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I reading

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Opening extract from

Evidence of Dragons

Written by

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Published by

Macmillan Children's Books

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Praise Poem

Let us begin
    with the hottest of days
        and the shock of icy water sipped from
                frosted glass.

Let us begin
    with the tickle of a ladybird
        and the rosebud of its freckled red coat.

Let us begin
    with the fizz of sherbet lemon
        sizzling on the tongue.

Let us begin
    with the sudden grin and giggle
        of a joke cracked open like a walnut.

Let us begin
    with the cat's warm purr
        and the first crazy petals of snow falling.

Let us begin
    with the kicking of legs
        as the swing flings itself higher.

Let us begin
    with a blade of grass
        and sunlight pouring through clouds
                like golden dust.

Let us begin
    with the hot breath of chips on a cold night
        and the surprise of torchlight icing
                the dark.

Let us begin
    by counting the rings on your fingertips
        and the mystery of a magnet's pull.

Yes, let us begin
with such simple things.

A Poem to Be Spoken Silently . . .

It was so silent that I heard
my thoughts rustle
like leaves in a paper bag . . .

It was so peaceful that I heard
the trees ease off
their coats of bark . . .

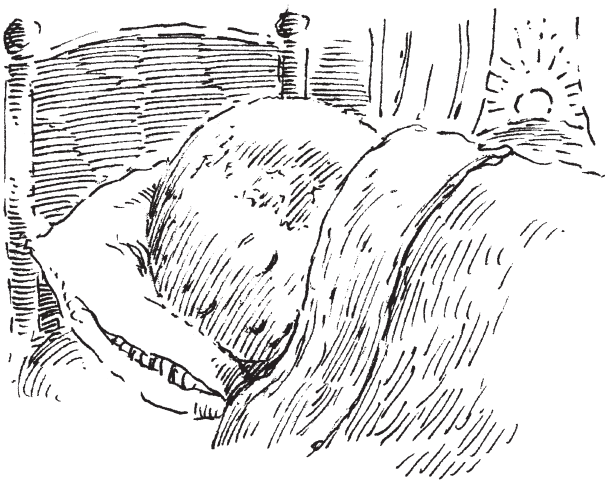
It was so still that I heard
the paving stones groan
as they muscled for space . . .

It was so silent that I heard
a page of this book
whisper to its neighbour,
'Look, he's peering at us again . . .'

It was so still that I felt
a raindrop grin
as it tickled the window's pane . . .

It was so calm that I sensed
a smile crack
the wary face
of a stranger . . .

It was so quiet that I heard
the morning earth roll over
in its sleep and doze
for five minutes more . . .



Wings

If I had wings
I would touch the fingertips of clouds
and glide on the wind's breath.

If I had wings
I would taste a chunk of the sun,
as hot as peppered curry.

If I had wings
I would listen to the clouds of sheep bleat
that graze on the blue.

If I had wings
I would breathe deep and sniff
the scent of raindrops.

If I had wings
I would gaze at people
who cling to the earth.

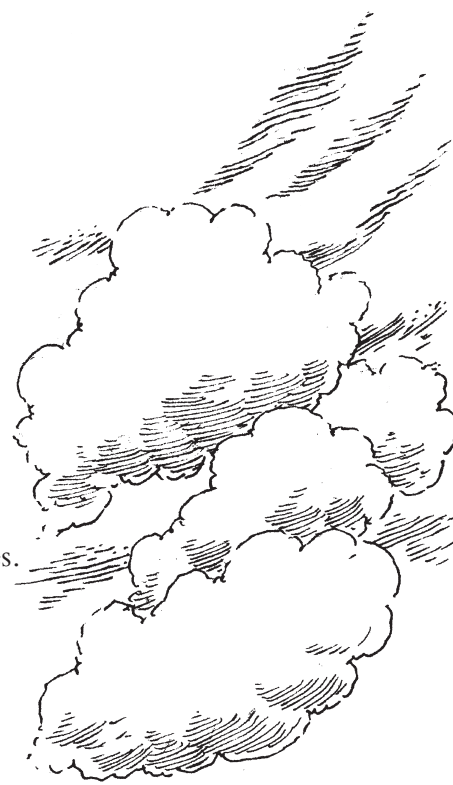
If I had wings
I would dream of
swimming the deserts
and walking the seas.



