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Her Presence is Felt

by Stuart Carruthers

“Quite like old times, the room says,” laughed Rosie aloud as she danced around the small living room, her slim frame wrapped lovingly into her mother’s apron. It had been a week since she had found her father’s book and the handwritten notes from her mother. Afraid to tell anyone, not even Kieran, for fear of bringing bad luck to her home, Rosie waited until the house was empty before carefully turning the pages and re-reading her mother’s last words. Her presence was welcome on this bitterly cold winter’s afternoon.

The fire lay dormant until the men returned with pockets full of coal stolen from Mr Clarke’s cart. So the young girl who had grown up too fast, danced to the sound of her mother’s voice that she had locked away inside her head. Margaret McCracken had the voice of an angel and could be heard outside of the walls of the house on regular occasions as she cleaned and prepared her home for the arrival of her family.

She remembered fondly sitting on the bottom step of the stairs watching her parents glide effortlessly around the room to the faint sound of her father humming a loving tune into her mother ear. The back room was the heart of the home. Everything happened here. Its walls proudly decorated with newspaper clippings of their father’s sporting achievements and shadowy photograph’s of her grandparents, its oak flooring, heavy stained from the men’s work boots much to Rosie’s annoyance.

Carefully returning the book to her father's bedside table, she took a moment to wonder why he had chosen this particular book. He wasn't known for reading anything other than the weekend papers.

Returning to the kitchen to prepare the evening meal, her mind was preoccupied with her mother's secret message, it was clear it was unintended for anyone other than her father. But she was determined to ensure her request was carried out.

Wednesday was the hardest day of the week to try and make dinner for her family. Thursday she could obtain credit from Mrs Booth's corner shop, knowing the wages were due on Friday, but today she would sacrifice her portion, so the others could eat. She knew her mother would often do this, so it wasn't unexpected. Anyway she had more important matters on her mind.

As the back gate banged open, she hollered her instructions to remove all dirty boots and clothes before entering. Placing their plates carefully on the table, the room fell silent as the small offerings were devoured. Fully aware of the hard times they lived in, no one mentioned that the bread was stale or the vegetable soup was lacking its main ingredient.

Clearing the last of the plates from the table, Rosie made small talk with her father before returning to the kitchen. Slipping unnoticed out the door, she walked quickly along the empty streets, turning to look over her shoulder a number of times to ensure she wasn't being followed, until she reached No 57. After repeated knocks, the door opened and Rosie smiled and slipped inside.