

You pass through the main gate into the hospital complex, heading along the path that stretches all the way up to the main building, first branching off to the annex and funeral hall. Its soft contours are lined by streetlights on both sides. Wreaths are lined up at the entrance to the funeral hall. Near them, young men are silently applying themselves to their cigarettes, yellow armbands over their white shirts.

It's late, but you are wide awake. The backpack is cutting into your shoulders and your back is drenched with sweat, but you don't care. You keep on walking, remembered dreams lancing through your mind.

You plummet from the roof of a high-rise building, clad in a suit of armor linked with hundreds of iron scales. Even though your brains are dashed out against the ground, you don't die. You pick yourself up, climb all the way back up the emergency stairs, walk straight over to the edge of the roof, and tip yourself off. Still you don't die, and it's back up the stairs to fall one more time. One layer of the dream unpeels, and you're sufficiently aware of the situation to wonder: *What good is a suit of armor if I'm falling from such a great height?* You haven't woken yourself up, though, merely passed through into another layer. You feel the weight of an enormous glacier bearing down on your body. You wish that you were able to flow beneath it, to become fluid, whether seawater, oil, or lava, and shuck off these rigid, impermeable outlines, which encase you like a coffin. Only that way might you find some form of release. Now this layer, too, unseams itself and collapses softly around you, exposing the dream's ultimate core. You are standing in the streetlamp's cone of ashen light, looking out into the gathering dark.

The dream grows less cruel as you move closer to wakefulness. Sleep grows thin, becomes brittle as writing paper, and eventually crumbles away. In the quiet corners of your conscious mind, memories are waiting. What they call forth cannot strictly be called nightmares.