The Cloud Appreciation Society

Clouds are no bother;
they do not interfere
with anyone –
are not known to be
busybodies,
keep their noses clean.
They loiter quietly,
then shuffle on.

Clouds are cheap;
make ideal pets.
Needing no feeding,
they thrive
with no real attention.
The main advantage
of a cloud
is that it takes
no looking after.
Clouds just get on
with the job
of shepherding themselves.
You do not need a dog
to round them up.



The sun warms
a cloud's back –
the wind sculpts
its shifting form.

Dawn brings
another bunch of cloud surprises –
all shapes and sizes blossoming,
whether you like it or not.
For the work of a cloud
is never finished –
the job never done.

Perhaps it's not much fun
being a cloud . . .
but at least they have no need
to be perfect.

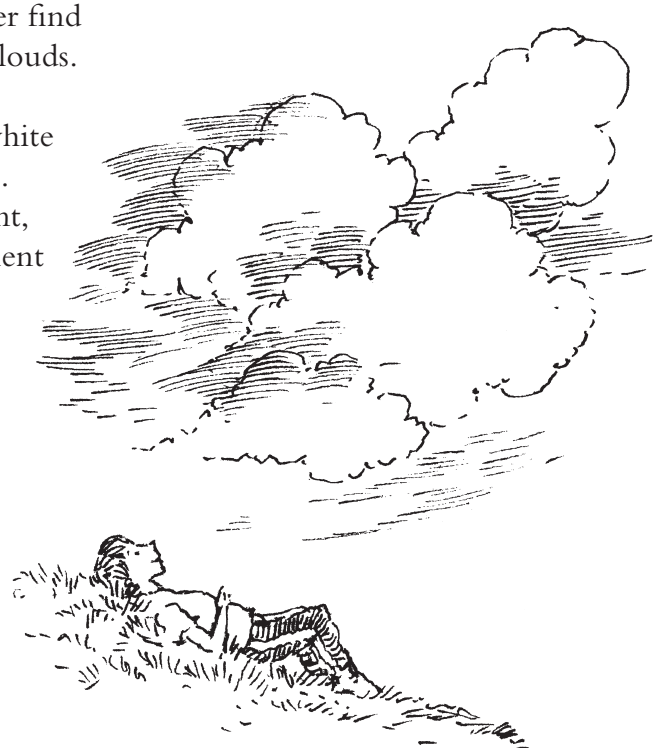
Nameless, they shift storms.
Blameless, they ferment lightning.

No one has ever tamed a cloud.

I like the way clouds
look after themselves
without any fuss.
A bus needs a driver,
a ship needs a sail,
but a cloud moves on
like a gigantic soft whale
slowly easing through
a sea of blue.

New clouds pillow,
billowing and blowing.
No cloud is ever the same.
You'll never find
identical clouds.

Drift on white
    mystery.
Ghost-silent,
each moment
    making
cloud
    history.



Are You Sleepwalking?

Cats are more than alive.
That purposeful purr,
the ripple
of muscle and fur;
and bright eyes seen green
in midnight
headlights . . .

But what about trees?
They too grow slow,
stretching up;
their thin limbs
covered in rough skin.
They live and die.

But is water alive?
Like us it sleeps,
still and deep –
then shifts restlessly
like wind-blown silk,
or silver pouring from a tap.
If you touch water,
it moves aside,
its wet invitation
lets you slide in.

