

THE MOONLIT PAGE

# Before the Drop Falls



Lina had walked past the same overhanging branch every Saturday for a month. This time she stopped beneath it.

A drop of water hung from the pointed end of a leaf. It was large enough to tremble when the leaf moved, but it would not fall.

Her brother Rob took three more steps before noticing that their conversation had lost half its participants.

“What is it?”

“That.”

He came back. They stood side by side on the broad path, looking at the drop.

“Any second,” he said.

“You said that about the kettle at your flat.”

“The kettle was unplugged. This seems better arranged.”

The rain had stopped a few minutes earlier. The river moved brown and smooth beyond the railing, and the trees were still letting water go in small, irregular taps. Lina could hear one tapping on a metal litter bin farther along the path. It had a much more efficient leaf above it.

Their own drop stretched, rounded itself again and stayed where it was.

Rob bent his knees a little to see it against the pale sky instead of the dark hedge. Lina tried the same. Now the water had a bright edge.

"Oh," she said. "That's better."

A breeze moved the branch. The drop swung with it.

"Now," Rob whispered.

Nothing happened.

Lina straightened. Her brother remained in his half crouch, hands resting on his thighs, as if waiting for a very small bus.

"Are you comfortable?" she asked.

"Perfectly."

He turned to demonstrate this with a dignified expression. Lina looked at him and laughed.

When they looked back, the leaf was empty.

For a moment neither spoke.

"I didn't blink," said Rob.

"No. Neither did I."

The tip of the leaf sat a little higher now. A fresh bead of water was gathering farther back, along its central crease. It crept towards the point, stopped, then moved again.

Rob straightened slowly.

“Would you like to wait for the next performance?”

Lina considered it. There was tea at her flat, and a packet of biscuits she had bought because her brother always said he didn't want one and then ate four.

“Not without seats.”

They continued along the path. Rob was telling her that three and a half was not four when a drop struck the litter bin behind them with a small, clear tap.

# To remember

1. Lina stops at a familiar branch after rain; Rob returns to look at one hanging drop with her.
2. They lower their viewpoint to see its bright edge against the sky; repeated predictions fail.
3. Rob looks at Lina to answer her question; she laughs, and both miss the instant the drop falls. The now-empty leaf sits higher.
4. A new bead begins to gather, but they choose tea and continue their biscuit argument; a separate drop taps the litter bin behind them.