



A CREEK STORY

THE
LANDING
BRANCH

WREN MARLOWE

PUDDLEBEND



The Landing Branch

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WREN MARLOWE



PUDDLEBEND

*For anyone who needed
somewhere to land.*



The Landing Branch

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At Reed Shallows, Hush stood very still beside a pale gum tree. His beak pointed up. His huge yellow eyes stayed wide. Morning water flickered blue between the reeds. The dry leaf behind his left eye made him look almost exactly like a skinny branch. Almost.

A breeze tickled the reeds. Hush whispered, “Branch. Branch. Branch.” Across the water, Nix spotted his tall shape. Her wings opened at once. “A landing branch! Me first!”





Hush saw Nix zip closer. He wanted to say, “I am not wood.” But the words hid behind his wide flat beak. His feet pressed deep into the soft mud. If he stayed still enough, perhaps she would notice the leaf, the feathers, the eyes.

Nix skimmed over the reeds.

“One-two-THREE. Gone!” she called. Her little feet reached forward. Hush’s eyes got even rounder. At the last moment, Nix landed right on top of his head.





“Oof,” said Hush, so softly that Nix did not hear. Nix balanced on one foot and spread her wings. “Best branch ever,” she said. “It is warm and wobbly.” “I am warm,” Hush breathed. “And I wobble.” Hush stayed stiff as a fence post.

Nix tried a bigger bounce. Hush tipped sideways. A reed bent beneath him. “Wait,” Hush whispered. “Please wait,” he tried again. Nix heard only the rustle. “Branches do that,” she said. “They say shhhh when the wind comes.”





Hush tried pointing with one wing. Nix thought it was a twig moving. Hush blinked twice. Nix thought it was two drops of rain. “Not twig,” he whispered. He opened his beak, then closed it again. Every small signal turned into something else when Nix looked only for a place to land.

At last Hush sagged into a fluffy heap beside the reeds. Nix tumbled gently into the mud. Her coral pennant stuck up like a tiny flag. A dragonfly settled on the real branch overhead. “Oh,” she said. “My branch has feathers.”





Hush pulled the dry gum leaf over one eye. “I was trying to be unseen,” he whispered. “But I did not want to be landed on.” “I should have asked,” Nix said. Nix’s ears folded low. “I was trying to be fast. I did not look properly.”



They sat quietly while a dragonfly hummed past. Then Nix pointed to a real branch over the shallows. “How can I tell?” Hush looked at it. “Ask first,” he said. “Ask me?” said Nix. “Ask every time,” said Hush. The words came out small, but they came out.



“Ask a branch?” Nix asked. Hush’s wide mouth made the tiniest smile. “Ask the thing you think is a branch. It might answer.” Nix looked at him carefully. “Are you a branch?”

Hush lifted his head. “No. No. No. I am Hush.” Nix nodded. “May I land beside you instead?” Hush checked the soft mud, then scooted over. “Yes. Beside is good.” “Thank you for telling me,” Nix said.





Nix landed beside him with both feet in the mud. “I am beside you,” she said. “I see that,” said Hush. This time she looked before she leapt. Hush did not freeze. He fluffed his feathers and pointed his beak toward the real branch. “That one is wood.”

“May I use that one?” Nix asked the branch, then glanced back at Hush. A little breeze rocked the wood. Hush listened. “It did not say no,” he said. “But check if it will hold you.”





Nix tested the branch with one paw, then two. It stayed firm. “Check one: real branch. Check two: strong branch. Check three: no friend underneath.” “And check four?” Hush asked. “Listen for an answer,” said Nix. Hush gave a pleased little puff.

Hush tapped the branch. “Check the wood. Check the space below.” Nix folded her wings. “Firm above. Clear below,” she said. “And before I land?” “Look for my nod.” Nix waited. “I can do that. I can wait.”





Nix landed softly on the real branch. “I checked the branch, the space, and your nod,” she called. Hush stood in the open reeds. When Nix waved, he raised one wing. “You heard me before you landed,” Hush said. “I heard every word, and I waited,” Nix answered.

On the real branch, Nix stood with both feet planted and her wings folded. Below, Hush waited in the open reeds, one wing raised. The gum leaf behind his eye trembled in the bright morning breeze.



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 Dropped Rope



The Cloud That Would Not Stay



The Missed Leaf



The Shadow That Followed



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THE LANDING BRANCH



When Nix mistakes quiet Hush
for a branch, the friends learn that
speaking up can help
everyone land safely.

WREN MARLOWE
PUDDLEBEND

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