll find a whole new thing to talk about for another hour.”

I laughed. “Right,” I said.

We stayed at the Wallace’s late into the night that day. After we returned, I laid in bed and thought about choking. Hugging my neck with my hands, I squeezed with increasing pressure. I imagined someone—anyone—hovering over me, applying that force on my throat. After lying like that for some time, I fell asleep.

...

I remember eating lunch with my dad's friend--another pastor--in Guam. He was visiting from Korea. We went to a Korean restaurant, probably the only one on the island, while my mom was at work. I was almost ten at the time, and my mom worked several jobs since we would be moving soon to the states. She was a part-time pharmacy clerk during the day and a waitress at night. I didn't realize it then, but she says that she felt degraded. She used to be a famous math teacher in Korea before going into the mission field with my dad.

We all ordered beef-bone soup. While we ate, my dad and his friend talked. Since I didn't have a phone or anything else to play with, I watched whatever was on the TV. I think it was some talk show.

"And the hardest thing was that my daughter found the pictures," my dad said. "The fact that she actually saw those is hard for me to bear." When I looked up at him, his body was shaking. I'd never seen him cry up-close before.

"Dad, why are you crying?" I said. I handed him a napkin slightly blotched from spilled soup. "Don't cry... Don't cry."

My parents had given me a toned-down version of that incident later in that week. They told me that Pastor Kim had been bad to my dad and that we were going to work directly under Pastor Tommy now. We never used the word choke. We never discussed the pictures. So I wondered why my dad talked about it now with me sitting right next to him.

...

After that day, I dreamed the same dream. I stood outside the front doors of the church—watching, still, silent. The building was dark inside, empty. Then two figures appeared out of the darkness and crashed into the wall. They ignored me. One man jammed a hand into the other man’s throat, pushing him harder against the wall. The other man grabbed on to the wrist of the hand that held him. Their bodies stood trembling, but they did not move. There was anger in the first man’s face, and the veins in his neck bulged. His lips curled inward like he was about to growl. Then he looked at me. His eyes—the ones filled with anger—bore into mine. And fear gripped me. The other man squirmed violently against the wall. And our panicked gazes met.

Daddy.

I woke up clutching at my neck, but there was nothing there. The dream felt so real, though, that I sometimes question whether I had really seen it for myself or if I’d imagined it with the pieces of information that I’ve glued together.

...

Maybe it’s like that scene when I was nine that I can’t label as either a dream or a memory. I really thought it was a dream until I turned seventeen. Then I wasn’t so sure anymore.

“I’m done with your father,” my mom said. I was in my room, doing homework, when she slammed my door open. Her hair was disheveled, and her glasses hung crooked from her left ear. Her entire body shook as she glared at me. “I didn’t tell you before because I thought it would hurt you, but you’re old enough now.” With her shirt, she wiped her glasses, which were still foggy from all her tears. Then she stretched out her

neck and pointed at a large purplish blotch on her right jawline. “Your father hit me. He’s been hitting me from Guam until now.”

I couldn’t respond. I started remembering all the odd little scenes that could’ve been hints.

“We were talking about how he needed to focus on his vision for the church. I told him he needs to fix that gruff demeanor of his. Then he punched my arm,” she said. She pointed at her right arm. There was another bruise there. “He told me I ‘deserved’ it for acting proud. And then I told him, ‘That’s right. This is the real you. This is the kind of person you are. You’re small. That’s why God won’t achieve anything through you. I don’t need your letters of apology or promises anymore. What’s the point if you don’t even mean it? Go ahead. Hit me. Hit me again. You think that just because I forgave you until now that I’m weak and mute? I’ll tell everyone this time. You won’t be able to hold up your head in front of your own family from now on.’”

Had that memory with the shadows been the first time? Had I, by chance, witnessed my mom scolding my dad after he had first hit her?

“Then he told me to shut up and hit me in the jaw,” she said. “So I clung to his shirt and ripped it off him, and now he’s outside in the parking lot. Don’t you dare let him in. That’s the kind of man your father is. All these years, ever since that incident with that pastor in Guam, he’s been depressed and hitting me. He’s weak and takes out his sense of inferiority on people weaker than himself. Well, now he’s going to fear me and my mouth too.”

As she told me all this, I vaguely remembered her voice on the night before my tenth birthday.

“Did you hit her too?” she had asked my dad. But I don’t even remember that night clearly either. There are only bits and pieces. It never happened again, which is why I wonder if that had just been a dream too.

I thought of the man in my nightmares--the one with the panicked look. I saw his face change from my dad to my mom to me. And I couldn’t differentiate my memories from my dreams anymore. They were all just blurred moments of my past.

IMMIGRANT CHURCHES

“Go take pictures outside,” my dad said when I entered his office on Sunday morning. “Deacon Song is blocking the entrance to the parking lot with his car and telling our members to leave.”

Mooseok Oppa, who was also in the office, shook his head and groaned. “Do they really have to go that far?” he said. When I first met him, he was a student pilot at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. I was an eighth grader. Later, during my high school years, he had even driven me to school.

“I’ll go through the side door,” I said and left.

Deacon Song and his wife were standing next to their blue Honda Civic, which was parked right at the entrance to the parking lot. I stood at the other end of it, watching. Mr. Song was a petite 4’10” man in his fifties, and Mrs. Song was maybe one inch taller and at least fifty lbs heavier. They used to be nice. Mr. Song even brought candies for my baby brother in the past. Now, they were stopping a car that belonged to an Embry Riddle student. They said, “Don’t come to this church!” and shooed the car away. But the students simply parked their car on the street and walked toward the church entrance. I saw Mr. Song grab the male students’ wrists. When that didn’t work, he pushed them backwards. They did not respond but continued walking forward. As they left, Mrs. Song yelled after them while Mr. Song shook his head. Then they saw me.

We had a staring contest. I knew what they thought of me--an insolent little brat who dares to hold her chin up in front of her elders. Keeping my eyes on them, I grabbed

my phone and snapped pictures of them blocking the parking lot. Mr. Song said, “Oh, you’re going to be like that now? Well, two can play that game!” He then took pictures of me standing on the church balcony.

They were part of the opposing group.

About half a year ago, Deacon Im and her husband followed my father to his office after early morning prayer. Mr. Im rarely came to church, and his wife started regularly attending early morning prayers only after being diagnosed with breast cancer. But that day, they both came and asked my dad for a meeting.

I don’t know exactly what happened that morning, but I remember waking up to a man yelling and pounding on my father’s door outside. I am a heavy sleeper--heavy as in I slept through a 7.2 earthquake in Guam and woke up on the floor the next morning--but this time, I jumped straight toward my windows like a puppy when strange sounds occur. Mr. Im was in the church parking lot, screaming curses at my dad’s office door. Then my dad came out. Mr. Im quickly grabbed him by the collar and said, “Are you disrespecting my wife?”

My dad said, “Let go of me and talk. She simply has been out for too long to participate in the official meetings right away.”

Then Mooseok Oppa appeared. He was a regular attendee of early morning prayers. Seeing him, Deacon Im said, “Honey, that’s enough for today. People are watching.” Dragged by his wife, Mr. Im climbed into his car but continued to hurl insults at my father. Then they left.

My mother had also been awake and watching through the kitchen window. So she called my dad and Mooseok Oppa into the house. I sat in the breakfast room with them.

“What happened?” said my mom.

“Pastor, this is insane!” said Mooseok Oppa. “How could they treat you like this? We must tell the other deacons. We can’t just ignore this.”

“No,” my dad said. “You can’t get yourself involved in this, Mooseok. You’ll get hurt.”

