

A CREEK STORY

THE DROPPED ROPE



WREN MARLOWE

PUDDLEBEND



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*For the ones who go back
for what they dropped.*



The Dropped Rope

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Bramble laid his thick rope across two smooth creek stones. It made a low, safe line over the shallow water. Nix crouched on the bank, tiny wings stretched wide and coral tail pennant twitching. “One-two-THREE. Gone!” she chirped.

“Not gone yet,” said Bramble. He held one tassel in each paw. “We check first. Then we go.” Nix bounced on her toes. “I checked the sky. It is blue. Can I be first?”





Bramble pointed to the far stone. “Check one: where will you land?” Nix squinted. “There. The round one. Easy.” “Check two: what will hold you?” asked Bramble. Nix spotted the rope and nodded quickly.

Before Bramble could ask check three, Nix sprang. Her pennant flashed. Her wings caught the breeze. Then one hind paw snagged the rope. Down dropped the loose end, sliding between the stones with a wet plunk.





Nix landed on the far stone with a squeak. The rope lay below her, looped around a root in the middle of the creek. “I can swoop down,” she called. Bramble widened low on the bank. “First, we see what it is caught on.”

Nix glided low over the water. “It is around a root,” she reported. “And the current is pushing it under.” Bramble leaned forward, but the root was too far from his sturdy paws. The rope dipped and pulled tighter.





“I will tug it from above,” said Nix. She hooked both paws around the rope and flapped. The loop only squeezed harder. “Oh,” she said, puddling flat on the stone. “That was not a helpful pull.”

Bramble tried his plan next. He found a long fallen reed and reached from the bank. The reed bent, the root stayed put, and the rope slipped another inch under the water. Bramble lowered his head. “That was not a steady reach.”





For a moment, neither friend spoke. Nix watched the current make tiny arrows around the root. Bramble watched her tail pennant point downstream. The rope was still there, but it would not wait forever. Creek water hummed around the stones.

“I know where the loop is,” Nix said quietly.
“But I cannot tell which way to pull it.”
Bramble looked at the moving arrows.
“I can hold a line. But I cannot see above
the root.”





Nix's ears lifted. "What if I tell you where?" Bramble's rope tassels stopped swinging. "And I pull only when you say." Nix grinned. "That sounds like check three."



Nix flew in a slow circle. “A little left. Now lower. Stop!” Bramble eased the reed under the loop. “Now lift the far end,” Nix called. Bramble pressed his paws into the mud and lifted, steady as a small hill.



The loop rose above the root. Water streamed from it like silver threads. “Now toward you!” cried Nix. Bramble drew the rope in one careful pawful at a time until the wet tassel landed safely on the bank.

Nix swooped over and wrapped the dry part of the rope around her middle. “I am sorry I launched before check three,” she said. Bramble nodded. “I am glad you told me what you could see.”





“Can we try the crossing again?” Nix asked. Bramble looked at the creek, then at the rope. “Yes. Together. Check one?” Nix pointed to the far stone. “Landing place.” “Check two?” “Rope held by you.”

Bramble waited. Nix did not spring. She took one slow breath. “Check three: I go when you say go.” Bramble smiled under his heavy brow. “Steady. Go.”





Nix glided over the shallow creek while Bramble held the rope firm. She landed on the round stone, then turned at once. “Your turn. I can see the safe place for your paws.”

Bramble crossed with the rope between them. On the far bank, Nix's pennant fluttered beside the rescued tassels. "We check together," she said. Bramble gave the rope a happy little shake. "Then we go."



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 SKY STORY



The Missed Leaf



The Landing Branch



The Cloud That Would Not Stay



The Shadow That Followed



PUDDLEBEND

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THE DROPPED ROPE

NIX'S THREE CHECKS



1. Water
Is it safe?



2. Footing
Can I land?



3. Wind
Which way?

Before a creek crossing,
Bramble and quick little Nix
discover that a pause, a plan,
and a friend can make
a brave jump feel **safe**.

WREN MARLOWE
PUDDLEBEND

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