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THE #1 KOREAN BESTSELLER

A NOVEL

THE
DALLERGUT
DREAM
DEPARTMENT
STORE

MIYE LEE

TRANSLATED BY SANDY JOOSUN LEE

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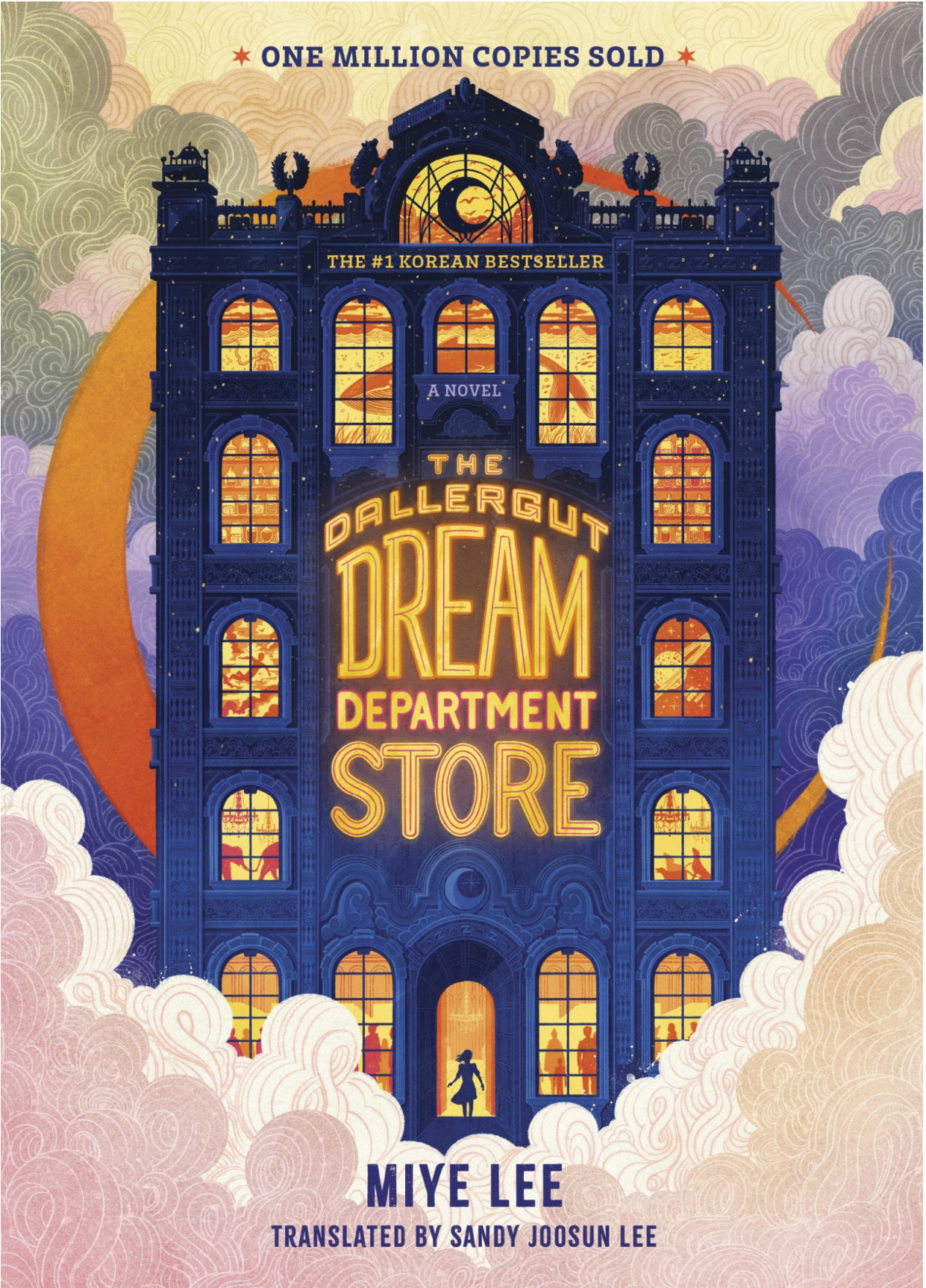
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Praise for The Dallengut Dream Department Store

“A page-turning bear hug of a novel. Like all good fantasy fiction, Miye Lee smuggles in the big issues, too: the divide between rich and poor, the unrequited yearnings of the soul, and the aching pain of loss and bereavement. There’s a tenderness to the book that envelops the reader, making them long to stay there forever.”