Mooseok Oppa slammed his fists on the table and stood. “But I recorded everything! We have proof!” he said.

We all stared at him in silence until my dad said, “Re..record?”

“Yes, when I was done praying and was about to leave, I heard raised voices in your office. So I stood outside your door and slid my phone under with the voice recorder on. It’s all here,” he said as he took his phone out.

He really had recorded everything and with perfect audio quality too. In the recording, the Ims and my father discussed Deacon Im’s absence from church because of her chemo treatments. According to the established bylaws, one could not take part in and vote in official church meetings unless a certain attendance criteria had been met. And such a meeting had taken place on the previous Sunday to which Deacon Im had tried to force her way into. Upset that his wife had been rejected from a meeting, Mr. Im had come to argue for her status as an active deacon. But when my dad explained the proper procedures, Mr. Im said, “You bastard!” and quickly lost his temper. This escalation of

events made little sense to me, and I wondered whether he had anger management problems.

“Well,” my dad said. “You young people sure are different. To think of recording this in that moment...” He chuckled then said, “Regardless, I don’t want you getting involved. Keep the file just in case, but don’t say anything about it until we figure out what the best solution would be.”

Mooseok Oppa agreed but kept his scowl and sighed all throughout breakfast.

On the following Sunday, I saw Mooseok Oppa secretly tap on the shoulders of each deacon. He motioned them to gather in the meeting room. I followed them up the stairs, pretending to have left my purse in the sanctuary. When the meeting door shut, I hid behind the adjacent hallway door.

Mooseok Oppa played the recording. “Shouldn’t something be done?” he said.

After a minute of silence, Mr. Song said, “Who do you think you are to record something like this? You young people, don’t you have any fear? You should be sued for this!” Then several other deacons quickly expressed their disapproval as well. The room grew louder.

As the situation became worse, Dr. Joo left the room to grab my father. “Pastor, you must come immediately,” she said as she hurried him into the room. Dr. Joo, a second-generation Korean-American, was a family doctor who had married a neurosurgeon of mixed black, white, and Chinese ethnicity. They attended church with their three children, and Dr. Joo served as the church secretary and translator. She

explained the situation to my dad as they ran to the room. But by the time my father had arrived, half the deacons had turned on Mooseok Oppa.

Mooseok Oppa slammed the table and said, “How could you all be like this?”

But my dad rushed into the room and said, “Calm down, Mooseok. This won’t end well for you if you continue.” Then he said to the other deacons, “He’s young. Let’s not act like this in front of him.”

But several deacons threatened to sue for the illegal recording unless it was erased to which Mooseok Oppa said, “Go ahead, then. Sue me! You should all be ashamed of yourselves.”

I held my phone to the crack where the door I hid behind hinged, recording everything. No one saw me. No one heard me. No one knew I was there.

My father and Dr. Joo urged the deacons to forgive Mooseok. It was his last semester. Suing would not affect them much, but it would damage his future.

Deacon Yoon then said, “Then have him kneel and apologize.”

My dad and Mooseok Oppa must have exchanged some form of silent interaction because Mooseok Oppa finally said, “I’m sorry. I was just so mad that Pastor Hur was treated like that.”

The door opened then, and Mooseok Oppa came out. The meeting continued without him. He stood across from me as he wiped his right cheek. Then our eyes met. He had seen me through the crack, backed up against the wall, tiptoeing to keep the door as close to the wall as possible.

“Ah, Hwi Eun ah...” he said and walked toward me.

I tried to smile but cried instead. He was like the older brother I'd never had. And now, we stood hugging in that hallway, unable to help my father in that other room.

"I'm so sorry," Mooseok Oppa said. His voice shook. "You've been here listening...I'm sorry... I..."

"It's not your fault," I said. "They would have found another reason other than you anyways. We've been here long enough."

My dad and I called it the five-year rule. At first, the pastor and the church enter a honeymoon stage during which each side attempts to make the relationship work. Then the problems begin. People grow tired, others get hurt, and ideas clash. After about five years, people start calling for a divorce when things fail to fit the idealistic vision that they'd constructed for the church.

It was our seventh year in Daytona, so what seemed a random disturbance to others failed to surprise me. In fact, it felt long due. Mooseok Oppa's recording had simply served as the necessary excuse to incite a war that had already been silently ensuing.

Half a year ago, the church changed its name from Daytona Korean Baptist Church to Daytona International Baptist Church to accommodate the growing number of non-Koreans who were regularly attending. We even added a translation option--Dr. Joo and I traded off as translators--for those who could not understand the Korean sermons, and English songs were added to the worship experience. At first, this shift was supported as many of the older church members--the Songs, Yoons, and Ims, in particular--had children who were more comfortable with English than Korean. Focusing on the growing

young adult ministry was favorably viewed as their own children would benefit from them. However, after graduating high school, their children moved away. Yet the young adult ministry kept growing, and more English-speakers came. This had caused a growing discontent among the older Koreans.

Now, four months after that Sunday, Deacon Song and I stood facing off in the church parking lot. Inside the sanctuary, I knew there were more people who opposed us. According to my mother, everyone who was somewhat connected to the church--both the opposers and the supporters--had made it a point to attend church for their cause.

Around 10:50 a.m., one of the young adults called me back inside. "The pastor wants you back inside. Service is about to start, and more people are coming in," he said.

With a nod, I walked back into the sanctuary and put on my best smile. My mom had trained me to smile in any situation. Right after I entered, a swarm of people who opposed my dad also appeared.

Among them was a middle-aged woman who worked as a hairdresser, Mrs. Lee. She looked more Thai than Korean and spoke both Korean and English in a tacky accent. My mom had told me about her, how she had started attending again after this rebellion began. Before then, she had stopped coming, claiming that American churches fit her better. I deliberately approached her and said, "Oh my, it's been a while! Hello!"

In response, she scoffed and, putting a hand over her chest for dramatization, said, "Oh God, she's just like her mother! What a sly little fox, just look at her smile. Scary little bitch." And she walked away, grabbing her companions to her side and telling them

how audacious I'd just been. When they each turned to look at me, I gave an even bigger smile.

Before this, I had hated how two-faced my mother could be. During my senior year in high school, we had fought, leading to a three-month period of complete silence. Though we lived under the same roof, we refused to exchange a single word. My dad suffered the most during this. Yet, when we were at church, my mom would talk to me as if nothing had happened. Then, right when service ended, her face would turn to stone again. I still hadn't learned to master my emotions to that extent, but I was proud now of having been likened to her.

At 10:55 a.m., almost everyone was seated. The middle pews were mostly filled with the opposing group, including the Songs, Yoons, Ims, and their acquaintances. Half of that group was somehow related to the Songs with Mrs. Song's older sister (who called herself the eldest deacon) as their leader. She was a lady in her late seventies with arthritis who walked around with a cane. She had married a white soldier in her early twenties and moved to America, inviting each and every one of her three siblings to immigrate after her. When this church battle broke out, those siblings all decided to appear with their local Korean acquaintances, who claimed that they had all been church members before my father had arrived; therefore, they should have the right to vote and take part in church matters.

The left and right pews were filled with younger crowds who supported my parents. These included Dr. Joo's family, Embry Riddle students and instructors, and other interracial families. The young adults served as members of the praise team, sound

crew, and children ministry while the older members served as secretaries and treasurers. Among them were also Dr. Green, a white pathologist, and Deacon Brian, a white marine veteran.

