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Feet Under The Table

by Stuart Carruthers

In the dim light of the kitchen my old man sits slumped into his favourite chair, positioning the sole's of his feet to feel the love of the dying embers. Here he sits day after day remembering conversations that occasionally bring a smile to his weather-beaten face. Outside the Devil screams and tear's at the stone cottage at the bottom of Cliff lane. The beach is deserted on this dark evening. Small wooden fishing boats rest on their sides far away from the oncoming breaking waves.

On the mantelpiece her father's clock ticks annoyingly. The table set for two. The blackened cold red teapot hasn't moved for days. Nor has he. On the walls hang two black and white pictures from that glorious sunny day in April when she said yes. His brown suit still hangs in the wardrobe, but now ravaged by a swarm of moths' larvae. I once checked its pockets. A rolled-up Spanish peseta, various buttons, fishing hooks embedded into its fabric and a note to him he just couldn't let go off.

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The slow walk across the floor was nerve-racking. The gawky blonde-haired boy dressed like his father, lips dry, hand sweating, could barely speak let alone look her in the eye. Her hand was lost in his. The wolf-whistles from the opposite side of the room he could live with, but the glare from Father Ryan told a different story.

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Two years from the day he braved the long walk to the house on the hill and asked his permission, the young man from nowhere experienced a love unbeknown to his siblings. They lived above Joyce's butchers on Greggan Rd. The damp walls, cracked glass windows that screamed when the cold winter wind arrived, brought them closer together. His shadow couldn't move without her.

Brisk walks on cold spring morning's brought dreams to life in troubled times. Despite the lure of the foreign dollar bill, a promise is a promise.

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I watched him with his stubborn ways refuse to acknowledge reality. Horizontal rain trickled off his grey stubble down to the mud of the fields he sculpted. Between the words of the book he didn't believe in he held her hand, her pulse winding down like the records they loved. Her boyfriend of choice showed no emotion.

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Ten years to the day I stand at the top of the lane. Below lost among the lush green countryside a man lovingly tends all he knows. His shadow alone now. I know he knows I'm here, but not today. Its all too much for him now.

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Like a lone star in a blackened sky, the house I know as home stands alone. The key in the door. The smell of a working man. From the kitchen I hear the faint sounds of the evening Angelus. The fire long gone out. My old man in his favourite chair.