—Alex Howard, author of *The Ghost Cat*

“These days I’m reading *The Dallengut Dream Department Store*, and when they talk about the dream department store, I can see it in my head. I imagine I’m shopping there as I read.”

—Wonwoo, member of the K-pop group Seventeen, from *Weverse Magazine*

“I read this and it was so much fun! The writer of this novel must be brilliant, because this world was so creative. You need to read this too!”

—Yugyeom, member of the K-pop group Got7, from *GQ Korea*

“A charming foray into the land of sleep. This is an excellent choice for a gentle book club read.”

—*Library Journal*, STARRED review

The Dallengut Dream Department Store

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AUTHOR NOTE

Why do we dream?

A third of our lives is spent in sleep, yet as we dream we venture to wondrous and bizarre places. Are dreams merely subconscious illusions? Or are they something more profound?

Everyone has probably pondered these questions at one point or another. But I've clung to them as tightly as Linus clings to his blanket. The more we learn, the more insistent our curiosity becomes. And the more complicated our questions get, the more we wish for simple answers.

This is especially true for me when it comes to sleep and dreams. The unknown, mysterious rift between yesterday and today is a space I've found myself filling with joyful imagination. As I started writing this story, I enjoyed the way my imagination and reality fondly drew closer.

This is a story about a shopping village you can only enter when asleep. It's full of interesting people and places that capture the hearts of sleeping customers, like a food truck that sells snacks to ensure a good night's sleep, and the grumpy Noctilucas who frantically dress those customers who arrive without nightgowns. There's Maxim's back-alley nightmare-making workshop, as well as a mysterious dream maker hidden in a Million-Year Snow Mountain cabin. Products on offer range from Babynap Rockabye's conception dreams to the flying fantasies of Leprechauns.

But most of all, it is a collection of stories about the Dallergut Dream Department Store—the sleeping customers' favorite spot, so popular that once you try it, you'll always go back. Each floor offers unique dreams in special packaging, filling up the endless shelves and enhancing the customers' everyday lives. I hope this place holds a special place in your heart, too.

And lastly, if this story enriches your life at all and helps you have a good night's sleep—and a good night's dream—I could not be happier.

Miye Lee

PROLOGUE

THE THIRD DISCIPLE'S HISTORIC STORE

Penny is sitting on the second floor of her favorite café. She's wearing a comfortable shirt. Her bobbed hair is soggy. This morning, she received word from the Dallengut Dream Department Store that her application has passed the screening, and her interview is next week. She went straight to a corner bookstore to buy job interview books, and now she is in full prep mode.

But something has been bothering her for a while. A guy drinking tea at the next table has been tapping his feet, showing off his colorful fuzzy socks with every bounce, distracting her like crazy.

He is in a thick dressing gown, sipping his tea with closed eyes. As he blows on his tea, its fresh forest scent carries over to her table. He must be having a special herbal tea good for fatigue.

"Hmm, very nice...warm...delicious... Should I get a refill?" The guy mutters under his breath as though he's sleep-talking, then goes back to tapping his feet and smacking his lips.

Penny turns her seat to block his bouncing socks from view. Others in the café are wearing pajamas.

For centuries, Penny's hometown has been famous for its sleep products. Now it has evolved into a metropolis with a surging population. The locals, including Penny, who grew up here, are used to seeing outsiders roaming around in sleepwear.

Penny sips on her now-cold coffee. The bitter caffeine seems to mute the background noise and cool the air around her. The extra charge for two Calm Syrup pumps is worth it. She pulls out her job prep questions and rereads the last one, which she has been struggling with.

Q. Which dream and dreammaker won the Grand Prix at the 1999 Dream of the Year Awards by a unanimous vote?

- a. "Crossing the Pacific Ocean as a Killer Whale" by Kick Slumber
- b. "Living as My Parents for a Week" by Yasnoozz Otra
- c. "Floating in Space Gazing Down on Earth" by Wawa Sleepland
- d. "Teatime with a Historical Figure" by Doje
- e. "An Infertile Couple's Dream Foretelling the Birth of Triplets" by Babynap Rockabye

Penny chews on her pen cap. The question is tricky: 1999 was a long time ago. Young dream directors like Kick Slumber or Wawa Sleepland might not be correct. She strikes out those two choices with her pen. When did Yasnoozz Otra's "Living as My Parents for a Week" come out? If Penny's memory serves, it was fairly recent. Otra's dreams usually receive heavy prerelease promotions, and a catchphrase from their ads is still vivid in her memory. "Still bothering to scold your kids? Make them live like you for a week in a dream, and everything is solved!"

