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Dawnhill

by Joe Jackson

They can see the house up ahead, past the moorland coloured a deep burgundy; it is looking out over the South Downs, and below that Ashdown Forest. She is in a red car, her boyfriend is driving. They rise and fall leisurely with the smooth, winding, countryside road. He glances at her with one of those innocently suggestive faces, as if saying, without words, that that is all there is to know. She catches the end of his glance every time; their eyes entwine but briefly; playfully; then dart towards the house.

It is late autumn and the fresh air rushing through her slightly open window is cool. They see in the clear sky the moon, and if she looks hard enough, for it is disappearing behind them, the sun setting amidst a vibrant red sky. It is so beautiful, she thinks, peering over her shoulder, trying not to draw attention to herself. There are three or four long streaks of red, blending into each other and the sky so naturally, that she forgets all about the house, the car... her boyfriend even, so beautiful is this November day.

“Are you excited?” he asks, once again glancing at her soft cheeks and awe-stricken eyes.

“It doesn’t feel quite real,” she says, this time standing her ground, watching the house as it loses light. The white paint on large sections; the exposed brickwork; all is slowly and surely being enveloped by night.

“Isn’t it lovely?” she says.

“What is?” He looks at her blonde hair, her done-up quilt jacket; he thinks of what is underneath it all. And of his intention of marrying her.

“The moonlight. Can you see how lovely it looks? And so close to the house.”

“Yes, well, let’s get settled in first, shall we?”

“Oh look, Richard, over there!” She points to an elderly gentleman awaiting their arrival.

“Good evening,” says he, walking up to the car on the driver’s side and doffing his cap. “Welcome home, Mr Boundary. Miss,” he peers into the car (Richard opens his window, somewhat reluctantly), catching sight of her and her beauty. He smiles warmly then steps away, watching as the car moves up the driveway. The front entrance faces away from the Downs, right atop a hill. There is a large water fountain, which catches the moonlight, and a sloping oval lawn. She opens her door before he gets round to doing it, and she apologises.

That evening they have a glass of wine over dinner before retiring into the study. Richard plays a classical record, for the intellectual stimulation, he says, and reads a book. Perhaps an hour passes—to her it feels longer—without a word shared between them. Suddenly, Richard gets up from his chair, deep in thought. He looks up vacantly, comes to, then heads, she assumes, towards the workroom. The house is silent now and she feels like a stranger here.