



The Waters and the Wild



EILISH FISHER

Illustrated by David Rooney



PUFFIN





Arizona, ten years ago





*Dad, tell me again
about the horse and the fire,
the fairies and the woods.*

*The Sídh, sweetheart.
Not fairies, not really.*

*Do they have wings?
Can they grant me wishes?
If I ask nicely will they cover me in dust
so I can fly?*

*Hush now, Rowan.
They aren't what you think they are.
Irish fairies are different;
our stories are different.
Here, heat shimmers,
waves of light,
red,
orange,
the colours clear.
Nothing is hidden;
the sun tells every secret,
honest and true,
lighting the trails and paths through the desert.*



*But in Ireland a story can have many faces.
Like the weather, it can be
grey,
star-kissed,
misty or bright,
deep shadow or gentle sun.*

What do they look like, Dad?

*They look like me and you.
They can be trees and leaves,
shadows in the corner of your eyes.*

Can they be a horse?

*Oh, absolutely.
A horse is the Púca's favourite form.
But it can be anything;
a bird, a hare, even a spider.
The Púca loves to change shape.*

Did you ever see one?

Only once.





*On Halloween night, behind the bonfire.
Its eyes glowed in the flames
but no one else saw it.
Only me.*

Were you scared?

*Rowan,
it was the most beautiful and terrifying thing
I have ever seen.*





Ireland, present



I thought summer would be hot here,
or at least warm in a place like this,
where the valley stretches below the town,
green and thick.
The river folds
back
and
forth,
teasing with its burbles and wakes.
Dad always said Ireland wasn't like the movies,
all rainbows and sun-soaked green fields.
He said it was cold, rainy,
damp.

To a girl raised in the Arizona desert
that sounded magical,
and I didn't believe him,
not really.

When I was little
I always wanted to visit,
follow the map Dad drew for me when I was eight.
Maybe someday.

It always made him sad,
remembering,
so I stopped asking.

But now we're here,
now Dad is gone,
his funeral over, buried in the churchyard
in the town where he started,
the town he left behind.

We've moved our whole lives
but Mom still won't tell me why;
 why we brought him back,
 why we are now strangers,
 outsiders,
 in a place he left behind.

It feels like our lives stopped too
 the moment he
 died.

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Rowan!
Come get your toast.
I'm late!

Mom shouts from the kitchen,
thumping wood into the woodstove that's always burning,
even now at the end of August.

I pull on an extra pair of socks,
the giant fleece robe I got for Christmas,
shuffle down the hall.

You can make your own tea,
kettle's boiled.
I'm off.
Don't want to miss the train;
it was early yesterday.

And late last night,
I mutter, but she doesn't hear.
Not that I mind that much;

I've got used to being on my own.

It's still summer.

It's still summer.

It's still summer.

I chant it over and over,
inhale the steam, take a sip.

But really, who am I kidding?
School starts in two weeks
and summer'll be gone.

The kitchen table is close to the woodstove,
the edge slightly singed.
I hold my mug of tea tight,
the heat warming my hands.

Mom's a doctor, always on call.
She can't help it,
she would stay with me if she could
instead of leaving me
alone
all the time.

I tell myself this, over and over,
but I know the truth.

She can't stand to be here,
in this freezing house
in this cold town
so far away from the life we had,
the three of us
together.

She can't stand to see me every day;
a constant reminder of all the things we've lost.

