

Pluviophilia

‘Aoife!’ cried Deirdre. ‘You’ll get sick!’

Aoife hardly heard the words, for the rain that streamed past her ears swallowed all other sounds under its velvet tongue.

‘Aoife!’ her mother yelled again. She tossed the towel into the kitchen sink and marched across the porch, down the steps and out among the giant, pale gums.

Aoife sat, placid, oblivious, face tilted upward to catch the raindrops on her skin. She’d stood this way since the shower started. She relished the sensation, it coated her whole body in the soft embrace of home, was a haze that took her in its cupped hand and sheltered her from the fearsome heat that caused all other days to wither.

Aoife felt a sudden warmth on her arm. Deirdre.

‘Aoife,’ she said. ‘Now.’ She wrenched the girl from where she stood.

‘Mammy...’ Aoife blinked, her mother slowly coming into focus. ‘I like the rain.’

‘You’ll catch a cold. Watch the rain from the window. I’ll start the fire.’

Deirdre used to love the rain... *here*, she despised it. She never wanted to come, no, she just followed her damned husband — ‘We’ll strike it rich and live out a dream!’ he’d said. It was a wretched place. Such a freak of nature even the rain fell wrong. No man in the house for days on end... yet not a spot of gold to be seen!

Deirdre had started preparing dinner when the rain picked up, hammering against her wooden walls. She glanced outside, only to see Aoife right where she’d been, watching the raindrops fall into her wide eyes.

Deirdre tutted and tapped her foot, but went after her. The rain was mean and feral now, biting at Deirdre’s side.

‘You’ll kill me someday, child,’ she grumbled, snatching up Aoife’s wrist. She cursed the sky for its temperament. Her skirts were now splattered with mud and her fingers so numb they could fall off.

As she came to the steps, she looked down and realised Aoife was gone. She saw her own hand, skeletal and clenched, but they held no daughter of hers. ‘Oh, for God’s sake.’

She looked out at that spot among the trees, where Aoife had returned to, ritualistically: feet planted, face up.

Deirdre squinted and raised her hand against the squall. Aoife... didn’t look right. Almost like she was flickering, transparent. But it must have been the rain.

As Deirdre ventured out once again, the effect grew stronger... as if Aoife was a spectre, a phantom made itself of rain. Hardly even there.

Deirdre said her daughter’s name again. Reached out once more. But her hands met only water and air. She started to shake, eyes welling up. ‘No,’ she whispered. ‘No, Aoife. *Come back.*’

The girl’s figure grew fainter still. Deirdre started to grab and claw, desperately heaving the waterlogged air, until at last she realised the girl was gone. Her veins flooded with shock and she collapsed, mud splattering all over and soaking through to her skin. Tears fell hot and fresh on her rain-soaked face.

As she wept, she felt herself growing colder, overcome by the icy embrace of the downpour.

With the last bit of heat left under her ribs, she cried her daughter’s name for the final time. Then she turned her face to the heavens and cursed the goddamned Devil.