At 11:00 a.m., the praise team led everyone in worship. The praise team leader, Hana Unni, had also been attending since our family arrived. She was a young adult leader, a praise team leader, and a flight instructor (when we first met, she was still a student). Like her, the rest of the praise team were also students or instructors at Embry Riddle. Starting the service, she said, “Hello, everyone. It’s so great that we can be here together to worship God today. I...”

Someone said in Korean, “Don’t speak English!”

Another voice from the pews said, “This is a Korean church! No English here!”

Hana Unni said, “We say this every Sunday, but we are an international church, and we can worship God in both English and Korean.”

Though the middle pew kept protesting, the worship carried on. They also interrupted Hana Unni during her prayer. Some yelled about what language to use while others started barking and growling in their prayers to God--probably asking Him to throw my dad out. By growling, I meant growling...like dogs. As Hana Unni finished praying, my father walked up to the pulpit, and the growls grew louder.

A supporting deacon stood and said, “Be reasonable! You all are going over the line.” I could see my dad scowling, probably asking God why this was all happening. Even before the sermon had started, the opposing group was barking and hurling insults at him.

...

After leaving for college, I purposely joined a large American church. From Guam to Atlanta to Daytona, I had grown tired of small immigrant churches. I remember a conversation I'd had with Dr. Joo before leaving for my semester abroad. As we discussed the incident with Mooseok Oppa and the deacons, she told me how she'd refused to attend a Korean church before having kids. It was only when she realized that her children needed to maintain their Korean heritage that she chose to join our church. Growing up as a second-generation immigrant, Dr. Joo was also more comfortable with English than Korean, and she had sought non-Korean church communities.

“People don't go to immigrant churches to worship God. They come for the community. They come because, outside, they're looked down upon. They own laundry mats, hair salons, beauty salons, and don't get the kind of recognition they want. So they come to the church to gain some kind of status and recognition as a deacon and to feel like they deserve some kind of respect. It's the result of a different kind of Napoleonic Complex. They don't come to serve. They come to be served,” she said.

It was true. Some of the people sitting in this service had even declared themselves non-believers. Some had said they were raised Catholic. But they all came here because it was the only Korean community that they could find. The title of deacon was also something that was thrown around without actual proof of their validity and origin.

“They called this a Korean Community Center, not a church,” I told Dr. Joo.

“Well, that just goes to show how important this is for them. If they don’t have this, then they really have nowhere to go, which is why they won’t stop. But we can handle them. It’s alright,” she said.

...

As my dad began his sermon, one man marched up to the stage and tried to wrestle the microphone from my father’s hand. He was the husband of the “eldest deacon’s” youngest sister. Though he had never attended church before, I had seen him several times since he ran a tiny grocery store in town. “You’re not our pastor! We brought our own...” he said, but Joshua Oppa turned off the mic from the back sound board. Joshua Oppa had served in the U.S. Army for five years and liked to wear his military pants everywhere. They were comfy, he claimed. He was a pastor’s kid too.

The other adults from the opposing group got up and crowded around the sound board to try to turn the mic back on. “This is our church! You can’t just turn it off like that! Those are our mics!” they said.

Yet the entire praise team, who had returned to that back corner after worship, stood and surrounded the sound board with their arms crossed while the adults tried to reach past them, shoving and pushing.

“I’ll sue you! I’ll sue all of you!” Deacon Yoon said. He owned a t-shirt store for tourists. His daughter had been close with the young adults and me. So he’d often bought dinner for us until his daughter moved to Savannah for school. He and his wife remained in contact with the former pastor of the church, who had been kicked out.

“Insolent brats! No respect at all for their elders...” Deacon Song said.

By that time, Dr. Joo and Deacon Brian (the marine veteran) had regained the mic from the grocery store owner. Once things somewhat calmed, my dad tried to speak again and completed his sermon amidst the opposing group's barks, screams, and curses. Some of these Korean curse words, I had never heard. But several of the supporting deacons' jaws dropped upon their utterances.

Then a man walked in. I recognized him as Pastor Lee--the former pastor who remained friendly with the Yoons. I froze as he moved past me to a seat in the middle. It was customary manners for the current pastor to not return to a former church as to avoid creating a social divide in the church. Plus, he had left because of a romantic rumor with an older widow in the church. According to what Deacon Yoon had told us before this conflict arose, they used to all drink and karaoke together before we'd arrived. The last I'd heard of him, he was a divorcee and working as a freelance photographer, having renounced Christianity. Yet he was here, back in Daytona, in my father's church, being welcomed back by the people who had thrown him out. He looked unshaven and skinnier--broke and in need of a job.

During the final prayer, the self-proclaimed eldest deacon Song with arthritis speed-walked up to the podium without her cane and wrestled the mic from my dad's hand. "I bought this church in..." she said, but Joshua Oppa turned the mic off again.

Then the riot started. Everyone stood from their seats. Several members of the opposing group attacked the sound board while the praise team fended them off. People vehemently waved their fingers at each other while some of the opposing group shoved several of our members toward the sanctuary doors. Mrs. Song fell on her knees barking

and growling toward the cross that hung behind the podium. And the older deacons screamed at the young adults to leave, that this church didn't need young people who didn't pay any offering and just ate all their food.

Money and property was the opposing group's main concern. They claimed that my dad was trying to sell the church building and run off with the money. Though we had explained that no individual could actually do such a thing since the church buildings belong to the Southern Baptist Convention per bylaws, they would not believe it. Mr. Song even tried to go to the bank with official church documents to relocate all the church funds so that the church wouldn't have enough money to pay my father's salary. Of course, the bank had refused.

One of the opposing adults pointed at Deacon Brian and another white member and said, "You do not belong here! This is a Korean Community Center!"

"Now, see here," Deacon Brian said. "We all have a right to be in this church. There's no need to fight like this."

But some men said, "You shouldn't be here. This is our church. This is our problem, not yours."

"But I'm a deacon here!" said Deacon Brian.

While this encounter continued, my dad, Dr. Joo, and another supporting deacon wrestled with the eldest deacon Song for the mic.

A young adult, who had been watching the children, ran upstairs, but seeing the commotion, he turned around to head back down. I ran after him and said, "Oppa, call the police."

“What, me?” he said. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, call the police. It’s time to end this,” I said.

“But what do I say?” he said. He did not handle stress well.

“Tell them that people are disrupting church operations and making it impossible to conduct service. Tell them that people are fighting,” I said. “I need to stay inside and record things.”

“Okay,” he said as he took out his phone and repeated the words to himself.

Before he left, I asked him to stay downstairs with the children afterwards.

“Alright,” he said then asked, “Hwi Eun ah, aren’t you scared at all?”

“Nah,” I said, “I’m fine. This is nothing.”

This was not the first time I had seen fights in the church. I remembered seeing police cars on Sundays during our time in Guam. I remembered realizing that another pastor had choked my dad. I remembered when my parents were scammed by a church member while applying for a U.S. green card. I remembered overhearing the youth pastor’s wife badmouth my mother to another pastor’s wife in Atlanta. And I remembered hiding behind doors with my recorder as Deacon Yoon and his wife appeared at our house with the rest of their gang to try to physically force my parents to give up their church keys.

When I went back into the sanctuary, my mom was kneeling near the back door in front of the older women.

She said, “Please just stop! Leave the young adults out of this.”

But they continued to threaten to sue the young adults. Though the threat was meaningless, it did scare some students who were non-U.S. citizens and had F4 visas. Being sued would complicate their studies and legal status.

Mrs. Song and Mrs. Yoon told my mom to get up.

“Why are you on your knees? How do you think that makes us look?” Mrs. Yoon said. “You doing this won’t change anything.”

“What will the young adults think when they see you like this?” Mrs. Song said. “You’re the worst of this lot! Absolutely brazen-faced.”

