

Opposite Day

It's the first day of school. My sister, Kira, stands in the hallway; clad in a light grey blazer and a knee length pressed black skirt. Mum says that the school she is going to is a boarding school, and so she won't be able to come home for dinner in the evening, or play monopoly with me and dad. I'm glad of this; she always wins anyway. Kira says it's for the best, that she must put her education before family if she is to get a job and support her husband and children for the future. Sometimes I think about what it would be like if I were born a girl. How would my life be different? Would I also be standing in the hallway next to Kira in a private school uniform? Dad straightens my tie, pulls down my too big school jumper and looks me in the eye. 'Daniel, you must keep your head down.' He tells me. 'Keep your head down and don't talk unless you're spoken to.' Then Mum pulls out a camera and snaps a photo of Kira in her smart uniform, all the while grinning widely. She doesn't bother with me.

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It's my primary school leaving day. Most of the boys in my class will not be continuing into high school, including me. Even if we were to receive a full education like the girls, it would be completely pointless. Why would anyone in their right mind want to hire a man for a job a woman could do twice as well? From now on I will stay at home with my father and learn how to manage the house, and look after my younger siblings. When I return home, tired but content and squinting with the afternoon sun in my eyes, I find that Kira is home. I am delighted; I haven't seen Kira in months, let alone talked to her, and now I want to tell her everything; about my friends, about my grades in English, and about how now that she's gone I'm winning nearly every game of monopoly; but as soon as I go to hug her she steps backwards. My mum tells me to go to my room. Dad explains to me that Kira can't play with me anymore; she must focus on learning about science and maths so that she can be a doctor. I nod, even though I don't understand. Kira always told me that she dreamed of being a world famous author.

Later on in the evening, after dinner has been finished and cleared away, I find Kira sitting on the window seat surrounded by textbooks full of sums and diagrams that I could never understand if I tried. She tells me that I'm lucky. I must have an easy life of staying at home all day whereas she has to work hard and get the best results possible in everything. I disagree but keep quiet. I want to say that I would do anything to learn. I want to be just like her. I want to work to support my family, and I want to go onto to learn at high school, and after that college and university. But I don't say anything. I am where I'm meant to be.

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I am eighteen years old and Mum is choosing a woman for me to marry. Most of them are at least ten years older than me, but that is to be expected. I sit through dozens of polite interview dinners and try to look appealing while Mum asks the woman's parents what job she has. In return, they ask her if I am good at housework and parenting. Smiles are exchanged as well as quick apologies if they are not deemed suitable. Finally someone is chosen: a woman named Alison who is in her late thirties. I am to leave with her the next day, and so Dad goes through what I must do to be a good husband. I must obey my wife. I must look after the children that we have together. I must make the meals and clean the house. There are so many rules that I feel as if my head will explode. But of

course I must abide. Sometimes I think about what it would be like if I were born a girl. My life would be very different, that is certain. But I wish it was.

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