Penny wavers between the two remaining options and finally goes with "e.," Babynap Rockabye's "An Infertile Couple's Dream Foretelling the Birth of Triplets." She reaches to take another sip of coffee when, out of nowhere, a furry paw slaps down on her question sheet, catching her so off guard that she nearly knocks over the mug.

"No, the answer is *a*," says the owner of the big paw without an introduction. "Kick Slumber debuted in 1999. He won the Grand Prix in his first year. I saved for six months straight to buy that dream. It was the most vivid dream I'd had in my entire life! The feeling of my fins crossing the ocean and the view under the waves. It was so real that when I woke up, I

was devastated to remember that I wasn't a killer whale! He's a genius. You know how old he was then? Just thirteen!" The owner of the paw seems to burst with pride as if he were talking about his own accomplishment.

"Oh, it's you, Assam. You scared me." Penny pushes the mug out of harm's way. "How did you know I was here?"

"I saw you coming out of the bookstore with a bunch of books. I knew you'd come here. You never study at home." Assam glances at the pile of books on Penny's table. "Prepping for the job interview?"

"And how did you know *that*? I just heard from them this morning."

"Nothing in this area goes unnoticed by us Noctilucas."

Assam's job, like the other Noctilucas working on this street, is to make sure sleeping customers don't go around taking off their pajamas. They chase after any naked patrons with stacks of dressing gowns that hang from their oversize claws. That feature, combined with their warm, furry bodies, makes a good fit for the job. The irony is that they don't wear anything themselves, but on second thought, Penny thinks the naked customers would rather be chased by equally naked furry creatures than by well-dressed humans.

"You don't mind me sitting here, do you? My feet hurt from bustling around all day." Assam plops down next to Penny before she can answer. His fluffy tail sticks out through a hole in the back of the chair, wagging.

"This is hard." Penny looks at the question again. "How old are you if you know all this, Assam?"

"That's a rude question to ask a Noctiluca," Assam says primly. "I once studied hard to get into those stores too, but I quit. I thought this job suited me better." He slings a stack of gowns over his shoulder. "Anyhow, I can't believe this is really happening. Clumsy Penny, getting an interview at the Dallengut Dream Department Store!"

"I guess my good karma is finally catching up to me!" It's a miracle, Penny thinks, that she even passed the screening.

Everyone wants to work at the Dallengut Dream Department Store. The high pay, the glamorous architecture, the chance to work at a city landmark,

the perks of free dreams doled out on special occasions. It's a sought-after job. Plus the locals are familiar with the long pedigree of the Dallergut family. In fact, the family is the origin of the city. The prospect of working with Mr. Dallergut makes Penny's heart so full that she thinks her whole body might swell up like a balloon.

"I really hope I can get in," Penny says, clasping her hands together as if in prayer.

"And you're studying just these materials?" Assam holds up one of the prep books and skims through it before putting it back on the table.

"Thought I should memorize whatever I can. You never know what they'll ask. I could have to name the Legendary Big Five, or the highest-selling dream of the decade, or what time of day is popular among what customer demographic—who knows? Apparently the shift I applied for has a lot of West Australian and Asian customers. I even memorized all the time zones and datelines. Fun fact, do you know why our city has a constant influx of customers twenty-four seven?"

Penny is eager to launch in, but Assam is equally eager to avoid her lecture, vigorously shaking his head. "Dallergut would never ask such a boring question. Plus any random middle schooler would know the answer."

When Penny turns glum, Assam holds out his paw to pat her on the shoulder. "Don't worry, friend. I've heard a lot about Dallergut after a decade of working here. And I hear he loves to ask open-ended questions about dreams, so I don't think his prompts will have a clear answer. Speaking of which, I actually came here to give you this." He drops the heap of dressing gowns from his shoulder and starts rummaging through them. From the mountain of gowns, he produces a small bundle containing dozens of fuzzy socks.

