

I dreamed of a family where two children were about to die.

But if they turned into household objects—a teapot, perhaps—they would live, like those enchanted things in a Disney film. At first, the little girl refused, but later she too began choosing what she would become.

Then the perspective shifted. I saw that all of this was the mother's projection. Her children were struggling in school, and she held a comic book that warned: children who disobey would become objects. One drawing showed a banner stretched across a little girl's eyes, with blood everywhere. The daughter burst into tears.

My vision pulled back, out the door of their small apartment—two rooms, a common bed pressed to the window, the first scene unfolding in the living room where Death himself had once been glimpsed. The camera of the dream panned outward, across a vast sea, until I saw the eldest son at work on the beach, repairing a car with others.

At first I was an onlooker. But then I realized I was in the story: the youngest son. It had been me and my sister who were to die. Now I stood beside my brother, twisting large bolts, everyone joking about who had the easier tasks. My brother's job was the hardest.

A girl drove up in the car. She was the driver, but she looked like no driver I had ever known: dressed in pale, ruffled clothes, beautiful but impractical. I slid into the back seat, and we began to talk. She had just eaten a sandwich. As the car moved through a gray cityscape of square buildings, I leaned back against the seat and began to tell her my story. I said I was still a student, that my parents thought me lazy and good-for-nothing, though it wasn't true. I even cried a little. But I knew I was lying, for in my mind there appeared the face of a woman I had once loved.

Then the scene shifted again. I was in the car with my mother, who was driving me to boarding school. I carried a small gray suitcase. The streets grew narrow and frightening, and I feared she might abandon me. She took me instead to a deserted parking lot, then steered into a twisting underground garage. The world turned from black and white to color.

I found myself at the entrance of a children's playground filled with deep ball pits and slides. I wondered if I must cross it to reach the school. My mother was gone.

Then I saw a frosted-glass door set in the wall. Behind it were rows of desks and warm yellow light. A woman in a white apron beckoned me: “Child, this is where you belong.” Relieved, I carefully unpacked my makeup bag, placing everything into a clear acrylic box. I was proud of its neatness.

When the woman urged me inside before the lights went out, I carried the box into the study hall. Desks lined the walls and ran down the center, most already filled with girls—some writing in notebooks, some in quiet conversation. The air should have been loud, but I heard nothing.

At the end of the long table I hesitated, waiting for direction. The woman checked her list, then pointed to an empty seat. I placed my box there. On my left two girls worked together, one teaching the other. Further left sat Emma, my friend from summer school, though she didn’t notice me.

As I hurried back to the door for my suitcase, only one girl turned and greeted me: she wore heavy makeup, blue eyeshadow, a short dress, and she was dazzling. I hadn’t expected anyone to speak to me, so I only smiled awkwardly before slipping past.