I had witnessed my mom kneel before. According to her, people became flustered when she went down on her knees. I still hated seeing it, though. It hurt my pride.

Deacon Song appeared and told my mom to get up. But my mom grabbed onto his leg and said, “Please, just leave all of you!”

He screamed at her to let go and shook his leg, but she held on tightly.

So he punched her.

I froze, and my fists tightened. My mom held her cheek. I saw a few oppas run to her aid.

“Now, look here!” Mooseok Oppa said.

“Stay still, Mooseok,” my mom said. Joshua Oppa helped her stand. “Don’t touch him,” she said. She did not want them to be liable.

Dr. Green, the pathologist who had been shaking his head the entire time, said, “You do realize this is battery! How could you lay your hands on a woman?” He was a white man in his seventies who insisted on opening every door for his wife. Though he

had refused to fully involve himself in the disputes so far, this incident must have seemed unacceptable. I had never seen Dr. Green so furious.

“I didn’t hit her!” Deacon Song said. “It was an accident!”

Dr. Joo and her husband also appeared on the scene. “What do you mean you didn’t hit her? We all saw you!” her husband said.

My dad also approached and said, “That was really going over the line.”

“Fine. I’m sorry,” Deacon Song said. “But I wasn’t trying to hit her. I was trying to get her off of my leg, and she moved her face there!”

While everyone started gathering around my mother, I stepped outside to wait for the police. I did not want to watch anymore.

When the police car arrived, I ran up to the officer.

“They’re all inside,” I said.

Once we entered the sanctuary, everyone paused. Then everyone dashed toward the officer, yelling their accounts of the situation.

“They’re trying to sell off the church property!” Deacon Yoon said.

“This is my property!” said the eldest deacon. Apparently, she had paid a \$10,000 offering to help buy the church property. But the church, nevertheless, was placed under the Southern Baptist Convention.

“This is a Korean Community Center!” said Mr. Im.

“The pastor is trying to sell off the church to pay for his daughter’s college tuition,” said Mrs. Lee.

I poked the officer's arm and said, "Officer, I think I can explain. These people are all..."

"Don't listen to her!" Deacon Yoon said. "She's a child."

"You should know better," Mrs. Lee said. "And to think we worked so hard to find a good school for you when you first arrived."

The officer said, "That's enough." Then he turned to me. "Go on, young lady."

"As I was saying, these people are..." I said.

"Her father is stealing from the church!" Deacon Song said.

I cleared my throat, and the officer gave Deacon Song a warning finger. "I have a full ride for school, thank you," I said. "Anyways, these people have been blocking the parking lot to keep people from entering, they've been barking and growling during the worship to make the service impossible to conduct, and that man"--I pointed at Deacon Song-- "hit my mother."

"I did no such thing!" said Deacon Song.

"I have pictures of them in the parking lot, and we have CCTV's set up in the church," I said.

The adults looked shocked. They had not realized that they were being filmed, though we had put up signs that read, "CCTV in use."

Mrs. Yoon said, "That's ridiculous! You can't use CCTV in church."

"How dare you without my permission!" said Deacon Song.

"This is our church. We can do whatever we want here!" said Deacon Im.

The officer shushed them all again before turning back to me.

“How old are you?” he said.

“Eighteen,” I said.

“Young lady,” he said. “You’ve got a smart head on your shoulders. You keep that there. Now, where is the CCTV footage?”

My dad said, “I have them in my office.”

Dr. Joo, Deacon Brian, Mooseok Oppa, and I followed the officer and my dad to his office while the others continued bickering about the use of CCTV’s. The officer called for backup and instructed everyone to stay in the sanctuary.

After we pulled the videos up, we realized that my mother and Mr. Song had been positioned outside the camera’s range. But the scene of the eldest deacon marching up to the podium had been clearly taped.

“Now, I know Sue. I’ve met her and her daughter before,” the officer said.

“Doesn’t she have arthritis?” Sue was the eldest deacon’s english name.

“Yes,” Dr. Joo said, rolling her eyes, “that’s the lady with arthritis.”

“Man, she don’t look like she’s got arthritis!” the officer said.

Then we noticed another footage in the hallway. Deacon Yoon stood outside the meeting room in the hallway, looking left and right, while Deacon Song fumbled with the door knob.

“What are they doing?” said my father.

Deacon Brian and Mooseok Oppa went outside to check on the door knob. When they returned, they were laughing.

“I can’t believe it,” Deacon Brian said. “They glued the door shut.”

“They what?” said the officer.

“They just did that now?” said Dr. Joo.

According to my dad, Deacon Brian had changed all the locks after Deacon Im had tried to steal official church financial documents last week. My dad found her trying to take a file of folders from the meeting room. But when he had asked her to hand it back, she ran off into the sanctuary accusing the pastor of touching her breasts as she hugged the files close to her chest. “Why would I want to do that?” my dad had said as he retold the story later in the week when we were all gathered for a meeting. “I mean... just... you know. She’s an old lady with breast cancer for goodness sake.” It was true. Why would he want to touch that when he had my mom who was younger and curvier?

“I guess,” said Deacon Brian, “they were so upset that they couldn’t get through the door, so they made sure that no one else could.”

“Well, that...” said the officer. “That is vandalism, and I can definitely write them up for it since it happened while I was here.”

“I can’t believe they did that even after we told them that the CCTV’s were up,” Mooseok Oppa said.

Deacon Brian laughed as he replayed the footage. “Look at them keeping watch!” he said. “The camera’s right there!”

“Can we trespass them from the property?” I asked the officer. The others all nodded. We had discussed this option during our meeting.

“Well I don’t know. Things get real tricky with the law and religious institutions. I can get everyone to leave right now and write up a report about the vandalism. But I

really don't think there's much I can do about keeping them from coming back," he said.

"Unless they do any physical harm, we can't trespass them since... well... the first amendment. We can't interfere with religious matters."

"But they hit my mom and vandalized the property," I said.

"Yes, but there's no proof for the battery, and vandalism is not enough for that kind of action, especially when they are claiming that this is their church," he said.

I was so mad that breathing became difficult. I cried, and through trembling lips, said, "So I have to wait until they hit my mom on camera again to file anything against them?"

The officer dropped his head.

"I'm afraid so," he said.

The room stayed silent for several minutes.

"Well," my dad said. "Can you guys send someone every Sunday just to keep things from getting out of hand?"

The officer scratched his head and said, "I mean I can ask, but I can't promise anything." We all walked back into the sanctuary. Many had left by now, having tired of the wait. But the main contributors still remained. Everyone sat in silence as we waited for something to happen. Then the officer received a call that backup had arrived.

When we went out to meet them, the officer was called aside. Then he came back to us and said, "Look, that was my superior, and I was ordered to leave things here. I will write up the vandalism incident, but I'm afraid that's the best I can do."

I could hear the others talking behind us. They laughed, and someone said, “Even the police think we have the right to be here.”

I looked up at the officer. My tears were still wet on my cheeks.

“You’re leaving?” I said.

“I’m sorry,” he said. Then he walked away and slowly drove off with the other cars following behind.

Dr. Joo placed her hand on my shoulder. And we stood at the entrance, watching them leave.

WITH BROTHER

At 23, I became my nine-year-old brother's guardian. This was never planned. The decision happened spontaneously over winter break. And in the span of a week, my life changed from a regular young adult grad student to that of a working single-mother with braces. When I walked into a professor's office after pulling seven teeth, battling pneumonia and the flu, and with a child trailing behind me, he called me the most tortured graduate student on campus. I believed him.

