

## Golden

You are American. Born in Detroit, Michigan, raised in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. Your parents were born and raised in Korea, but they want you to be American. They want you to be excellent, be better than everyone else.

You sit in your kindergarten classroom, colors are scattered throughout. Rainbow tiled carpets, food group posters, crayons and colored pencils at your desk. The teacher tells the class to draw a portrait of yourself. You sketch out your head and ask for the colored pencil your table mate is using to color in his skin. He is using it right now, so he looks at you and gives you a yellow colored pencil instead. The yellow looks nothing like the color of your skin, but you use it anyway.

Your sister walks you to the bus stop for your first day of school. The bus stop is down a long, winding road leading to the stop a good half a mile from your house. You had just moved to the area and you didn't know where you were, but your sister knows where she's going, she always knows. You reach a side road where the stop is and wait patiently.

A boy is walking from across the street. He stops when he sees you and your sister. He stretches his eyes and dances around yelling "Ching, chong, ching, chong!" You have never heard these words before, they meant nothing to you. You look over to your sister, who always knows what to do, and tears are streaming down her bright, red face.

You ask her why he is making fun of them and through her sobs, she says it's because we are Korean. You still do not understand. Why would someone make fun of another person for being who they are? Again, you ask your sister why. But she is unable to speak through her sobs. By association, you sob with her.

You are American. You go to middle school in the rural Quakertown. You are an excellent student who is praised and loved by all your teachers. You are in a woodshop class. Another classmate stumbles toward you. He stops and starts to scream in your face, "Go back to where you came from! You're such a show-off and you always get good grades, you should just go back to where you came from!"

He repeats the same thing over and over. You don't understand him. Does he mean you should go back to Detroit where you were born? You didn't understand the sentiment behind the phrase. He continues to shout angrily in your face and you start to cry. What is going on, you have no idea what is going on.

It appears you are not American. You are not like the friends you are visiting in Hampton, who look as if they have stepped out of a catalog. You are not blond or brunette, nor are you skinny. You are nothing like them.

You are supposed to be delicate, fragile, and stick-thin. Like everyone says your people should look like. Your mother wants you to date Korean men. She says, "They like them much skinnier than you." She says this, but maintaining a fit, healthy body is one of your top priorities. You don't want to be skinny. You don't want to be just a little, fragile piece of femininity. You want to be you.

You are Korean American. You are married and you just had your first child. She was born in the month of September, a strange month when it comes to deciding when to enter into the school system. You have a lot of faith in your child, and decide to put her in first grade early. As the year goes on, she struggles with the work.

Her teacher calls for a meeting with you. She tells you she thinks your child should be pulled back. You think this is a fine recommendation. You are aware of how hard it must be for your child. The teacher continues. "I know that your culture is all about hyper-achievement and early achievement, but this is really the best decision for her."

The meeting does not continue in the same tone. You go home and everything falls apart. You want to think that you are not pushing your child beyond her limits, that you are not ignoring her needs, that because of your race, you do not think of what she needs in the same way. The thought of neglecting your child only brings you more sobs. Eventually you stop crying, but it doesn't escape your mind for an eternity.

Despite everything, still, you are Korean American. Despite the looks you get in supermarkets in Minnesota, despite the man who always tries to greet you in Chinese, and despite your coworker who asks if you have sars, you are still Korean American. You won't color your portrait the same as those around you. You won't color your portrait with colors that others want you to use. You will color it golden.

