

“You did great,” you tell her.

“I didn’t win,” she says.

She throws away her ribbon on the way out of the pool complex. Not all dreams die, but most do. You watch her try not to cry. Perhaps it was cruel to let her think she could have this. You only want the same thing all parents do: for her life to be better than yours.

“Come on,” you tell her, “let’s get milkshakes.”



You are almost forty, and your sister has just had a son. He is eleven months old now. She calls you to invite you to his first birthday celebration. Both of your parents are in Korea, where your father works six months out of the year. Your father is pleased about a grandson, but he cannot make it home. You have work as well. Your sister knows better than to argue with either of you. “I’ll come to you, then,” she tells you. She hates traveling, but neither of you can imagine a first birthday celebration with only the parents in attendance.

It is an eight-hour drive, and your sister complains for an hour about her back pain when she arrives. “Next year, you visit me,” she says. You promise to come in the summer. You remember when you used to share a room. Nobody ever imagines they’ll get old.

You have just gotten a promotion at your job and bought a house. Your sister wheels around, trying not to look impressed. She rolls her eyes at your trash can, hidden behind wooden doors. “It’s like those rich kid houses we used to make fun of,” she says. But you both know she’s lying. You never made fun of those rich kid houses. You carry your sister’s luggage to her room while she peers at the backyard through the blinds. “*When my husband finishes residency, I think we’ll get a house with a pool,*” she says in Korean.

Your daughter, an only child, is thrilled to have a cousin. She is seven, and she treats him like a doll. When your sister walks in to see your daughter braiding his wispy hair, she snatches him off the floor. “Don’t do that,” she