...

It was Christmas. I'd traveled to Quebec with my best friend, Tian Tian. We sled, drank ice wine, and ate things we couldn't pronounce. Tian Tian, being Chinese-American, told me a Chinese belief about New Years: Whatever a person does at the strike of midnight, he/she will do for most of that year. So five minutes before midnight, we both sat in our hotel room doing the things we most wished to accomplish in the new year. She counted money, and I read the Bible. Afterwards, I congratulated her on her soon-to-be wealthy state, and she told me that I will become closer with God this year. I was proud of my overly-pious decision and reminded myself to relate this to my preacher father, who was sure to also compliment me. He thought it was so funny that he later used it in his sermon upon my return.

After our rather ridiculous handshakes and congratulations for one another, I called my parents. "Your brother misses you so much," my mom said. "He's asking why

you didn't come home for Christmas this year. We couldn't make a Christmas card because you weren't here."

In the background, Evan said, "Noonim, why did you and Tian Tian go to Quebec without me?" *Noonim* is a Korean title for older sister. Though *Noona* is more common, I taught him the more formal version of the word which basically translates to "Oh, great-and-wonderful- older-sister-whom-I-respect."

"I'm sorry, Evan," I said. "I'll be there next week, though."

"But we can't take a family picture without you," he said.

"We don't need to make a Christmas card, Evan. It's already New Years anyways."

"Yes, we do."

"Just tell him we'll make one," my mom said.

"Okay. We'll take a picture for Christmas," I said. Then my mom asked if I had time to talk. "Sure," I said.

"We got Evan's progress report from school," she said. "He's failing reading. And they said he's below average. If he doesn't pass the next set of standardized tests, they're going to hold him back."

"But he's already repeated second grade," I said. "If he repeats third grade too, he'll be two years behind. That might not matter much now, but it will later on."

"He even has a C in math because he doesn't understand the word problems. We don't know what to do about him. And it's not like ESL is an option since English is his first language. He just doesn't understand it. How are you supposed to explain something

to a child without a language? The public school just doesn't have anyone specialized enough to help him. So they don't know what to do with the child.”

...

When Evan was developing communication skills, my mother decided to speak to him in broken English. My dad wanted to use Korean in the house, but my mom had convinced herself that she had forgotten much of her Korean. She was very proud of how “American” she'd become. And since my mom spent the most time with Evan, he picked up English first. My dad, for convenience sake, started to also talk with Evan in broken English. They never conversed with Evan, however, for very long. Most of the time, the purpose was clear: “Come eat,” “Do this,” “No this.” So that was the extent of Evan's language as well.

In school, Evan easily made friends at first. But with every year, those friends moved on to new friends who could understand and play with them. Evan had never learned to hold a proper conversation. I felt bad. I had spent most of my days at Barnes and Nobles as a highschooler before moving out for college. Evan was four years old at the time. My mom told me once that Evan was being bullied in school. The teacher had called my parents about Evan kicking his friend. He'd never shown violent tendencies at home, so my mom asked him what happened.

Evan told her that he didn't hurt Morgan, his friend. Instead, Morgan had kept pinching him everyday. “He did...” Evan said and aggressively pinched his own arm.

“So Morgan hurt you?” my mom said. There was more body language than words in their exchanges.

“Yes,” Evan said. But he couldn’t explain this to his teacher. He didn’t know how. So my mom told me that she went to the teacher and took Evan’s side.

“But it’s weird,” she said. “They were such good friends last year. But even your dad says that Morgan’s parents glare at him in the parent pickup station now. But when I ask Evan, he still tells me that Morgan’s his friend. He tells me that they’re still friends, but Morgan doesn’t want to play with him anymore.”

I felt anger. How could anyone dare bully my little brother? I pictured Evan being ostracized by his classmates and Morgan coming up to pinch Evan’s arm and run away. I wanted Evan to fight and speak up for himself. But he apparently did not. Instead, my mom said that Evan sometimes slammed his fist on his table. “He’s obviously holding things in, which is coming out in spurts of anger. It’s like he’s so mad but doesn’t know how to express himself.”

...

Tian Tian organized her cash back into her wallet. Then she scrolled through her phone while I continued talking with my mom. “Do you know if Evan has any friends?” I said. “I get that he’s not doing well study-wise, but how is he socially?”

“I don’t think he’s got any close friends,” my mom said.

“Well, it’s just going to get worse if he goes down another grade. That’s got to affect his self-esteem later in life.”

“I don’t know what we can do.”

“Unless...Unless we homeschool Evan or something...”

“Well, I can’t. I’m barely home already because of work. And you know your father. The only reason he was able to homeschool you that one time was because you basically taught yourself. But Evan’s not going to do that.”

I thought of sixth grade. Since we were moving from Guam to Korea to the U.S., I did homeschool for a year. It was the best year of my life. I woke up late, took classes in pajamas, and skipped half the homework. My dad simply checked my test papers with the answer key and mailed it off.

“I mean...” I said, “Should I?”

We both laughed. But a part of me seriously considered the option.

“Anyways, let’s talk about it when you come home,” my mom said.

After hanging up, I told Tian Tian about the call. We’d been best friends for ten years now, so she worried about Evan too.

“I don’t normally like kids, but I like your brother,” she said. “And that says a lot. Just saying.”

“Thanks,” I said.

“That’s so stupid, though. They’re basically just trying to hold him back because they don’t know what to do with him. It’s not like that’s going to make him understand the material more if he never understood it in the first place.”

“Yeah, and homeschooling’s not really an option either. Evan being around my parents’ broken English was what caused this problem in the first place. But I know he’s going to fail that test if they just give it to him.”

“Yeah, and it’s not like you can homeschool him since you have school too.” She paused. “Angella,” she still called me by the American name I’d stopped using, “life sucks. But things will work out at some point. And you and I will be rich. Well... I’m already rich, but I’ll be even more rich. And Evan will succeed later too. I mean, he’s good at drawing, right? That’s something.”

When I returned to Jacksonville, FL, my dad and Evan picked me up from the airport. At this point, Evan automatically equated the airport with my arrival. He hesitantly walked towards me and gave me an awkward hug. He’d grown again, but he didn’t seem as excited to see me as before.

“He’ll warm up soon,” my dad said while giving me a hug and taking my bags.

Once home, I observed Evan. He stayed mostly in his room or in my room-turned-office, on the computer. I saw my mom mostly on the weekends since she worked late into the night with county matters. And my dad was there, but he wasn’t quite *there*. He spent his time watching other sermons, reading books, preparing for his own sermons, or napping. Since I was home, he said it was my turn to spend time with Evan. But Evan seemed accustomed to being alone already.

“Alright,” my dad said one night when everyone was home. “Evan’s school is starting next week. What are we supposed to tell them?”

“It’d be great if we could homeschool him,” my mom said. “But I just don’t have the time right now.” She looked at my dad. “Do you think you can do it?”

He held both hands up and shook his head. “Oh, God. No,” he said. “I don’t know how I even did that for Hwi Eun.”

“That’s because you didn’t,” I said. “I did everything.”

“It’d be perfect if you could just live here and take care of him,” my dad said.

“Dad, you do realize that I have a separate life and need to worry about standing on my own. You can’t just expect me to match everything to your lives anymore. I’m not a personal helper for you guys. You need to stop thinking of me as a readily-available backup.”

“How could you say that?” my mom said. “We are family, and we help each other. You need to stop being so selfish.”

“Who’s being selfish right now, though?” I said. “You two are just so caught up on how to use me to make your lives easier. You don’t even consider my plans or schedules.”

