



A CREEK STORY

THE MISSED LEAF

WREN MARLOWE

PUDDLEBEND



The Missed Leaf

WREN MARLOWE



PUDDLEBEND

*For everyone still learning that
waiting is a way of listening.*



The Missed Leaf

Copyright © 2026 Puddlebend Studio

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Written and illustrated by Wren Marlowe.

ISBN 978-1-9999-9001-5 (hardcover)

First edition, 2026

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published by Puddlebend Studio · puddlebend.com

Printed in the United States of America

The text is set in Atkinson Hyperlegible, designed for legibility by the Braille Institute.

The title and dedication are set in Fraunces.



After a bright little rain, Creek Park shone with silver puddles. Skip popped from one to the next, making round splash rings. Sora stood on Lookout Rock with her brass spyglass tucked close. Today they had invented a game: Leaf Spotters.

“I find from down low,” Skip called. “Plop! I’m here!” Sora lifted her long neck. “And I find from up high, hmm. The first person to spot the yellow leaf wins.” A yellow leaf swirled once near the reed gate.





Skip scooted into the shallows. From the water, the creek looked like a busy sky. Pebbles flashed. Minnows winked. Each small wave pushed a leaf-shadow across his eyes. “There. No, there. No, wait, wait, wait!” he bubbled.

Above him, Sora turned her spyglass slowly.
“I see a yellow speck by the far bend. Hmm.”
Skip sprang up to look, splashing so hard
that the reeds shook. The yellow speck spun
away behind a curtain of grass.





“Oh, sorry,” said Skip, sliding flat. “I only wanted to see it too.” Sora’s neck made a worried S. “I only wanted one quiet moment to track it.” The creek carried their game farther downstream.

They tried Sora's way first. Skip held very still beside a pebble marker while Sora watched from the rock. A breeze lifted three yellow leaves at once. "Which one?" Skip whispered. "I cannot tell," Sora said. "They all look the same from here."





Then they tried Skip's way. Sora folded her tall legs and peered beside him at the water's edge. A leaf bumped a root, dipped under foam, and vanished. "It went beneath us," Skip cried. "I cannot see beneath these ripples," said Sora.

Skip darted between the roots. Sora hurried around the bank. They searched the sunny mud, the cool shadows, and the tiny pool beneath the stepping stones. At last, Skip's eyes sank low. "Maybe the leaf won," he said.





Sora looked toward the far bend. “Maybe we each saw only half of where it went.” Skip opened his mouth to answer, then closed it. For one whole breath, he watched the water instead of filling the quiet.



In that breath, Skip noticed a thin line of bubbles slipping between two reeds. “Something is moving under there,” he said softly. Sora raised her spyglass. “And from above, those reeds point straight toward the pebble marker. Hmm.”



“You tell me where,” said Skip. “I will tell you what the water does.” Sora stretched tall. “Left of the marker. Just past the bent reed.” Skip glided forward. “The current turns right there. It is carrying something slow.”

Together they followed the bubble line to a quiet little pocket behind a root. The yellow leaf had tucked itself there, bright as a button. Skip did not splash. Sora did not hurry. They both stared, then both laughed.





“You found its hiding water,” Sora said.
“You found its hiding direction,” said Skip.
He lifted one fin. Sora lowered one wing.
Their careful high-five made the smallest
plip in the creek.

“Do we win?” Skip asked. Sora considered the leaf, the root, and their two wet reflections. “I think we found it together. That is a different kind of win.” Skip grinned. “A two-person win! Best kind.”





The yellow leaf floated free again. This time Skip watched the bubbles while Sora watched the bend. “It is heading for the willow shade,” Sora called. “And it is spinning toward the smooth stone,” Skip answered.

They raced after it without rushing each other. Sora called what she saw from above. Skip called what he saw below. Their clues met in the middle of the creek, exactly where the leaf bobbed into a patch of blue sky.





“Leaf Spotters, round two!” said Sora. Skip drew himself tall on both fins. “Ready when you are.” Sora smiled. “I see it first.” Skip waited, eyes bright. “Now you see where it goes.”

The yellow leaf sailed beneath the willow shade. Skip followed along the waterline, watching close. Sora paced the bank above him, spyglass raised. At the smooth stone, Skip's bubbles rose into Sora's quiet hmm, and both friends watched the leaf spin on.



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 Landing Branch



The Cloud That Would Not Stay



The Shadow That Followed



PUDDLEBEND

puddlebend.com

ISBN 978-1-9999-9001-5

A CREEK STORY

THE MISSED LEAF

Skip looks down low
and Sora looks up high,
but the leaf they nearly
miss is easiest to find
together.

WREN MARLOWE



PUDDLEBEND

ISBN 978-1-9999-9001-5
US \$19.99 • CAN \$25.99

