

SAMANTHA LEE

## GOOD KOREAN BOY

When you were born, you got stuck. You were too big. The doctors had to pull you out with metal tongs around your head, the kind they use in fireplaces. You still have the scar on the back of your neck.

You are fifty years old, with your own family and your own shiny life, and your mother has just found you smoking a cigarette on her back porch. You are visiting with your wife and daughter. Your mother's hands are on her hips. They are covered in red pepper—she has been making kimchi. Women now use dishwashing gloves, to save their skin, but your mother always insisted on doing it the traditional way. When you were a kid, you and your father ate so much kimchi that you would see her in the kitchen twice a week, wincing, arms up to the elbow in pepper and vinegar.

You didn't even want a cigarette that badly, you have just learned that this is the best excuse to get away. Still, your mother is yelling at you in Korean. *"You almost killed me when you were born,"* she shouts, *"and you kill me a little bit more every day!"* She slams the door behind her when she goes back to the kitchen, rattling the screen. Your wife, inside, smiles at you above her head.

You put out the cigarette and go inside. You slip the lighter back inside your father's briefcase, where you found it. At the table, your mother slams down platters of food. Your daughter gushes over it as your mother aggressively heaps her plate. Your father sits stiffly at the head of the table. His toupee looks ridiculous. He has two extra cushions on his seat, so he can be the tallest. You remember when you used to think he was a giant. He eyes you with disapproval. "You're smoking now, son?" he asks. *"You disappoint me."*