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562 Words

“Rufus’ Mother”

1. Rufus had been gone for 2 hours, and his mother was getting worried. She had hurriedly cleaned up an uneaten dinner and slithered to the surface of the earth in search of her son. Rain pounded down like footsteps in the softened dirt and the grass drooped, already weary under its burden; Sophie decided to retreat while she was still standing tall, and trusted that Rufus hadn’t gone far. She imagined he’d taken refuge under a rock, and convinced that he’d be home soon, she wriggled back into the warmth of her den to wait.
2. It was around 1:45 that she really began to worry, though. Rufus was never out late, and though she wasn’t alone, Sophie felt daunted by the emptiness of her home; a worried air had thickened into a cloud of despair that was palpable, and impossible to shake. Sophie tried to imagine Rufus tucked away under the gentle knots of an oak root, but images of winged creatures with talons, even teeth, had settled deeper in her brain than her own thoughts. Before she knew it, she was tunneling skyward towards their soaring shadows, but through persistent rain and dancing branches, Sophie couldn’t see. So she hoped Rufus was curled up in a knot, and let the rain beat her back down into the earth.
3. In the dry morning light, Sophie shot through goopy mud and scorned the sun for shining down on the earth. She cursed every bird that flew overhead, every bee that dropped down to touch the flowers which bloomed so mockingly, every living creature that grazed through her line of sight. Sophie scanned her world for signs of Rufus, looking for a

friendly face among slippery pebbles and clusters of bugs. Nothing. Her heart plunged lower with each flapping shadow that passed through the park; any one of them could've eaten her son.

4. A soft thump behind her knocked her back into reality, and Sophie turned around to see a clock-stopping, three-pronged, gnarled bird foot, twisted into a knot by a stringy piece of plastic. The other foot, undefiled, held a crusty, sunburnt Rufus against the earth. Sophie forgot the bird entirely, flooded with joy as Rufus wriggled free from its talons and squirmed towards her. Other worms rose to the surface; insects of all kinds gathered in celebration, and the trees seemed to dance again, swaying to a contented breeze. Had he been right all along? Sophie thought maybe it was possible that Rufus really had a friend in this bird. How silly that she had entertained this idea, even for just a brief moment of pure and desperate relief.
5. A joyful embrace between Sophie and Rufus' father was cut short as she was yanked upwards with a jolt. By a (toothless) beak. Rufus watched in horror as the bird uprooted his mother from his family and tossed her helpless body to the back of her throat. Sophie was gone in a gulp. Insects dispersed and worms frantically scratched at the sun-dried dirt; the trees relentlessly swayed. A killing spree ensued, as a gnarled knobby foot wreaked havoc on worms helplessly trapped above ground. Devastated, horrified beyond words, burnt by hot concrete, Rufus couldn't bear to watch his naivety die alongside his parents and managed to burrow through cold, stinging dirt down to his home, to wait.