"Wait, no, these are for the customers who have cold feet... Ah, yes, there it is!" Assam finds a small booklet among the socks. It has a hard, pale blue cover, and the elegant gold titling reads *The Time God and the Three Disciples*.

“I haven’t seen that book in ages!” Penny recognizes the title at once. Everyone who grew up in her hometown had to read it.

“Dallergut could ask about this story, you know. If you haven’t read it since you were little, you should read it again—carefully, this time.” Assam pulls his seat closer, his face right next to Penny’s. “And just between us, I hear Dallergut gave this book to all his employees at the Dream Department Store.”

“For real?” Penny asks, clutching the book from Assam.

“Of course! That proves how important he thinks this boo—” Assam stops abruptly as his eyes move from Penny to the view outside the window. “Oh goodness! I should get back. I think I just saw a person roaming around in underwear.” His chestnut nose twitches. He rushes to pick up the pile of gowns while Penny helps to put the fuzzy socks back in the bundle.

“Good luck, Penny. Let me know how the interview goes.” Assam stands up, his eyes still preoccupied with the view outside. “At least he is wearing *something*,” he mumbles.

“Thanks, Assam,” Penny says.

Assam’s tail circles clockwise as if to say, “You’re welcome,” and off he goes downstairs.

Penny inspects the book from Assam. He does have a point. *The Time God and the Three Disciples* explains the origin of this shopping street, the birth of the city, and most of all, the genesis of the Dallergut Dream Department Store. If Dallergut values history, there is a good chance that the answers to his interview questions will be in this book. Penny tucks the sheets of practice questions inside her backpack. She finishes her coffee in one gulp, straightens her back, then flips open the book.

**THE TIME GOD
AND THE THREE DISCIPLES**

Eons ago, there lived the Time God, who governed people's lives. One day during their usual relaxed luncheon, the Time God realized there was little time left. The Time God summoned three disciples and shared the news.

The First Disciple, gallant and daring, asked their teacher what they should do next. The vulnerable Second Disciple brimmed with tears, lost in the memories they shared with the Time God. The Third Disciple stood there without a word, waiting for the Time God to continue.

“My dearest Third Disciple, always considerate and cautious, let me ask you a question. If I divide time into three shards for each of you to govern, which shall you take—the past, the present or the future?” the Time God asked.

The Third Disciple pondered, then said they would choose whatever was left after the First and Second Disciples had chosen.

The gallant and daring First Disciple immediately made their selection. “Please grant me power not to dwell on the past so I can govern the future,” they added.

The First Disciple always thought that having a fixed eye on the future was the most beautiful virtue. So, the Time God granted them the future with the power to forget the past.

The Second Disciple cautiously requested that they take the past. They said holding on to warm memories would make them happy forever. So, the Time God granted them the past with the power to forever cherish all old memories.

Now, holding the shard of the present—so small and sharp compared to the future and past—the Time God asked the Third Disciple, “Shall you govern the momentary present?”

“No, teacher, please distribute it to all people equally,” the Third Disciple said.

The Time God was confused. “Throughout all my years of teaching, there was no particular time that you considered special?” the Time God asked in disappointment.

The Third Disciple’s response was candid. “The time I love most is when everyone is asleep, teacher. In sleep we do not dwell on regrets about the past or anxiety over the future. We do not even recognize we are asleep in the present as it is happening. But I am a measly being, and could never request to govern such a time.”

The First Disciple secretly scoffed at them, while the Second Disciple was mildly surprised. They both thought sleep was a waste of time. But the Time God generously offered sleep time to the Third Disciple.

“Dear First and Second Disciples, do you mind if I take slices from your shards, past sleep and future sleep, and give them to the Third Disciple?”

The First and Second Disciples answered without hesitation, “Not at all, teacher.”

So, the three disciples took their portion of time shards and dispersed. The First and Second Disciples, who each received

the future and past, were very satisfied with the powers given to them by the Time God.

The First Disciple and their followers let go of all the tedious things from the past and were soon excited to build a grand new future, venturing out to a land much bigger than their own. Equally excited were the Second Disciple and their followers, who cherished the past, remembering their young, fair-skinned faces and loving memories.

