

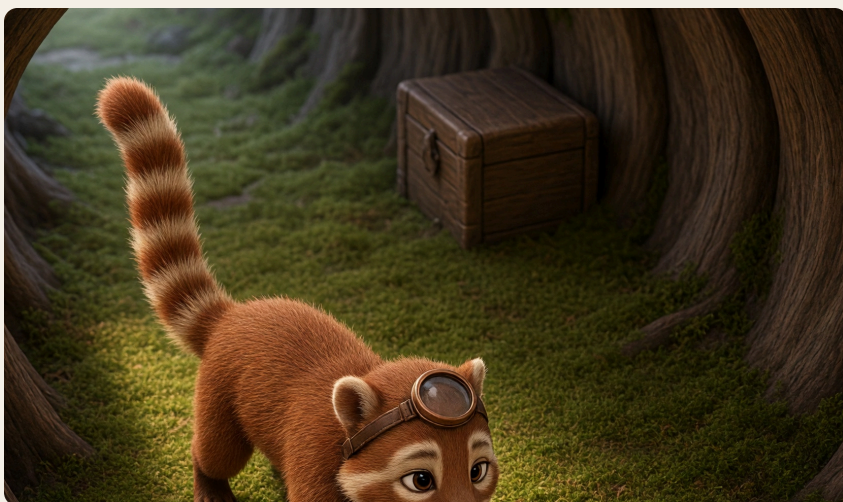
PUDDLEBEND



A CREEK STORY

The Clacking Lid

WREN MARLOWE



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*For small hands that keep trying the
lid.*



—



Cinder crossed the moss on quiet paws. She sniffed left and right. The closed box sat ahead. Nobody else was inside the hollow log. One secret look would do.



She set both front paws on the lid. The lens slid down toward the seam. "One peek? Just one?" she whispered. The wood under her paws did not move yet. Her snout dipped toward the thin dark seam.

A red-orange bow flashed at the edge of the log. Cinder froze with her paws still on the lid. Her tail hooked down. "Who is that?" she gasped. Tock's big claw rose beside the box. The quiet sneak had company now.





"One, two, clack!" called Tock. She held the big claw high. The ribbon bow bounced. "We open on the beat," she said. Cinder kept both paws braced. She had wanted silence. Now the plan ran on Tock's count. The ribboned claw tipped downward toward the log.



tock's claw hit the wood with a clack. Cinder jumped. The lid rose a thin crack under her paws. "What's in there?" she whispered. Her snout pressed to the dark gap. The lid sat higher than she had planned. One paw slipped on the smooth wood.



"One, two, clack! One, two, clack!" Tock called, faster now. Her ribbon bow bounced. Cinder flinched and locked both paws on the wood. "One peek? Just one?" she gasped. The lid kept rising anyway. Each clack cost more of the quiet. The lid swung past halfway on the next clack.



Tock conducted with the big claw high. The ribbon bow flew side to side. "One, two, clack," she called again. Cinder held both paws on the gaping lid. Her eyes went wide. Her tail stood straight up. Nothing quiet was left of her sneak. The whole log rang with it.



Cinder pulled her snout back from the wide gap. Her paws locked hard on the loud rim. The open box sat under her like a shout she had not meant to make. She could not walk the quiet peek back. Tock's big claw hung mid-air beside her. The next clack held back. Cinder's tail drooped into a hook.





Both held still over the open box. Cinder's snout hovered. No one moved.





"One, two, clack," Tock whispered this time. Cinder pressed both paws down on the wood. The lid sank with the beat. "We shut it now," Cinder said. Closing was the next act, not any wider peek. She stole the count to close it. The lid dropped toward the final click.



The lid clicked fully shut. Cinder pushed the lens up above her eyes. She turned to Tock with one paw still on the box. "One peek? Just one?" she asked. "May I look? After you say yes?" Tock's claw paused beside the shut lid.



Cinder rested one paw on the shut lid. Tock set her big claw quiet on the moss beside it. The ribbon bow lay still. They sat together by the closed box. Green light moved on the moss.

EVERYONE AT THE CREEK



Bramble

COMMON WOMBAT

The steady big-kid guardian



Cinder

COATIMUNDI

The nosy neighborhood explorer



Hush

TAWNY FROGMOUTH

The tall nervous big cousin who thinks nobody can see him



Nix

SUGAR GLIDER

The littlest rocket sibling



Skip

MUDSKIPPER

The tiny little brother who cannot wait his turn



Sora

SANDHILL CRANE

The tall watchful big-sister neighbor



Tock

FIDDLER CRAB

The bossy little drummer who wants everyone in the game



Tuck

SHORT-BEAKED ECHIDNA

The littlest cousin who is always a bit too close

ABOUT THE CREEK

Puddlebend is a slow bend in a warm creek where the water is shallow enough to stand in and the mud is soft enough to sit down in. Everyone who lives there is small. Everyone who lives there is working something out.

These stories are about the ordinary, difficult business of being a friend: waiting your turn, going back for what you dropped, letting someone hold you when you are all spikes.

WREN MARLOWE

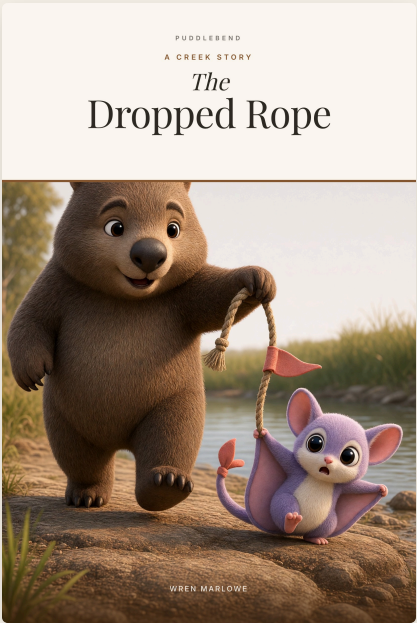
Wren Marlowe is the Puddlebend house name for stories made at the water's edge — quiet, funny books about small creatures working out how to be together.



ALSO IN THIS SERIES



The Missed Leaf



The Dropped Rope



The Belly-Up Hug



The Landing Branch



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