

An Attempt to Make Do

There is a dream I often have about a man that lives in the walls of my mother's house and is plotting to kill her. I call my mother, tell her I have had the dream again. This time the man was in the yard and I kept trying to lock the doors, I kept turning the lock and hearing the click, but the door would open anyway. I hold the handle tight but my small hands are weak. I always wake before he gets in.

My mother doesn't know or care what it means because dreams are just dreams and the websites claiming otherwise are written by people searching for meaning as a crutch. You cannot blame them, things are awful, things have been awful for a while.

The man never gets to my mother and I never stop having these dreams.

My sister is Pagan and she celebrates Samhain, which is pronounced sah-win. She is vegan so she makes eleven different vegan dishes, including a Celtic yule cake in the shape of a log, with little lines run through the icing to look like wood. She has so many friends there, my sister is neurodivergent but these people are not. They talk about the weather, about university, about bus timetables and busses that never arrive. Anger rushes to envelop the boredom within me; how dare they expect me to be an active listener, to wear the mask of an interested and interesting person.

How dare I ask myself to do this, time and time again. Why can't I just be quiet?

I tell my sister about the dreams of the man in the walls and she asks if I worry about my mother living alone in that big house. The only emotion I feel regarding anyone living alone is jealousy. That kind of boomer privilege that I will one day inherit and what does that make me? While mourning my mother will I also feel a great swell of relief? As they lower her into the ground will I already be planning homewares?

Can I just retreat into the woods? Would anyone miss me? Will I ever make enough money to do that?

I leave my sister's house and the bus does not come. Her friends are still inside, laughing or talking about which smart watch to buy. It is April, I am cold.

In the dream, the man asks if I am a good speller. We are on speaking terms; we are the soldiers on the front line that have lowered their guns for Christmas Eve. In my waking life, I am a good speller, in my dream life I am not so sure. He asks me if I can spell loss, and I can.

'I am sorry for your loss,' he says.

My friend has a fight with her boyfriend and messages the group chat. I pull a coat on over my pyjamas, tuck the bottoms into brown boots. We meet at another friend's house and drink red wine and then white wine and then beer. They both talk over me. I am drunk when I leave and congratulate myself out loud for working out how to open the gate. It is the first time I have spoken all night without fear of being interrupted, the words fall out of my mouth and they sound so nice. Do they all sound so nice?

When I was a teenager my dad built a house on a hill, right in the middle of all the wind. The wind collects there, it has arguments and engagement parties and late-night trysts there. My dad built a sterile environment he thought would foster love, he thought love would live inside.

Too many sharp edges, too much grey, too much tasteless affluence. I do not know what love requires, what it relies on, what invitation it would need to receive in order to show up. I do know the lack of love, I know her personally, I know her carnally.

I make all the right noises, all of the time.

In the dream the man asks if I can spell wound and I can. He points at my chest. I point at my mouth.

Written by Amber O'Sullivan