

The Spy

The chapter opens with a group of characters—Julia, Mauro, David, and Betsy—concluding a meal and preparing to leave. Betsy, struggling with mobility, leans on David for support, remarking on his steadiness despite his drinking. Their farewell is tinged with a sense of transience, encapsulated by Betsy's comment: "If it only happened once, it didn't happen at all." The scene shifts to a contemplative observation of the courtyard, where the remnants of the evening—elongated shadows, bare tables, and distant kitchen noises—create an atmosphere of quiet dissolution. The narrative then transitions abruptly to a reflection on the death of the narrator's mother, whose passing is marked by a lack of conventional grief. The coffin's entrance is described as more shocking than the death itself, highlighting the dissonance between the physical finality of the body and the lingering, unresolved presence of the mother in the lives of her children.

The narrator explores the aftermath of the mother's death, noting a paradoxical sense of lightness and unease. The mother's life is portrayed as a performance of suffering and control, her body a site of defiance against societal norms. Her decline—marked by self-inflicted ailments, a wheelchair, and eventual cancer—becomes a metaphor for her rejection of reality. Even in death, she haunts the narrator's dreams as a grotesque, unseeing figure, embodying the unresolved tension between her constructed identity and the truth. Meanwhile, the story shifts to G, a filmmaker who conceals his identity to escape familial and societal expectations. His films, characterized by naturalism and detachment, baffle audiences accustomed to authoritative storytelling. G's artistic vision is rooted in his childhood as the eldest sibling, bearing the brunt of his parents' rigid conventions, which he later evades through secrecy and reinvention.

G's journey unfolds as he abandons teaching, moves to the city, and navigates the intellectual circles of his brother, who openly challenges their conservative upbringing. G, however, remains silent, his anonymity a shield against the burden of identity. His novel, published under a pseudonym, explores the alienation of youth in a bourgeois town, mirroring his own struggle with authenticity. The failure of his subsequent stories—rejected for their moralistic tone—reflects his isolation from contemporary trends. His filmmaking attempts are similarly fraught; the practical demands of the medium clash with his desire for passive observation. Yet, his reviews gain notice for their lack of subjectivity, embodying his belief that true perception requires the eradication of the self. The narrator parallels G's evasion of identity with their mother's lifelong performance, both resisting the constraints of reality.

The chapter concludes with the narrator's meditation on the mother's legacy: a fractured sense of self and a distrust of love and language. Her stories—mythologized tales of romantic and artistic near-misses—serve as a form of control, rewriting history to suit her narrative. The children, trapped in her constructed reality, inherit her aversion to truth and freedom. Her death offers a tentative liberation, yet the gap she instilled in them remains. G's trajectory mirrors this tension; his artistic invisibility grants him freedom but consigns him to obscurity. Both narratives converge on the theme of authorship—whether of one's life or art—and the impossibility of true autonomy. The mother's defiance of reality and G's refusal to claim his work underscore the chapter's central question: Can one exist without being seen? The answer, suggested through their parallel struggles, is fraught with ambiguity.