

Mister Words Novel Sample #1

I awoke in the blackness of night with a song in my head. It happens more than you'd think. Messages bubbling up from deep in the tar pits of our subconscious, biological emails we block or ignore or tamp down during the day, but that scurry in like termites when the lights go out and our guards come down.

In this instance, the lyric came from the Talking Heads classic "Once in a Lifetime": "And you may tell yourself/This is not my beautiful house ..."

Just a fragment, but enough to concern me, because later in the song I remembered it says: "My God, what have I done?"

This would require some analysis, because on the surface, at least, I was happy. I loved Aaron more than ever, I loved my "beautiful house" that we were bringing back to life with our own four hands (mostly), and I loved the life we were building. So where the heck did the doubt come from?

Sure, I experienced random pangs of homesickness; ironic because, when I left Scandia, I was literally sick of home. But nothing to prompt this.

I stared at the nothingness before me, feeling around the unrumped sheets on Aaron's side of the bed, a sign he hadn't yet returned from his recently procured lounge gig. Perhaps the answer was as simple as loneliness (mixed with a dash of isolation); just the big old house and me still getting to know each other. I chewed on that possibility for a moment as the sounds of the night encroached: a siren, a car horn, a barking dog, a train whistle. Plus, the usual creaks and moans typical of middle-aged structures (and people). A melancholy chorus if ever there was one. I pulled the covers up higher and shuddered.

Could I dare hope for a second round of blessed sleep? The beginning of my second trimester was making it more and more unlikely these days. But as the warmth and oblivion enveloped me, another sound made its presence felt, tiptoeing around the threadbare outer edges of my consciousness. Barely present at first, indistinguishable from a dream, but then muffled, like your parents' murmurs from behind closed doors. It required my absolute concentration to will it into focus, the way you'd adjust the dials on a telescope to bring a distant celestial body into crystalline view. It was as annoying as walking with a grain of sand in your shoe; try as I might, I could not ignore it. And so I threw back the blanket and slipped into my robe, cinching it tight at what passed for my waist. Could I have left the TV on before going to bed? I clearly remembered turning it off, although my memory wasn't what it used to be, the growing alien in my tummy stealing my mojo by the day. Stupidly, I flicked on the light and set off to find the source of the babble, not stopping to think it could be burglars or worse.

A downstairs room-to-room inspection yielded nothing. But as I got closer to the stairs (all 17 of them), I noticed a second element added to the mix: the faint, but unmistakably pungent, aroma of cigar smoke.

A smart woman would have called 911. But what would I say? I hear a TV and smell a cigar. Please send your crack SWAT team immediately. Instead, I made my way to the kitchen and grabbed a rubber mallet from the rack, the kind you use to pound chicken. (I know, Aaron, not a euphemism.) I'm sure the sight was laughable; a pregnant woman awkwardly wielding a cooking utensil certain to strike terror in the heart of any home invader.

I stopped to catch my breath on the upstairs landing before completing my ascent and moving methodically down the long hall, poking my head into each room to—what? Assure myself it was all a figment of my overripe imagination? Was that really preferable to an actual intruder?

The hammering of my own heart was the only sound I heard.