

A CREEK STORY

THE CLACKING LID



WREN MARLOWE

PUDDLEBEND



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For small hands that keep trying the lid.



The Clacking Lid

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At Cinder's Nook, sunbeams slipped through the hollow log and made bright circles on the floor. Dust motes danced in the warm light. Cinder found a small wooden keepsake case beside a basket of acorns. Its lid had a brass catch and one mysterious, wiggly corner.

Cinder's copper lens flashed above her eyes.
"One peek? Just one? What is in there?"
Bramble stood at the doorway with his rope
sash damp from the creek. He noticed a
tiny scratch by the catch. "Before a peek,"
he said, "we check what belongs where."





“I can check while I peek,” Cinder said. She lifted the lid a finger-width. Clack! It fell shut. The sharp sound startled a moth from the bark. Cinder’s ringed tail sprang straight up. “It wants another try.”

Bramble crouched beside the case. “Check one: is the catch stuck?” Cinder opened it again. Clack. “Check two: is something under the lid?” Cinder peered closer. Clack. Each little peek made the log sound louder.





“Maybe we should pull harder,” Cinder said. Bramble planted his paws. “Harder is not always clearer.” “But it almost opened,” Cinder said. “Almost tells us to look again,” said Bramble. Still, he held the case while Cinder lifted. The lid rose, tilted, and clacked down even faster than before. Acorns jumped in their basket.

Cinder hurried for her magnifying lens. Through it, the brass catch looked enormous. “I see a scratch! A tiny scratch.” “Does it point somewhere?” Bramble asked. She poked at it with a pine needle. The needle snapped, and the lid gave another cross clack.





Bramble tried his careful way. He put one paw on the case and one on the lid, then waited. Nothing moved. He checked the catch again. Nothing changed. “What else could move?” Cinder asked. “I am checking the same thing twice,” he admitted.

The keepsake case sat between them, shut tight. Cinder's tail drooped into a hook. Bramble's shoulders spread low. The sunbeam had moved away. "I only wanted to know what was inside," Cinder said. "I only wanted to make it safe," Bramble answered.





A sunbeam moved across the lid and stopped at the wiggly corner. Cinder did not reach for it. “Bramble, can you hold the case still without holding the lid?” “I can,” he said. Bramble looked again, this time at the corner instead of the catch.



“There is a little groove,” Cinder whispered. Her lens showed a thin line in the wood. “The lid is trying to sit in it.” Bramble nodded slowly. “Then we do not pull up. We guide down.” “Sideways first?” Cinder asked. “Sideways first,” said Bramble.



Bramble steadied the case with both paws. Cinder set one small claw beside the groove. “Ready?” she asked. “Steady,” said Bramble. “Tell me if the corner wiggles.” “It is lining up,” Cinder said. Together they eased the wiggly corner sideways, then lowered the lid.

Click. Not clack. The brass catch settled neatly into place. Cinder opened the lid once more, slowly this time. Inside lay a smooth blue pebble with a tiny painted path curling across it.





“It is for my wall!” Bramble said, surprised. His low voice filled the hollow log like a happy drum. Cinder smiled. “A path pebble. It must have been waiting for its proper place.”

Bramble set the pebble in the case again. “Will you show me the groove?” Cinder leaned close, but not too close. “Only if you show me how you held the case so still.” “Both paws low,” Bramble said. “Both eyes open,” said Cinder.





They practiced together. Cinder pointed with one claw. Bramble kept the wood from wobbling. “Groove first,” Cinder said. “Steady paws,” Bramble answered. “Then down,” they said together. Click. Open. Click. Closed. The hollow log no longer sounded cross. It sounded like a small, careful answer.

“One check together,” Bramble said.
Cinder’s tail rose. “Then one peek?” Bramble
considered the shiny blue pebble. “Then
one peek.”





Cinder placed the path pebble on Bramble's wall, where it caught a slice of daylight. "The path ends at a bright dot," Cinder said. "Like a clue," said Bramble. "Like a place to begin," said Cinder. The painted path curled toward its bright little dot.

Back at the keepsake case, Cinder lowered the lid. Click. The wiggly corner sat snug in its groove. Bramble listened, then smiled. “Home, little case,” he said. “Home, bright path,” Cinder answered. Above them, daylight touched the painted dot on Bramble’s wall.



EVERYONE AT THE CREEK



Bramble

COMMON
WOMBAT

The steady big-
kid guardian



Skip

MUDSKIPPER

The tiny little
brother who
cannot wait his
turn



Cinder

COATIMUNDI

The nosy
neighborhood
explorer



Sora

SANDHILL
CRANE

The tall
watchful big-
sister neighbor



Hush

TAWNY
FROGMOUTH

The tall
nervous big
cousin who
thinks nobody
can see him



Tuck

SHORT-BEAKED
ECHIDNA

The littlest
cousin who is
always a bit too
close



Nix

SUGAR GLIDER

The littlest
rocket sibling

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.

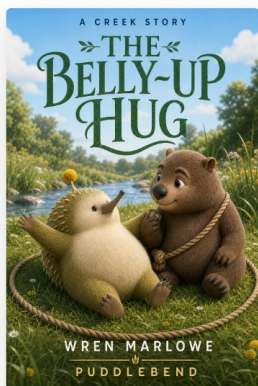
These stories are about the ordinary, difficult business of being a friend: waiting your turn, going back for what you dropped, letting someone hold you when you are all spikes.

WREN MARLOWE

Wren Marlowe makes quiet, funny picture books at the water's edge: small creatures working out how to be together.



ALSO IN A CREEK STORY



The Belly-Up Hug



Cinder and the Missing Moon



Cinder's Paw Band



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puddlebend.com

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When a little lid will not stop
clacking, Cinder and Bramble
learn that a careful check can
make a big noise small.



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