For months after my mother’s death I had a recurring dream: that I was riding an aerial tram as it slowly descended a mountain. I didn’t see myself but I knew I was inside the metal gondola suspended on the cables. Nothing tragic ever happened, but the feeling of weightlessness, of stomach queasiness, woke me up stunned and frightened each time. At twelve years old, I didn’t expect the nightmares.

I was not alone those nights. Since we had moved in with my grandparents, there were four of us in that room now: my unmarried uncle in the top bunk, my cousin in the lower one, and my brother and me sharing a bed, half of which had to sit length-wise into the closet so that all our furniture could fit. My brother and I took turns sleeping on the side beneath the hanging clothes.

On the nights I slept with the row of garments grazing my entire body, that’s when the bad dreams came. Always the suffocation before sleep, always the anxiety of falling as the aerial tram glided down.

And then one night, the quick relief of waking up was not enough. I decided to cry out deliberately, hoping that someone would rush over to my rescue. But no one moved or even whispered from another bed, It’s fine now; it was all a bad
dream. My cousin, my brother, my uncle simply slept—or pretended to sleep—through my girlish episode.

I knew then that I had reason to be scared: if anything should happen to the tram, help would be slow in coming. Or never show up at all.