But problems soon arose. The First Disciple and their followers were so occupied with the future that the sheer amount of forgotten past started to stack like fog across their land. Through the dense layers of haze, they could no longer recognize their friends and family. As memories of their beloved kinfolk evaporated, so too did their sense of purpose, which had previously guided the future. They became oblivious to what lay right before them, and even more so of what lay ahead.

The Second Disciple and their followers were no different. They were trapped in only the good memories, so they could not accept the passage of time, the inevitable partings and deaths. Their tears constantly flowed across the earth, creating a large cave in which they eventually hid, burying themselves deep inside.

The Time God, having witnessed everything, waited until everyone was sound asleep. Then, beneath the moonlight, they snuck into their bedrooms. The Time God pulled out a sharp shard of the present and, with a hard grip, used it to slice off

their shadows. Holding the shadows in one hand and an empty bottle in the other, the Time God left in the darkness.

First, the Time God put the foggy memories of the First Disciple and their followers in the bottle. Then, they filled it with all the tears of the Second Disciple and their followers. Lastly, the Time God went to the Third Disciple in secret.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of this unannounced visit at night, teacher?” the Third Disciple asked.

Without a word, the Time God pulled them out one by one and placed them on the table—the sleeping shadows, the bottle of forgotten memories and teardrops. The Third Disciple could not fathom what it all meant.

“How shall I help people with all this?” the Third Disciple asked, but instead of an answer, the Time God stuffed the saggy, deep-sleep shadows in the bottle. The shadows struggled to open their eyes.

Then a wonder occurred. The tears gathered to become the eyes of the shadows. The eyes opened wide, and the shadows came to life inside the bottle of memories.

“Let people’s shadows be awake when they are asleep,” said the Time God as they handed the bottle to the Third Disciple.

As wise as the Third Disciple was, they had no idea what their teacher meant. “Do you mean to let people think and feel, even in their sleep? How would that be any help for them?”

“The memories experienced during sleep will strengthen weak souls. And when they wake up the next day, they won’t forget what’s important.”

After the Time God had delivered this speech, the Third Disciple realized their lesson was ending. They shouted in haste as their teacher faded little by little. “Please enlighten me further, teacher. How can I teach people to understand all this? I cannot even begin to define what *this* is.”

The Time God smiled and said, “You do not need to understand. It is better that you do not. Time will come when people start to embrace it.”

“Could you at least give this a name? Shall I call it a miracle? Or an illusion?” the Third Disciple asked desperately.

“Call it a dream. You will make them dream every night.” And with that, the Time God vanished without a trace.

Penny closes the book, odd sensations stirring inside her. The story had seemed elusive and far-fetched when she first read it in childhood. A fairy tale. But the proof of its veracity solidified her understanding. The story is built into the fabric of the city, a part of the circle of life. The very fact that we dream every night is living proof. So is that fact that the Third Disciple went on to found the Dream Department Store, which passed through his descendants down to Dallergut.

Suddenly, Dallergut seems like a mythical figure to Penny. The thought of having a conversation with him one-on-one leaves her nervously excited. She shudders. *I guess I’m done studying for today*, she thinks.

Penny returns home, and for the rest of the day, until she falls asleep, she doesn’t put down the book from Assam. She reads and rereads it over several

days. She reads it so many times that she has memorized the entire story.

On the day of the interview, Penny arrives at the department store early, looking for Dallergut's office in the lobby on the first floor. People wear stretched T-shirts and loose shorts as pajamas, or dressing gowns rented by the Noctilucas. They are all looking at different dream products in the display corner. Next to the "Best New Products" stand, a customer in pajama bottoms covered with stars is holding a dream box. "Oh, the new dream by Kick Slumber is here... 'Becoming a Giant Tortoise in the Galapagos.' Let's see. These snobby critics even rated it four point nine out of five? That's rare. What's the description? 'A spectacular abyss surrounding its shell'? Their blurbs are confusing and useless as usual." Penny has ten minutes to get to Dallergut's office, but none of the spaces here look fancy enough to be his.

Penny intends to ask a middle-aged employee at the front desk, but she's on the phone and seems too busy. Same with the employees who hurry past in linen waist aprons, barely noticing Penny.

"Mom! I flunked it!" yells a passerby on the phone, bumping into Penny. "He asked the craziest questions ever. I'd analyzed the last five years of dream trends, but he didn't ask anything about that!"