“You’ve become too centered on the individual,” my dad said. “This is the problem with American culture. All the young kids just think about themselves now. No one cares about doing what is good for the group.”

“That’s because they know that they’ll get sacrificed for the group,” I said. “And what’s that good for? Plus, we were talking about Evan. And you’re not willing to do anything, so why are you suggesting that I stop my studies and come down to raise your son? You guys gave birth to him. I love him and all, but he is my brother--not my child.”

...

There was a time when my mom and I didn’t talk for three months. We lived under the same roof while only conversing with my dad--never each other. She said it was my fault. I told her she was to blame.

I was a senior in high school then. I don't remember the exact details of how the fight started, but it probably involved my little brother. My mom might have told me to watch him while she and my dad went out to lunch with some church members. She likely used a demanding tone. I swear that my parents purposely waited 14 years to have another child to have a permanent babysitter.

That day, she probably said, "Watch your brother."

And I probably said, "Why don't you ask nicely? You're asking for a favor, you know."

I would hate to have me as a daughter. My mom probably thought the same about herself before she had me. I'm both my parents--bossy like my mom and persuasive like my baptist preacher dad who always has three points for every sermon. Basically, I have a big head and talk back a lot. My mom said that raising me helped her to understand her mom more. She apparently called my grandmother to apologize and thank her and said that I will do the same when I have a kid. I believe her.

I do remember my mom saying, "Forget it" and leaving with my brother. She slammed the door behind her for dramatic effect. Though my mom wasn't the best at verbally expressing herself, she made sure that my dad and I knew how she felt. I watched a youtube video before in which a man joked that no one ever cares if the dad is unhappy. But if the mom is unhappy, then nobody is happy.

When my parents returned from their lunch, I was in my room. I heard my mom's footsteps come up the stairs and down the hallway. She swung my door open with my brother on her hip and said, "You don't have to ever watch your brother again. In fact,

don't even consider yourself a part of this family. You just go on living your life alone. I don't need a daughter like you." Then she left. As she walked away, she mumbled on--as she often does--about how ungrateful and unhelpful a daughter I was. She spoke as if talking to herself, but she meant for me to hear every word. In Korea, we'd call that "being a fox." The closest southern equivalents to it would be "passive-aggressive" or "manipulative," but that's not as subtle.

I yelled across the hall. "Fine! I don't need a selfish mom like you either." I should have responded faster--before she'd left. But I always threw my punches late. My mom, though, never hesitated.

My dad came up the stairs. "How is that any way to talk to your mother?" he said. My father has spanked me twice in my life--both times because I'd talked back to him.

"She treats me as if I have no life," I said. I wanted my mom to hear me. "Is it so hard to ask for a favor? Why does she have to just assume that I have nothing else to do with my life? I'm busy too, you know. I make schedules for myself, and when you guys do things like this, my whole day just gets messed up."

...

My dad half-stood from the couch. He didn't like to feel disrespected.

"She is right," my mom said. "She has to go to school." Education is something my mom holds above all else. "For Evan, maybe we can get someone from the American church to help him with his reading?" Two churches--American and Indian--leased our church building for services since they were just starting and had no funds to buy property yet.

“No,” I said. “You mean that old lady that teaches Sunday school? You’ve already tried her before, and Evan hasn’t improved. Just because they’re white doesn’t mean they know how to teach English, mom.”

“Well, what do we do, then?” she said. “Stop telling us what doesn’t work, and start giving ideas.”

I sat in silence while my parents complained about Evan’s school. I pictured Evan sitting alone in front of the computer. He had no supervision. No limitations. He watched movies on Netflix and videos on Youtube without really knowing what they were about. I’d had to tell him to stop watching something several times during my stay. He also played violent games online. And when I asked him who showed him these, Evan told me that the kids at church had shown him. Those kids had working parents who spent limited hours at home too. Most immigrant families in our church did.

“Maybe, I could.”

“Could what?” my mom said.

“Could homeschool Evan.”

“What?” my dad said.

“Maybe I can take him to Greenville. I mean... I don’t know. It’d be great if I could. Would that even work? I’d have to quit my part-time job and email my professors. But maybe I can find a sitter in Clemson while I take my class. I just don’t think this is a good environment for Evan right now.” I pointed at my mom. “You’re never here.” Then I turned to my dad. “And you don’t know how to give attention to a kid. You even lost me when I was five.”

“I’ll pay you!” my mom said. “I can pay for everything. That’s why I work anyways. You can quit and just study and be with Evan. I was honestly sad when you refused to take a dime from me during your undergrad days. But if you homeschool Evan, then wouldn’t you be willing to accept my help? Mommy makes a lot of money now, you know.” She did. Though she became a housewife after leaving Korea for a short while, she had always been the money-maker. And now, she worked for the county and had a stable managing job. “This is less expensive than the private school option anyways. We can make it work.”

“Wait,” I said. “We’re really doing this?”

“Yes,” my mom said. “You and your dad can go to the school tomorrow and take Evan out of the system. I never liked anything here for Evan anyways. I don’t like the kids in our Sunday school or his Tae Kwon Do classes. The entire Jacksonville area is mostly families in the lower socio-economic status.”

“Well, I guess you won’t have to worry about that in Greenville. It’s mostly white people over there... even at my gym.” My mom likes white people.

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I remember when my mom told me she was pregnant. I broke down crying. How could they? I imagined them fondling the new baby while I sat in my room by myself. When my mom saw me, she laughed.

“You know, you’re going to be so embarrassed that you cried when you’re older,” she said.

“I just don’t like it, okay?” I said. What if it was a girl? What if she was prettier than me? Then she’d get more attention than me. These were serious questions. It was hard enough having some unknown presence come and invade my space in the family. But if it happened to be smarter or prettier than me, I’d hate it even more. My mom sat across from me. I glared at her stomach. “It better be a boy.”

“You should feel lucky. You got all that love and attention from your grandparents. This baby,” she said while fondling her belly, “will never get that same experience you had. Don’t you feel sorry for the little one?”

I didn’t. Memories from that time were all I had to hold onto. It was mine. On the day I was born, my grandpa quit smoking. When he heard my dad say, “She’s finally here,” he threw his pack into the river and never held a cigarette again.

“I can’t kiss my granddaughter with dirty lips,” he’d said.

When they told me Evan was a boy, I was thrilled. I wouldn’t have to share my place with another girl. I’d be the only granddaughter. I’d be the prettiest. I would have all my mom’s clothes and jewelry when I grew up.

My mom always reminded me of how loved I’d been as a child. But that was the past and all too short. They removed me from my grandparents to go into the mission field, Guam, when I was six. If anything, the feeling of having lost that love filled me.

Before moving to Guam, I remember visiting my grandparents in the countryside. There was a new baby playing with my toys. Let’s call him David. I don’t remember his name, but it was similar. That’s how irrelevant he was to my life. My grandparents sometimes watched David while his single mom worked. I’ve erased him mostly from

my memory, but everyone--my grandparents, my aunts, my parents--tells me that I was jealous. Apparently, I hit and pushed David when I first saw him.

A similar situation happened in Guam. An older girl, Alice, lived with us for a year while her mom worked. I liked her enough. But my mom tells me that I always asked, "What about me?" whenever she complimented Alice. I remember getting scolded often for asking that question.

...

Evan's move was smooth. We explained the situation to him, and he was sad to leave at first. But then he said, "I don't want to fail. Please don't make me repeat third grade. I don't want to fail again." He'd never showed any signs of worry when we had held him back for second grade. So my parents and I were surprised. He cried. "But you can help me. You can help me not fail reading. I don't want to fail."

