

CLIMBERS

by Ken Bradbury



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(Jack tumbles onto the scene. He lies there, panting and holding his head. A moment later, Jill comes crashing in and lands on the floor next to him.)

JILL: Let's talk about our relationship, Jack. I mean, we're getting into a rut. We go up the hill, we fetch a pail of water, we fall down, you break your crown and I come tumbling after. Are you starting to sense a pattern in all this?

JACK: Don't be silly, Jill. That's our job! Sure, there's always a little monotony in life. We can't all go killing giants or stealing golden geese. Look, there are millions of people in this world who'd love to have a job like ours. Don't look at me that way. I'm serious.

JILL: But it's just the same thing, day after day, Jack. We don't ever talk anymore. We climb the hill, we fetch the water, we fall down, then tomorrow we do it all over again.

JACK: Sweetheart, there are only so many ways to climb a hill. And I told you, it's just a job. It's not like we do it all night too.

JILL: No. We go home to our two latch-key kids who've been entertaining themselves since school was out, I spend half the night fixing your crown, we talk about the hill, we talk about the water, we take the kids to their ballgame, and then we come home again. Some life.

JACK: Look, you're tired, Jill. The hill was a little slippery today after that rain. I spilt a little of the water on you ... I'm sorry ... things'll look better tomorrow, I promise you.

JILL: (*rising and dreaming around a little*) Remember how it used to be, Jack, when we first started climbing the hill? We'd talk about the hill ... sometimes we'd stop and have a little picnic lunch on the way up ...

JACK: That was before the kids ...

JILL: I know, but do you remember, Jack? Remember how climbing that hill used to be so much fun? How we'd actually look forward to climbing it together? And the pail! Remember how you used to decorate the pail for me every day? Somedays I'd find a flower tied onto the side? Or you'd float a dandelion on top just to make me smile?

JACK: (*rubbing his head*) Look Jill, why don't we just go home? It's almost time. Let's clock out and ... I don't know ... maybe grab a pizza on the way to the house.

JILL: (*undeterred, still remembering*) And the noises you used to make falling down the hill. Remember that, Jack? "Oh help me, fair maiden! I'm falling! I'm falling! Rescue me, Your Highness! For my crown is broken! And only a touch of thy healing hand can make me whole again!" (*she laughs*)

JACK: (*smiling*) I can't believe I used to do those things. I don't know ... maybe I still should but ... you know, we're getting older. Sometimes it's all I can to just fall down the hill.

JILL: You're still the best, Jack. You're the best tumbler I know. I still have the clippings from your high school days.

JACK: (*embarrassed*) Jill, don't ...

JILL: "State Champion Hill Tumbler! Jack!"

JACK: I was good, wasn't I?

JILL: And you still are. Other guys ... they fall a couple of times and their crown gets so punchy they can't even find their way up the hill the next day ... but you, Jack ... that noggin of yours never wears out.

JACK: Thanks.

JILL: Come on. Let's climb the hill like we used to ...

JACK: Jill, please ... I'm tired, and we're adults.

JILL: I know ... isn't it awful! Chase me up the hill! Laugh with me Jack! (*pointing up the hill*) Look! Remember that rock! We used to see who could get there first ... and see the little ledge where we'd sit and look out over the valley? That was our dream throne ... remember that? We'd say, "Whatever you wish on the rocky throne will surely someday be your own." You were King, remember?

JACK: Come on, Jill ...

JILL: And King Jack would say, "I wish eternal happiness for all my people!" And we'd listen for your subjects to cheer. I'd be all the subjects ..."Yea, Jack! Let's hear it for King Jack!" And you'd smile at us, Jack. King Jack would smile down because we were happy and we loved our King. (*pause a beat*) Today ... today we just walked up the hill. That's all ... just walked up the hill ... like it was a ... a job or something.

JACK: It is a job. It's a good job.

JILL: Because we've made it that way, Jack. It's the same hill. Can't we just for once run up the hill again like little kids? Be a King again, Jack! Please! For me ... for you!

JACK: (*smiles, then checks his watch*) It's getting late.

JILL: (*turning away*) ... that's what I'm trying to tell you.

JACK: Jill ... I can't always talk about these things like you can. It's so easy for you.

JILL: You mean having fun? That's not hard, Jack. Lots of people do it. I read about it in books.

JACK: Well ... if you're not going home with me until I say something, I will. (*looking to the hill*) That hill. That hill used to be different ...

JILL: It's the same hill, Jack.

JACK: Maybe for you. Oh, I don't mean I can't climb it ... it's still my hill and I can make it... but it used to be ... I don't know ... it used to be a challenge ... exciting ... I mean, when you've never climbed it, then every step's an accomplishment. I had nothing to lose. Nobody had ever climbed the hill before me. You can't fail when no one else has succeeded. But now ... now everyone expects me to climb the hill. You do.



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