

An Extraordinary Day

by Stuart Finegan

Without warning the back door swung open, assisted by the wind and rain.

“TIM, close that door, you’ll let all the heat out.”

“Give me a minute, Nula...anyway, why don’t you help with these bags?”

“A filthy day, I’ll put the kettle on instead, I’m sure you can manage a few bags.”

Dragonfly Cottage, a slate-grey stone thatched old farmhouse nestled on the edge of Blackhill forest. Its usual well-maintained garden regularly attracted the attention of passing strangers but today it looked tired and miserable in the rain. Late afternoon dark, moody clouds raced across the skyline as the forecasted storm approached. Inside Nula Byrne, still dressed in her pyjamas from the night before, stoked the dying embers of the fire while her lover undressed from his wet clothes.

“Did you see Una?”

“No, she had left before I got there. Are you putting the kettle on?”

“Don’t leave puddles of water on my clean floor, Tim, TIM!”

“I hear you.”

“Here, dry yourself off with this, it’s only just out of the dryer.”

Anticipating a miserable day with no plans to leave the house, Nula had prepared dinner earlier that morning. A large pot simmered on the stove. Inside a concoction of vegetables from the garden and ham her brother had dropped off. The result was a delicious smell that engulfed their large, homely kitchen. Positioned at opposite ends of the room two small lamps they had found in the cottage when they first moved in created a warm and a cosy atmosphere.

As the weather outside took a turn for the worse, they settled down on the couch next to the fire. The wireless, barely audible in the background, entertained them with a selection of jazz classics. Nula had only recently introduced Tim to her first love, he wasn’t sold on the idea yet. As they huddled up, Nula rested her head on her lover’s shoulder, pulled the sleeve up on her shaggy woollen jumper just enough to allow her pale skeleton like hand to slip into his.

After a few minutes of silence, she whispered,

“Tim, you hungry yet?”

“No why?, what time do you want to eat?”

Ideally before it's too late.”

“Ok say in about an hour, any post today?”

“Its on the table under the paper?”

Mindful that her head was resting on his shoulder, Tim carefully leaned forward and stood up. As he walked over to the counter, Nula cheekily issued instructions,

“While you're up re-boil the kettle will you please?”

As he busied himself, Tim struggled to say the words he'd been holding back for a while. Love is frightening, he told himself over and over again. Its got a beauty unlike anything he had experienced growing up, yet the news they were awaiting would mean he had decisions to make out of love that scared him. Nula stretched out her legs in the direction of the fire to warm her feet. She breathed deep and bottled it up for posterity. In her mind, she already suspected the truth; otherwise, they would have written sooner.

A sudden lull in the rain pushed a silence against the kitchen window. Tim stood at the counter, the kettle humming as it reheated. His hand trembled as he reached for the stack of unopened post still lying beneath the newspaper.

One envelope, cream in colour, looked clinical as it peeked out from under the others. He just hadn't found the strength to open it just yet.

Nula watched him from the couch, her fingers curled tightly in the fabric of her jumper. She already knew. She'd felt it in the heaviness of the kitchen atmosphere, as suddenly her world seemed to move more slowly around her and the way Tim couldn't meet her eyes for long.

“Tim, bring it here.”

He swallowed hard, then crossed the room with the envelope in hand. He didn't open it. He didn't need to. Instead, he knelt beside her, placing the letter gently between them like an unwelcome truth. After a few moments, Tim opened it.

“They've confirmed it, it's what they suspected.”

Nula let out a long, steady breath. Not a sob, just acceptance.

“Tim how long...Tim?”

“They... don't know yet. Months... maybe. Could be longer Nula, I don't know.”

He took her cold hands in his.

“We'll face it together. Every step.”

Rain resumed against the windows, a lot slower now as if the storm itself was tired. The fire spit throwing waves of amber light across their faces as they sat in silence. Nula leaned into Tim, her head resting once more on his shoulder.

“I’m not afraid of the end, I’m afraid of leaving you in it.”

“You won’t, every part of you stays with me Nula.”

She lifted his grey bearded chin, forcing him to meet her fading but fierce brown eyes.

“Tim we have time, maybe not the time we wanted, but enough to make the rest of our story matter.”

Outside, the wind whistled through the forest trees. Inside, wrapped in love and grief, they sat together in the dim glow of the fire, letting reality settle gently between them. Neither spoke for a long while. There was no need to. Outside the storm had passed its intense point. What was left was the quiet courage of two souls holding tightly to each other, refusing to let the darkness take over. And in that intense moment, the kettle clicked off, releasing a soft gasp of steam. An ordinary sound on an extraordinary day