

UNDER THE MOUNTAIN, A DREAM

I open my eyes and I find myself in the middle of a forest.

It's the darkest of nights but I can still see clearly the shape of the trees surrounding me with their tight embrace while their scent falls deep in my lungs.

There is a strange taste in the back of my mouth, at the bottom of my tongue: silvery, metallic, sharp. I can smell the same element in the soil below my feet: the ground where I am standing is mulchy, wet, cold. I notice the red reflections of the liquid, which makes me understand that I'm standing in a puddle of blood. I try to move my legs, lift my feet, but it's extremely difficult: I'm trapped in the puddle, the soil is dragging me down like quicksand.

I move nonetheless, I have to go- some strange music is calling me from the edge of the woods and I cannot ignore it. As I struggle to walk, I notice the redness of the bark of the trees that make this forest (I wonder what feeds them this dye).

I turn my head to the left and I see a flaming horse coming towards me. It's pacing slowly, seemingly unbothered by the fire surrounding it and eating its flesh. The closer it comes to me, the more overwhelming the smell of burnt meat becomes, accompanied by the cracking of the flames rising from his skin.

It takes notice of my presence and looks at me with its black, void eyes: it has come from under the mountain, where unresolved things cannot rest.

It sprints away, deeper into the forest- I stand frozen as I watch its glow fading into the trees.

The music -this chant- it's unrelenting: it demands my attention again, louder, pulling me towards its source. The closer I get to the edge of the forest, the clearer the sound becomes and once the trees open up I understand where it's coming from: a group of brides (dressed to the occasion) holding hands, dancing in a circle.

They appear happy (I can feel their smiles) but I cannot see their faces. I cannot recognize any of them, even though I'm sure that one of them is my mother. They appear happy (I can hear them laughing) but their chant is not: it's a familiar tune, but sad and reminding me of the white shade of funerary marbles.

They suddenly stop their chant and they clearly yell an order to the soldiers of the forest "DEAD - STAND UP!" and thus the dead do. The brides disband the circle and join the soldiers, who are still covered in blood, bandages and dirt, just like the last day they were fighting in this very same place. Both the parties come together and advance towards the feet of the mountain.

I join them, we form ranks- we look like a thin red line marching uphill, towards the last assault. The blood dripping from the open wounds of the soldiers stains the soil, which in return stains the white dresses of the brides, but these women are relentless. As they make their way forward, tirelessly, they hold ever so tight in their hands a bouquet of flower- the climb is difficult but none of them chooses to leave it behind.

The climb is difficult and I get tired (I am short of breath and I need to stop): as I look back I notice that the clouds are dimly lit with the first rays of the morning sun. The night has started to fade and the soldiers have taken their leave, but I still see their stars in the sky right above the brides.

I resume my rise, making my way through the crumbling soil and the pine needles which hurt my hands as I grasp at them.

I catch a glimpse of the white monument waiting for us at the top of the mountain (that is our final destination). I don't recognize it but its shape is familiar (like a postcard from my childhood).

We finally reach the top of the hill- the morning light has flooded the atmosphere and I can finally breathe again.

I look down at the valley where we came from- the forest is dyed black, turned to charcoal (and so are my hands, covered in ashes, soil and bloody pine needles). I mourn the loss of life, the nature that has been burned to the ground- but I must move forward to the clearing so that I can find what sleeps under the mountain.

The building is standing in the clearing, rising from the ground like a giant mound of white ash. It's almost blinding in colour, painful to look at (the closer I move towards it, the more unbearable it becomes).

As I stand tall in front of the building, everything has fallen deadly silent: the trees shaken by the wind are mute; silent are the birds resting on their branches, and so are the stones under my feet. Everything is trapped in a bubble: a giant breath that a beast takes before its plunge.

Suddenly, a gushing pain in my right side cuts my breath: I bring my hand to feel my ribcage, only to find my shirt wet with blood. As I lift it, I uncover a huge wound dripping with red droplets, opening a portal in the side of my chest.

I slid a finger inside it, but, to my surprise, I cannot feel the warmth of the flesh- only the coldness of the void inside it.

At last, I wake up.

I am covered in sweat, trapped in my bedsheets and gasping for air.

I recognize my bedroom and the reassuring familiarity of its furniture.

Luckily, it was only a dream: I can go back to sleep as soon as my heart slows down.

I turn to the side and I catch a glimpse of my face in the mirror beside my bed: it's staring back at me completely red, covered in blood.

I must have woken what was sleeping under the mountain.