"Yes," I said. "Noonim can help you, Evan."

I'd given him that name: Evan. My mom told me I could pick his English name. They'd already picked his Korean name: Hwi Young, but the name I picked would become his legal name. I'd always liked E names like Eric, Ethan, and Evan. Eric didn't have a religious meaning, though. And when I thought of the Evans and Ethans in my life, the Evans were usually big, but sweet, athletes. I wanted a sweet little brother who could protect me later. Though Evan was strong, I feared he might be too nice for the world.

Evan cried in the car ride. Unlike me, he hadn't moved much at all. The move from Daytona to Jacksonville was the biggest change in his life. Now, he was moving

states without his parents to live with me until I graduate. He told me later that he hates moving and that he wants us to all live in Florida together as a family.

We soon settled into a pattern. Evan came to the writing center with me to work. Then Emma, his sitter and a junior at Clemson, picked him up. She took Evan on walks around campus. They looked at flowers together, drew together, and read together. Evan really liked Emma and packed early to wait for her. After my classes, we drove back to Greenville and went to my gym. When I'd asked my coach if they had a kids program, he asked me if I'd suddenly decided to adopt a random child. They did have a Jeet Kun Do class for kids. After the first few visits, we realized that most of the kids were also homeschooled. And Evan and I started hanging out with these families outside of the classes as well. The moms joked that I probably spent more time with them on play dates than with the people in my program. But I was happy. Evan had new friends and spent less time with a screen.

Life wasn't all wonderful, though. There was an adjustment period. Spending most of his time with our dad, Evan had picked up the habits of the typical Korean male in the family. He never cleaned, never set the table, never lifted a finger. So I spent the first few months teaching him side-by-side how to wash his own dishes, fold laundry, and make the bed. And he learned to always ask before watching anything.

...

Being with Evan reminded me of happier times with my mom. In Guam, we'd never been well-off, but she rarely told me no when I wanted something. I remember this special cup I had. It had a heart handle. We had gone on a mother-daughter date to Ross.

The Wallaces, a missionary family from Arkansas who had helped us, had told my mom that Ross and Walmart were popular chains in the States. Oh how they missed Walmart. Arkansas is the home of Walmart, apparently. They were very proud. Anyways, my mom told me to pick a cup. “It’ll be a special cup just for you,” she said. I don’t know why I cling to this cup so much. Perhaps, even as a kindergartener, I’d felt a kind of sadness from my mom that day. They probably had financial concerns. But I was so excited. I took care of that cup until the day the handle broke off several years later. My dad did that.

My mom was a tiger mom and a scary teacher. After quitting her Kumon job in Korea to move, I became her only student. She yelled a lot and smacked my forehead with her knuckle. I remember how she’d make me use a timer and do an hour of piano, an hour of math, an hour of English and Korean each, and an hour of reading each day on top of homework. I’d never realized how scary she was. She was supposed to be out working and just love me during the short times that she was home. But now, she was home all the time.

We even cooked together. She bought me my very own apron and chef’s hat, which I wore to make scrambled eggs and ramen. I liked the idea of cooking with her more than actually doing it. I’m scared of heat, which made placing dry noodles into a pot of boiling water a rather terrifying experience. My mom forced me, though. I swore I got a first degree burn. I couldn’t see it, but I felt it. It was there.

...

One day, Evan decided that he wanted to be a chef. He'd seen a cooking show on TV. I asked him if he knew how to cook. He said, "No, but you can teach me. Right?" We started with scrambled eggs. I even bought him his own set of aprons and chef's hat. The entire experience felt like *deja vu*. Evan grinned and jumped around like an excited toddler.

"Add the oil first," I said. "Then when it gets hot, you add the eggs. Stir." Evan extended the spatula as far away from him as he could. Egg bits fell out of the pan. Maybe that's why my mom yelled at me. "Get closer to the pan."

"But it'll hurt me," he said. I gave up, telling myself we'll try another day.

Gradually, Evan turned into a mini-me. He turned into a homebody, and we spent most nights watching a movie on Netflix while eating dinner on the couch. We started with G-rated movies like *Winnie the Pooh*. Once Evan started understanding more of the plotlines, we moved on to films like *Willy Wonka and The Chocolate Factory* and *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. This transition took about a year. Though I enjoyed movie nights with Evan, I wished for just one day when I could go to the theater alone to watch a non-children's movie. I felt bad for wanting to be away from him, though.

Evan also became a regular at coffee shops. He'd sit with his hot chocolate doing homeschool while I wrote papers and sipped on coffee. When I put on my glasses, Evan also took out his blue-light repelling glasses. He watched my every move as if looking for hints. When we went to restaurants, he'd wait to see which fork I went for.

...

I remember how my mom drilled me about manners. When I was nine, my mom forced me to sit in front of the mirror and practice smiling for 30 minutes a day. “Learn how to control your facial expressions,” she told me. “If you don’t learn to control your emotions, then you’ll make your dad and me look bad. Even if you’re not happy, you’ve got to look okay. Look in the mirror. Sit here, and watch yourself. Think, ‘What kind of smile will make me look pretty?’”

As part of the ministry, my parents often visited church members’ houses or work to pray for them and listen to their problems. They’d take me with them, and I’d be left alone for hours into the night while the adults talked. If I interjected or complained, I received a scolding look or an earful in the car ride home.

During my high school days, I remember being lonely. I thought about the nights I spent in my room upstairs while my mom focused on her young adult ministry. After we moved to Florida, my mom started leading bible study groups among the young adults. It started out as four people but soon grew to over thirty. They were separated into groups based on when they had started. She had a group over at our house nearly every day--at least, that’s what it felt like.

She’d cook grand dinners for everyone. She’d talk and laugh with them. And I enjoyed the company too. But then, she’d tell me to leave. “Take your brother, and go upstairs,” she’d say. I wanted to stay too. I wanted to talk too.

For hours into the night, I heard them talking, laughing, and praying downstairs. My dad sometimes joined them when he wasn’t preparing a sermon. But I was always upstairs, putting the baby to sleep or working on homework.

Later in college, one of the young adults, Mooseok, came to visit me. While eating dinner, he told me he was sorry. “When I think about it,” he said, “I was really fortunate to have been able to do Bible studies with your parents. And it’s really a great ministry that they have. We really need it back there, but I always felt sorry towards you. Maybe it wasn’t all that great for you, you know.”

Moo was like the older brother I never had. He basically lived at our house, and he usually gave me rides to school after finishing early morning prayer services during the weekdays. “You, of all people, don’t have to be sorry,” I said. “I liked having everyone around. It’s just...sometimes, I couldn’t tell whose mom my mom was. She was more like a mom to all of you guys than to me.”

...

Evan never complained like me. In fact, he waited in silence. He kept himself occupied in his own thoughts. I saw him laugh by himself in Florida. When I asked him about it, he told me that he just remembered funny parts of a video. He did this for about an hour, and I wondered if he’d also been left alone for the sake of ministry. He’d learned to smile on his own too.

In the children’s Jeet Kun Do class, Evan sparred with his friend, Kevin. Since the punches are bare-knuckle, no direct physical contact was allowed. Evan knew this because he’d been training separately with my private coach, Aaron, in the same gym. Aaron had watched and trained Evan since he moved in with me. So he understood that Evan needed visual explanations rather than words. But Aaron wasn’t there that day.

Evan later told me that Kevin hit him in the face three times. Evan had looked flustered after class that day, and he forced himself to smile in front of me.

“Honey,” I said, “You can cry. It’s okay.”

“No,” he said. “I’m okay. I was not good today. I didn’t do my punches right.

