

Bad Weather

Oscar's trying to catch beads of water, tilting a stalk between his thumb and finger so that a small dock leaf curves upwards like a flimsy bowl. He stares at the summer clouds and then his collection, as if hoping to catch the light trapped inside each drop, even as they shatter when new rain falls.

A ladybird climbs towards him, a drop half the size of its body balanced on its back.

"You're getting wet." My statement of the obvious doesn't seem to register with Oscar. I attempt a different tack: "What are you doing?"

"Help me, Mum! I need to stop it spilling over." His wrist trembles like a thin branch in the wind.

I cup my hand under his, watch rain and light wobble.

He looks at the ladybird. "How does it carry all that weight?"

I think about the blood-red insect, then my marriage. The day squeezes tight around me, the air preparing for a thunderstorm.

"I don't know, Oscar." As I speak, I shiver, and another raindrop slides off.

"And how can I look after the ladybird when I can't hold the water?" Oscar's voice wobbles.

"Don't worry." I kiss his damp forehead. "I'll find some way to protect it, perhaps make a new home."