

La Belle Maison - A Portrait

By Katherine Fleming

Smell the banana and chocolate chip muffins fresh out of the oven. The teapot whistles as steam clouds the kitchen and the oven light cuts through the fog. Listen to the provincial clock on the wall tracking each second we wait to envelope our tastebuds. It's always a few minutes behind. The face of the clock reads 'La Belle Maison'.

Down the hallway I can hear my step-sisters belting out the latest *So Fresh* hits in their bedrooms. The golden retriever is snoring with his eyes open as he curls up like a baby on his bed — as if no one can see him. We all give him a gentle pat whenever we walk by and he continues to snore.

My stepdad is in the front sitting room experimenting with his acoustic guitar. Recycling the same old hits from his youth — *Ain't No Sunshine*, *Free Falling*, *Stairway to Heaven* to name a few. He doesn't like it when I play my music in the house but he's allowed to play his guitar so we can hear it in the street before even opening the front gate.

Grandpa sits at the dining table in his slippers and lycra after returning from one of his long daily bike rides — a fashion icon in his prime. He persists with his 2000-piece puzzle of an English garden, tapping in each correct piece three times habitually. Tap, tap, tap. A satisfied grin between his weathered cheeks every time.

When mum enters the scene I tend to hold my breath. She's always so frantic, determined she has an impossible list of chores to do. She has a tendency to list things and I find I run out of breath merely listening. She gets that from Nanna who she's determined not to become. She always tells me 'the day I turn into my mother, I want you to slap me'. I should've slapped her a while ago but it's nice having Nanna around sometimes. The only time she's calm is when she's reading, but even then she has her serious not-to-be-messed-with face on. I like to think I won't become my mother but I'm probably already halfway there.

In winter we light the fire in the living room, and we've been known to light it on some cooler summer evenings too. The glowing heat brings a wave of serenity over the household. It's as though that provincial clock stops ticking for a moment and time melts away. Salvador Dali painted us in those moments. I'm sure of it.