

### **An excerpt from *Little Fears***

Most cannily the usurper went by the name of June, although her birth name was Juanita, a name the usurper herself never liked, but back before you realized that she was a threat you let her have the moniker (April and June, the Monthly Specials) along with the Saturdays with April. Here's what happened: when April was four or so she caught the swim bug; what's more she was really good at it, a veritable waterina, and a sacrifice had to be made in the Grand Scheme of Things. So where there had been nothing on the weekend real estate came a Big Bang and suddenly there was swim practice, swim camp, swim meets, even swim theory. Gone were the sleep-in Saturdays, the brunches-in-bed, the Saturday sex transmuted from the cordilleran humping sessions of yesteryear to smash-and-grab affairs; gone were the café-hopping and shopping extravaganzas with the girls and plain-ol' TV. Even the Nuclear Family Hang fell by the wayside. You and Ben, like all good helicopter parents, made everything about April and her swimming. And you and June would always show up on Saturdays.

April is eleven now. Along the way Ben got a promotion and you got two promotions and the both of you outsourced, no, surrendered Saturdays to June, the agent of your parental will. Before you knew better, before the secret-stealing happened, that parental will was focused solely on ensuring April's unmitigated success in her chosen sport. It's no different for the other parents in the bleachers around you; no one is here to just *have fun*, unless it's the fun of crushing your (child's) opponents. The air is carbonated with the hopes and dreams of a hundred and fifty vicarious Ivy Leaguers.

When it's her turn you watch your daughter, small and bottle-nosed, dive into the blue and begin scything through water and air in her fuchsia one-piece, her motion sending coins of light skipping across the rippled poolskin. You hold your breath; everything else becomes white noise. Not that you have anything to worry about. Despite her petite frame and the physicality of the stroke April is shredding the competition. The butterfly is her best. Something her swim coach had said to her when she was just starting out, something about it being the hardest stroke to master, had convinced her to master it, just to show that she could. She is like you in that respect.

April's idol is Michael Phelps and her dream is to smash all his Olympic records. She believes foolheartedly in her abilities, that life will give her what she wants just because she works for it. Try telling her that beating all his records would be highly improbable for a woman. Try telling her anything, as a mother, and watch her shake it off like water off a duck's back.

You look around and see that June is already here, of course, front row and centre in the splash zone, dressed in a faded Disney tank top (once April's!), denim shorts (ditto!), and Crocs. Sitting with her are other Filipinas, Myanmarese, and Indonesian women, snacking on loud, cheap prawn crackers as they watch and cheer for children, none their own.