

# AUDREY REYNOLDS

FLASH 500

You shouldn't be surprised to see me. Take off your coat and sit down. It all looks calm to the untrained eye but if you turn very quickly you might see him. Then again you seem tired. And the air in here is very close. At first I put that down to the rooms beneath us but it's probably more to do with the history of the place. But let's continue. It occurs to me that I am being smothered. It's been going on for years.

It is true that I took a cup and saucer from his house as a keepsake. Had I never been inside when he was alive? It was no place for a child. I found a blanket and fell asleep in his armchair amongst that holy mess. I woke up limp. That was the day he picked me. I might have been asked. But things were never in the right order: one day she would burn all those papers of his; the bookcase would look better on the other side of the room; she was throwing clothes out of the bedroom window. She was saying nothing.

I practised forward rolls on the carpet. Yes, the air did turn cold and I felt the tingling on my skin. The same thing happens now when I hear soft voices on the radio. People say he was born out of time. All those inventions and schemes that came to nothing. Expecting them to come back to Ireland. Vicious, she'd said. And I am just like him. He'd winced at that. Even the mother had gone along with it, whilst the little ones tried to sleep next door. And those children had spent a winter without glass in the windows. And I am just like him.

It often begins with a sound. I've become used to it. The music is underneath the voices. For all that, you will hear nothing out of the ordinary. If you do it is bound to get louder. One time, a glass broke in my hand when I walked into that room. Another time I was pushed over the threshold. I can still conjure it. When I do my forehead tilts back. At night he sat cross-legged in the cupboard above my headboard, watching me read myself to sleep, ready to call the play.

That evening the lights wouldn't come on. I could smell the milk on the rubber plant. I could hear nothing. I could be with him in Ireland. Where had they all gone? For hours I tried to work it out by counting my way around the house. Nonetheless, there are some facts: I had said his name over a vigil light, he had never spoken to me, or touched me, he had offered me strawberries from his field, blue, blue eyes, he looked like Beckett, I am his. In the end I found the candles in the kitchen drawer and waited for them to come home. Hush! Not another word.

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