

## The Hill

She held the corpse in her hands, shaking fingers granting movement to the lifeless body. Up the dark sea of snow she tramped, crunching feet moving tremors through her heart with every step. She was but a fleeting drop of colour on this barren hill of white, transparent if not for the dim beam of a shadowed moon. And it was barely a moon really, rather an echo of some long forgotten star, hovering with hesitance in the sky, as if only out of respect to expectations. But it was there; a light, a single path for the corpse-bearer.

This was new snow upon which the corpse-bearer walked. Virgin paper, calling for direction and formation, a plea for any mother. It felt strange for her to walk this snow. It was so hard to move her legs, so difficult to forge her path when no one had walked there before. And the snow kept going. Spreading up the hill in endless torment, it hinted no notion of stopping. To stop would be to cease its beauty, to halt all existence that walked it. To stop would be to stop the corpse-bearer, yet was that really such a terrible thing? For the corpse-bearer, that seemed like possible relief, a welcomed dissolve of this arduous journey, of the antagonizing questions that consumed her thoughts. Is it possible to get lost when you have no destination? The corpse-bearer shuddered. She had a destination, but her only direction was up. Up the hill.

A pale wind swept remnants of voices from the house. The big, ancient house, seated below her, down in the valley at the foot of the hill which she climbed. They were distant voices; voices that spoke no words, only flashed colour. But with her back turned, the corpse-bearer could not see them, could not hear. But she could recognize them, the nameless faces that shouted orders, calling warnings, directed action. They bounced off a turned back, yet their vacant drone still resonated.

On she climbed, the hill growing steeper with every step, the corpse becoming heavier and heavier. How easy it would be to drop the body, to turn with outstretched arms towards the house and fall to the ground, letting gravity pull her back. But deep in the valley where the house stood, the corpse-bearer knew she would see no glimmering moon. Down there, amid the cacophony of neon lights and traffic signals that blocked the moon's natural glow, she would form no paths, no matter how fresh the snow. Walking was easy there, effortless. To move was not a miracle of strength, nor a reward of perseverance as there were always people to walk first. There were the crossing guards and the teachers and the signs and the pictures, all making tracks which you could echo, all forming paths for you to follow. Down there, there was always light and the house was always warm. And for all this, all you had to do was listen.

And repeat.

The voices, the teachers, the crossing guards. The signs and the pictures. They were your friends, they were your path. But here, here on the hill, the corpse-bearer had no friends, she made her own path. She was cold and the air was dark. And yet, by the light of the moon, she climbed.

Only this moon could watch her and it could speak no words to call her back. Instead, its glow seemed to ease her on, reassuring her decision, encouraging her climb. Up here on the hill it was a solitary friend.

But her friend was far away, and half covered in cloud. It could not help ease the burden of the corpse- that dead weight which was slowly becoming stone-this sickening thing, that she could only hold with the greatest of care. How she longed to fling it over her shoulder, to throw it down the hill, into the house. But then she would have to go back, to retrieve it, to fix it. She could not leave this on its own. It had no life now, so it needed somebody else's. At least for now. At least until she reached

her destination.

On and on, would this ending ever be revealed? Would this snow never end? And was that what she was expecting, for the snow to stop and an arrow to descend from the sky, illuminate a spot on the ground? The corpse-bearer did not know. All she knew was that she was heading *somewhere*. Away from the house. By the light of the moon. Through the endless snow.

The white, untouched, beautiful, terrible snow.

The voices from the house were becoming murmurs now, that meaningless drone of sound dying to only a memory. Their gradual absence made the climb easier, more bearable. There was no other way to look back on, no calls to tempt the lazy spirit. And the moon was so bright now. Up here, high on the hill and without the neon lights, the corpse-bearer could appreciate it more clearly. The clouds had drifted away, leaving only an orb hanging in brilliance- a secure path, a sincere acquaintance. It was constant, unlike the flashing signs, and it was honest, it was fair-an immovable mirror. By its light, she moved faster, the moon so close, so beautiful. Though as she moved in reflective freedom, the corpse grew heavier.

Closer, closer, the snow was shorter and the corpse was heavier and the moon was brighter, so bright, it was a sun, a constant sun. The corpse-bearer was close, so very close, if it should become day, she felt sure that the moon would not be lost to the real, fiery sun. Up, up, moving, climbing, on and on and on...

And then the hill stopped and she had reached the moon.

The corpse-bearer had reached the beautiful moon, naked in the sky, without cloud and without any

other light. It was alone and it was magnificent. Its one face smiled in welcome to the corpse-bearer. Raw and free, it held her, suspended in its luminescence. And in this liberation, the corpse-bearer could barely make out the house, its once blinding glare and deafening roar. Instead, the light guided her eyes to a set of footprints, strong and relentless, making their way from the house, up the hill and to the moon. Her footsteps. Her path. And here the footsteps stopped. And the corpse-bearer knew she had arrived.

At last, finally here, she lifted up the corpse.

The dainty, perfect, porcelain doll, she lifted it up and held it to the moon.

Its vacant black eyes stared into the light, snow white porcelain face, hill crested cheek and blind, black pools of sight-into which she dropped the corpse.