She must have had an interview with Dallergut! Desperately, Penny tries to silently mouth to her *Where. Is. The. Office?*

The woman bluntly points up the stairs before rushing through the crowd. A wooden staircase leads to the next floor. Looking closer, Penny spots a half-open wooden door with a dangling sign that reads Interview Room. The door's peeling paint and the rough handwriting on the sign make it look like the entrance to an old-school classroom.

In front of the door, Penny takes a moment to breathe and calm herself. Then, still unsure if this is Dallergut's office, she knocks.

"Yes, do come in." A booming voice rings from the inside. The same voice Penny has often heard in TV interviews or radio broadcasts. There is no doubt that Dallergut is inside the room.

"Excuse me."

The office is smaller than she expected. Dallergut is struggling with an old printer behind a long desk. “Welcome. Do you mind giving me a second? I have issues every time I print with this thing.”

He is wearing a clean shirt, and looks taller and skinnier than he does on TV or in magazines. His disheveled, wavy hair shows streaks of gray. Dallergut forcibly pulls out what looks like Penny’s résumé from the printer. Having been jammed somewhere inside the machine, the paper is crumpled and ripped, but he seems satisfied. “Finally.”

Penny approaches and Dallergut offers his wrinkled, skinny hand. Penny, feeling nervous, wipes her hands on her shirt before shaking his. “Hello, Mr. Dallergut, I’m Penny.”

“Nice to meet you, Penny. I was looking forward to meeting you.” Dallergut looks regal. His dark brown eyes exude youthful twinkles, more like the eyes of a boy. Penny worries she’s staring and looks away at the boxes strewn all over the office, which looks more like a shabby storeroom. All dream products. Some are damp from long days spent here, and some seem new with their wrapping still shiny. Dallergut pulls a steel chair closer, drawing Penny’s attention back to him.

“Please have a seat.” He points to a nearby chair. “Make yourself comfortable. These are my favorite cookies. Here, have some.” Dallergut hands Penny a savory-looking nutty cookie.

“Thank you,” Penny says, and as she takes a bite, the air turns cooler, and her shoulders relax. Strangely, the mysterious office becomes more familiar. The effect is similar to the Calm Syrup she adds to her coffee, only better. There must be something special in this cookie.

“I remember your name very clearly,” Dallergut says. “Your application was impressive. I was struck by what you wrote. ‘As much as you love them, dreams are just dreams.’”

“I’m sorry? Oh, that... That was...” She now remembers sprinkling the phrase into her otherwise bland application, hoping it might pique Dallergut’s interest. *Did he just want to check who this daring kid was?*

Penny gauges Dallergut's expression. He seems genuinely interested in her.

"It is great to hear that I made an impression, sir," Penny carefully responds.

"Shall we get down to business, then?" Dallergut looks to the ceiling, gathering his thoughts. "First, I'd like to hear your honest opinion about dreams, Penny."

It's a tricky prompt to start with. Penny takes a deep breath and tries to remember the model answer she saw in the job interview prep books.

"So... Dreams let us experience things we otherwise couldn't in reality... They serve as a substitute to the unrealistic possibilities..." Penny notices Dallergut's disappointed glance and suspects that many interviewees who came before her would probably have answered in the same way.

"That doesn't sound like the person who wrote this application." Dallergut averts his gaze as he points to the crumpled document. Penny's gut tells her that responses like this will only lead to rejection. She needs to turn the tide.

"But even if we can experience the unrealistic in dreams, they can never be real." Penny has no idea what she's talking about. All she wants is to stand out from the rest of the applicants. She has a strong feeling this is what Dallergut is looking for above all. Plus, if the daring statement of "Dreams are just dreams" got her past the screening stage, she might as well stick to this path.

"No matter how good a dream you have, when you wake up, that is it."

"Why so?" Dallergut looks serious.

Penny is baffled. She has no idea how to build on her impromptu response. To buy time, she scarfs down the rest of the cookie, letting it soothe her. "No particular reason, sir. I just heard that customers mostly forget about their dreams afterward. I meant it literally, that dreams are just dreams, because they are gone once you wake up. And that's why they don't interfere with reality. I like how dreams don't overstep."

Penny swallows hard. She's rambling to fill the silence, worried it might ruin the interview. But now it's clear her answer has just killed the mood.