



You are forty-five years old, and you are visiting your parents for Christmas. Your younger sister is spending this year with her husband's family, and she's convinced you over several phone conversations to replace her at your parent's house.

Your daughter cries when you tell her. The three of you always spend Christmas with your wife's family. Your father-in-law picks up your daughter to put the angel on the top of the tree, and your mother-in-law makes hot chocolate with a little bit of heavy cream, just like she always had growing up in Boston. They play Bing Crosby, and your daughter is allowed to finally put the baby Jesus into the carved nativity scene. "Who will put in the baby Jesus?" your daughter hiccups.

Your wife scolds her. "We never see Halmeoni and Hal-abeoji. They miss you." Your daughter wipes her face. She is twelve; she is too old to be crying over something like this. "Just this Christmas," you say instead. "I'm sorry."

You stay in your childhood home. You have to share an air mattress with your wife, since your father turned your bedroom into his office twenty years ago. Your mother brings out a cloth mat for your daughter. She stares at it until you volunteer to swap places. You remember when you used to sleep on these every night, until your neighbor two doors down the cul-de-sac offered to raise money to help your family buy "real beds." Your mother, embarrassed, forced your father to buy mattresses. Top-of-the-line, she told everyone, but she complained to you and your sister every morning how they hurt her back. Now, you wake up in the morning so stiff your wife has to help you off the ground. Not again, your wife says. Your daughter can take the couch.

It smells like coffee and boiling rice, so you go to the kitchen. Your mother is there. You peek around the corner and see your father talking to your daughter. Already, she is taller than he is. They are sitting together in an armchair and flipping through a photobook. You know that one well. Inside are photos of all the broken hands your father has fixed. You used to gag