And I told Kevin sorry.”

“Why would you apologize to him? He punched you!”

Evan looked more flustered. “No. I’m sorry. Don’t be mad. I won’t do it again.”

“Evan, I’m not mad at you. You don’t have to apologize.” I wanted Evan to understand that he’d done nothing wrong. “I’m just sad, honey. I don’t want you to let other people hit you or be mean to you. You’ve got to fight back if that happens. And Kevin should’ve apologized to you, not the other way around.”

“He did,” Evan said. I didn’t know if I should believe him. Was he telling me this to make me feel better? “I won’t get hit again. Noonim, don’t worry about me.”

Later that night, I called my parents. I was mad. “How low is his self-esteem for him to apologize to a kid that hit him? We have to build Evan’s confidence up. This isn’t okay.”

Evan had become accustomed to a listen-and-obey relationship. He didn’t know how to interact with his friends as equals. “It’s our fault,” my mom said. I’m sure that she cried that night.

...

I remember when I sat in the living room crying a month after my grandfather died. My dad was in his office, and my mom was napping with Evan.

I didn't expect much from my parents when I told them I'd gotten all A's again. Just a word acknowledging that I'd worked hard--something more sincere than a "Good job"--would have been nice. I don't know why that bothered me so much then. My grandpa would have been more excited. He would have told me--like he'd always done--that I was "Fan-tas-tic" and "Wonder-ful" in his self-learned english accent.

When my mom appeared, I wiped my eyes. But she knew I'd cried. I wanted her to know. I craved attention and would have settled for a hug. When she asked me why I cried, I told her I was just upset by her response. She sighed.

"You've just got too much time on your hands," she said. "That's why you're overthinking things."

"How could you say that?" I said. "I really feel depressed these days, and you're not helping."

"Depressed?" She scoffed. "If you have time to think about such ridiculous thoughts, then you really have a lot to go before you mature. You've got it easy. You ought to be grateful."

...

There were times when I exploded at Evan. "Just give me five minutes!" I said. I don't remember what caused those moments--probably stress from my own life. Evan might've spilled orange juice on the carpet. He'd done that several times. Instead of helping to clean it up, his first response was to latch onto me and try to force me to smile.

"Smile," he said. "I'm sorry. Do you want to smile now?"

"Evan, stop. Get off of me. You're not helping the problem right now."

“But I’m trying to make you feel better.”

“No, you are trying to make yourself feel better. It’s selfish. Think about what the other person wants you to do rather than what you want me to do for you right now. I want you to help me clean up first.”

“But...”

And I exploded. “Five minutes! Stay quiet and leave me alone for just five minutes. I need you to give me time to calm down. Just stop!”

His eyes widened. “You yelled at me! Calm down, Noonim. Don’t be angry!”

“If you don’t want me to be angry, then don’t talk to me right now. That’s how you make me feel better. Give me space.”

I worried that I’d hurt him like how my mom hurt me with her bursts of anger. After those five minutes, I apologized to Evan. We talked for over an hour about why I’d blown up and how he had felt. He needed extra hugs to feel better. I realized how similar, yet different, we were. I remember wishing that my mom would have done the same for me too.

...

My grandparents had my pictures plastered all over their walls before Evan. But when I visited last, Evan had replaced my face with the exception of one picture that included me and Evan together. “What is this?” I said to my grandmother. “I’m a little hurt. How could you not have a single picture of me hanging on your walls?”

“There’s a picture right there,” my grandma said.

“Of me and Evan,” I said. “But you should have one of just me too. Where’s that cute one of me as a four-year-old wearing that adorable cape. Why did you take that one down? You shouldn’t play favorites, you know.”

“I don’t play favorites. You’re being childish. Your brother is a baby. It’s normal to have more pictures of babies in the house.”

“I’m your baby too. I came first. I’m going to be really sad if you don’t put my pictures up there.”

“Alright. Alright,” she said. “Geez. I feel like I’m walking on glass right now. You’re so scary.”

“Don’t take it personally,” my aunt said. She came over to watch me whine. “At least she has a picture of you on there. She doesn’t even have any pictures of your cousins. You don’t see them complaining.” Usually, the male line was preferred over a daughter’s children.

I laughed. “I didn’t even realize that,” I said. “But I’m sure that their other set of grandparents have their faces all over their house.”

“Yup,” my aunt said. “That’s true too.”

...

Evan and I spent Christmas with my parents. After we returned to Greenville, Evan cried. He said that he missed Mom and Dad. It must have felt nice having no homeschool or work to do over the break. I wondered if Evan felt something similar to how I felt when visiting my grandparents as a child. My parents pampered him, fattened

him, and took time off to play with him. Their parenting styles for Evan and me were polar opposites. They'd softened into jelly.

Evan cried under the covers. "I know you miss them," I said. "You'll be living with them again soon, though. But you only have a semester left with me. So let's try to make as many memories as we can. Okay?"

He shed tears again.

"What's wrong now?" I said.

"I want you to live with us," he said. "I want you to live with *family* in Florida. All of us."

"But I'm an adult now. You gotta move out when you're old."

"You're not old!"

"Thanks, hun. But I am."

"I don't want you to be all alone. Then you'll be sad."

"That's so sweet," I said. Being alone had never bothered me after moving out. I liked having me-time. I enjoyed the silence. But now, I felt sad too. "I'll visit often," I said.

Evan cried himself to sleep that night. He wouldn't come out of the covers because he didn't want me to see him cry. I hugged him to sleep.

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Evan and I are down to our last few months together. What started abruptly feels like a long-term healing process for both of us. Evan's comprehension and social skills have improved considerably, and he's even started speaking some Korean. These are

slower and smaller steps than other kids his age. But for Evan, they are major strides. He engages more in conversations, and he makes eye contact with people when conversing. When people see me these days, they express admiration and praise as if taking care of Evan should be a task that burdens me. Saying that it's easy is a lie. However, he ended up giving me what I'd feared to lose to him--love and attention. He's filled a part of me that's been rotting for quite some time.

One day, I looked in the mirror and realized that my sunspots were gone. I'd even tried laser treatments in Korea for a year to fix them. Yet they'd magically disappeared. I called my dad.

"Daddy," I said. "My sunspots are gone. You know, the ones that I kept going to the skin clinic for... they're just gone. I think they were from stress."

"What?" my dad said.

"The doctor said that my sunspots were genetic. I mean look at mom and your younger sisters. He said that they were just inside of me. He'd asked me if I was stressed because extreme stress could make these appear at a younger age. Do you remember when we went through all that trouble with the church in Daytona?" I didn't mention how that was also when he and my mom last physically fought.

"Oh God," he said. "Yes."

"Well, you told me to go to an Eastern medicine doctor because I had indigestion and the hospitals couldn't figure it out. The doctor said I had *hwabyung*." This is an illness that's only documented in Korea. Records state that Koreans have a lot of *Han*, meaning built-up anger. This anger creates an overheating that damages organs. I don't

know how accurate this information might be, but I suppose it's similar to psychological pains. My dad sighed.

“What's wrong?” I said.

“To think that a young thing like you got *hwabyung*...” He clicked his tongue. I might have saddened him.

“Anyways, I'm trying to say that I don't have that anger anymore. In fact, I'm at peace. I don't think that I've felt this relaxed since I was five. Dad, I'm really happy these days.”

I leaned closer to the mirror to observe my cheeks. My skin was clear. No pimples. No spots. My dad continued talking through the speaker phone, but I barely heard him. I smiled at my own reflection. “I'm really happy these days,” I whispered as I grazed my fingers over my skin.