And rocks –
may be hard as nails,
but they wear a thin skin –
a cold crust of lichen;
icy in winter,
warmed by simple sun.
Like solid old men,
weathered till
they too crumble into dust.

You must look close enough,
to enter their world –
even the grass seems alive –
as it uncurls its slim, green skin
and twists with the wind.



And what of you?
Have you yet woken to the world,
sensing its every move?
Or are you sleepwalking
through every waking moment?

Watching

Watching
the red admiral's miracle,
the opening and closing of wings,
the gentle fluttering of prayer flags



and the peacocks clustering
on the purple buddleia.



Watching their dusty colours
and silks flickering.

Watching the tubby bees
noisily nudging for a space,
nectar-greedy.

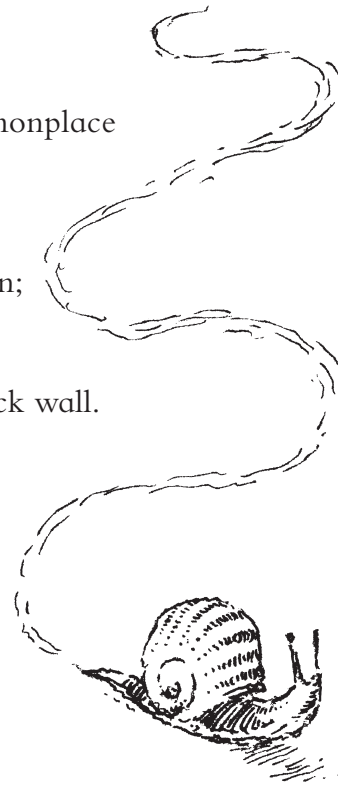


Watching
the sunlight catching
the flowers and speared leaves,
describing shadows,

and I'm thinking
how many of the small things
that I love are free for those

who know
how to see for themselves
the miraculous and commonplace
so close to hand –

the ant's hieroglyphic trail;
the snail's slow determination;
even the money spider –
that pinprick of blood,
perfect on a red-brick wall.



Go into –

a river as it noses by
burrowing between banks,
carving through stone.

Within it must be lonely;
except for the constant chatter
of stones rattling along;
except for the slither
of eels and the silver of fish.



Go in –
you might find the sky
or the moon or your own face
staring back.

Inside, there is the rush
of waterfalls and a wave's curve;
the imprint of a whale
and the dark shadow of a shark.

Go in –
it will wash away
the day's dirt and some may be
dazzled by its power
to free the soul
from sin – so, dip in –
it may not be as cold
as you fear.

Spain – Summer Diary 2001

Wednesday morning

Cicadas buzz
like electricity.

It's so hot that
wasps and bees drink
from the swimming pool.

Ants carry off trophies from our meal.

Stunned by sun.
Heat bounces
off whitewashed walls.
The track ahead shimmers.

Flies irritate –
whining,
stalking the cup's rim –
settling on my hand.

Towels map the washing line –
the breeze quivers –
a distant lorry tugs uphill.

Cicadas are busy.
The hillside seems alive.

Inside the fridge hums.
The landscape does nothing too.

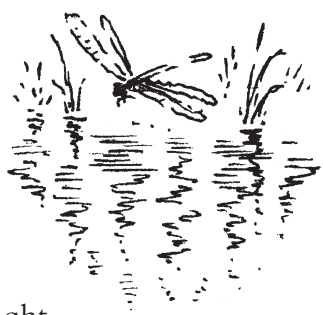
Clouds drift my thoughts

distant hills –
like a sleeping lion –
crouch.

The sun steadily
turns up the temperature.



Pastel-blue dragonflies,
pencil-slim,
hover by the pool.



Daisy's wasp sting –
a white injection mark –
like a tiny, raised moon.

It's three o'clock at night.
Lightning bursts over mountains
in a purple fuzz.

Trying to sleep but
the room is too stuffy –
even the pillows sweat.

Moon crumbles night swim stars scatter