

Borderline

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“Bastard bogging bloody bogland”... The refrain thrummed through his head over and over as he squelched down the lane to the cottage, kicking savagely at the clumps of reeds and nettles rising from the puddles along the way. Rain trickled down the back of his neck as he shifted the straps of the backpack pulling on his thin shoulders. He slowed down as he rounded the last twist in the path. No smoke from the chimney, or light gleaming in the small windows, even though the mid-winter dusk was gathering fast.

Did that mean she hadn't got out of bed again? And no dinner ready, that was for sure. He'd probably have to go back down to the little shop at the crossroads, if it was still open. Rashers and eggs and white sliced pan again so.

God, how he hated this place, and hated her with a fierce hatred for dragging him here. Would his father even know where to find them, if he wanted to? But no, she'd given up so easily, caved in so pathetically to his leaving. “I want to go home”, she'd said, “back to my own people”, like a wounded animal slinking back to its lair.

Well, these were no people of his,

that was for sure, these slow speaking bogtrotters, with their sly digs at his Dublin accent and the rusty streak he'd put in his hair just for devilment, to get a rise out of them, back in the days when his Mum and Dad were still a 'them'.

She knew he was unhappy, knew how much he missed his Dad. “It will get better Kevin, it will, I promise”.

He turned away from that pleading note in her voice that always set his teeth on edge, resolutely holding back the bitter words roiling up in his tight throat. He sensed, even in the depths of his own blind misery, how fragile her hold on herself was. All the clear edges that had shaped the space she filled in the world seemed to be dissolving, the way the borderline between land and sea dissolves here in these sodden, saturated fields; where the morning mist rises to mesh with the lowering clouds, and even the seagulls don't know which end is up.

And if at times the slanting evening light caught his heart with an unexpected jolt, as the drenched hills shimmered wetly like a mirage at sea, he turned his back, resenting the place even more for its sly seduction, still so unready to be seduced.