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Umma

Yoon DockYi was born on December 12, 1971, in Mokpo, South Korea. She is a daughter and a sister to many that the narrator is unaware of. DockYi had a rough childhood, secluded in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Mokpo. She lived in a clay-bricked house and shared a bed with her mother. Although her father struggled to keep a steady job, she found joy wherever she went. She would bike to the beach that met the Yellow Sea and relish the nightlife with her friends. DockYi would grasp the little things that Mokpo had to offer. She didn't think much about the future, but when she did, she imagined opening a tiny bakery in Seoul once she finished college. DockYi never thought she would leave Korea, but she wished to travel the world; however, those dreams fell through as she couldn't afford college.

In the year 1996, she met a man named Bradley Nadig. He was a captain at the time in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Camp Casey. DockYi and Brad met through a friend and would soon get married in Dongducheon, Korea in the year 2000. She was ecstatic as the man promised a life outside of the city she was so confined to; DockYi would finally travel the world she craved to see. However, she wouldn't realize in fifteen years that she would desperately miss the tiny peninsula she once called home. Her contradicting actions of infectious joy, talkativeness, and sadness reflect her heart being in two places. Some say that DockYi develops a mild depression in these years. This woman is my mother.

My *umma* (mother) is loud. Her laughter fills the air before she even sets foot in the kitchen. It's a rich melody that flows into every corner of the room. It pours out of the house into the streets of Durham and into every listening ear in New Hampshire. The only sound on Earth for three seconds is my mother's laughter. It's that loud. I meet my mother's gaze as she strolls through the doorway; she has lovely brown eyes that glow with a soft joy. Her face is adorned with a bright smile, and my sister and I go blind. "*Annyeong!*" (Hello!), my mother sings out as she sets down the gazillion things balanced in her arms. She gives us a smile that promises trouble. It's a contagious one too. Despite my hate for early mornings, I find myself smiling as well. I have always thought her joy to be like a faint spark that burns into a wildfire, consuming everything in its path.

My mother is beautiful like that; not only does her laughter fill the air, but her beautifully crafted words do too. She brings warmth wherever she goes. She will speak, and light will spill from her mouth like liquid gold poured from the sun. Here, at home, her tongue becomes loose and she speaks freely. My mother's soft-spoken English melts away into sharp Korean vowels and consonants. She is a whirlwind of words. I don't know how she doesn't run out of breath, but I love listening to her talk; she speaks with a fierce but gentle lilt. My mother often talks about her childhood home, Mokpo, and I can hear the yearning in her voice when she talks about Korea. It's as if the memories are flowing out of her head and tumbling before her eyes. My sister and I silently watch her as she lays her memories before us. My mother then says her goodbyes as we head out for school. She will usually send my sister away by showering her with kisses until she gets annoyed. My mother tries to do the same with me, but I quickly learned to dodge her attacks. Her endless love for us always amazes me. It is like she is overflowing with it, as if her own body can not contain it, just like her inability to contain her words.

Despite her joy and her whirlwind of words, despite how open she appears, I know my mother hides something from us. I do not know exactly what, but it is a thing that peeks out from her every so often. That thing, I think, is a sliver of sadness that my mother has learned to deeply bury. I wonder if it claws at her heart often, threatening to escape the prison that she has made for it. When it slips from my mother's grasp, it becomes noticeable. These are the days when I notice how stark her gray streaks are, how hunched her back is, and how the bruises under her eyes seem to smother out their inner light. Even then, a smile will be etched into her face. This is where I question whether I even know my own mother. Sometimes, I will find her in her bed, the covers engulfing her body. I never realized how small and fragile my mother is until she clenches the sheets tightly around her. This is when I know the sadness eats at her. I know it when I find her eyes lined with silver and she tells me that she is alright. I know it when my mother sits on the porch for hours and watches the Earth swallow the last rays of sunlight. When she stares off into the horizon, I wonder if her eyes are searching for the far-distant land that she calls home. "*Aigoo, cham,*" a Korean phrase of exhaustion, my mother would often whisper on these days. However, my mother's kindness never shrinks in size. It refuses to chip away even when I see tears in her eyes. There is nothing I can do for her that will ever compare to the sacrifice she made both as an immigrant and a mother. It's as if she's living two separate lives and the sadness is born from it.

It is usually like this: days when the house is flooded with sunlight, where I can feel her warmth from a mile away, and then there are times when she becomes a faint essence drifting through the halls -- a ghost. I wish to help carry the weight, the secret for her, to help ease the burden she so stubbornly refuses to give away. My mother's state is unusual, but she refuses to see anyone. I've always thought that she had some type of depression; some would say that she

would suffer from depressive episodes, but who knows? My mother says that it's the rain that makes her like this, and I laugh with her. Though, my mother and I both know that it is much more than the rain.