

Tomorrow I'll be Ready

by Stuart Finegan

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. Tim gingerly removed himself from Nula's loving embrace, taking in every moment if it was their last. Nula sank deeper into the couch and pulled her knees tightly up to her chest. Her brown eyes glazed over as she stared intensely into the glowing fire. Tim slowly walked into the kitchen, removed the kettle from its base and for a moment forgot what he was doing.

"What did I come here to do? O yea Tea, Nula, what will we tell Una?"

Nula's mind was elsewhere, she wasn't listening. Different scenarios played out in her head about how she was going to talk to her only daughter. They had made the decision the previous Autumn not to tell Una that her mom was undergoing medical tests. It was exam time at the school and Tim was adamant that the last thing Una needed was a family distraction.

Nula and Tim adopted Una when she was seven. The initial years were very difficult as Una was abandoned by her parents and spent her early life in several difficult foster homes. Trust was a big issue for the young, fisty, curly red-haired girl who would go on to change her parents' lives forever. Her life now was unrecognisable from the feral childhood she grew up in. Una Clarke as she was known before meeting Nula and Tim, was born on the North side of the city to drug addicted parents. Taken into care before her second birthday, she inherited their addiction legacy and a craving for someone to love her. That commitment in her life came when Nula and Tim changed her surname to theirs. No longer would she fear the knock at the door from the social team, advising her that she was moving again to a new home. They were her parents now, and that's what she told anyone when asked.

"Nula, Nula, what are we going to say to Una? We've got to say something as we can't keep secrets from her, we also said..."

"STOP, stop, Tim, my head's hurting, don't you think I know all this."

"Sorry, I'm just worried about her, she's come a long way, and that's down to you, me and her own courage, the least we..."

"I don't want tea, have we any wine left?"

Tim returned from the kitchen, leaving two untouched mugs of tea cooling on the counter behind him. He hovered by the fire for a moment, watching Nula. The firelight traced the edges of her face, softening the worry carved into it, but not enough to hide it completely.

“Nula, we can sit down with her tomorrow. We’ll find the words together. She deserves to know.”

Nula shook her head slowly. It wasn’t defiance, it was the fear, exhaustion, love, all folding into one heavy motion.

Nula whispered, “She’s only just found her feet, everything she’s built...her confidence, her routine, her security. If we tell her now, before we even know the full diagnosis, we’ll take all that from her. I can’t do that to her, Tim. Please not yet.”

Tim crossed the room and knelt beside the couch. Nula looked away, blinking rapidly as the fire flickered across her damp brown eyes.

“You’re not protecting her by hiding this.”

“No, I’m protecting her by choosing the right moment Tim.”

Silence settled between them, not tense but loving, a fragile understanding that comes from years of shared battles.

“I know what you’re thinking Tim, that secrets ruined her childhood. That she deserves honesty now more than ever, especially from us, her parents.”

Tim didn’t answer. He didn’t have to.

Nula drew a slow, trembling breath.

“But Tim this... this isn’t another foster home about to fall apart. This is me trying to keep her steady for as long as I can. Until we know more. Until I’m strong enough to explain it without scaring her.”

Nula’s voice cracked, and she pressed the heel of her hand against her forehead.

“I want one more day, one day where she wakes up believing everything is normal. One day, when she laughs without wondering why I’m watching her too closely. One day, when I’m just... her mum. Not a problem she has to face.”

Tim placed his hand on Nula’s.

“Just one day?”

Nula nodded.

“Just one. After that... we’ll tell her together.”

For the first time that evening, Tim accepted her answer with a soft exhale. He lifted himself beside her on the couch, pulling her gently into his arms. Outside, the last streaks of the storm faded from the sky, leaving the world quiet and unbroken. Nula closed her eyes, resting her head on Tim’s shoulder and made a promise to herself. Tomorrow she would be ready. Tonight she would choose peace, for Una and for herself.