

Melanie's Desert Adventure



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Illustrated by: Jupiter Chao

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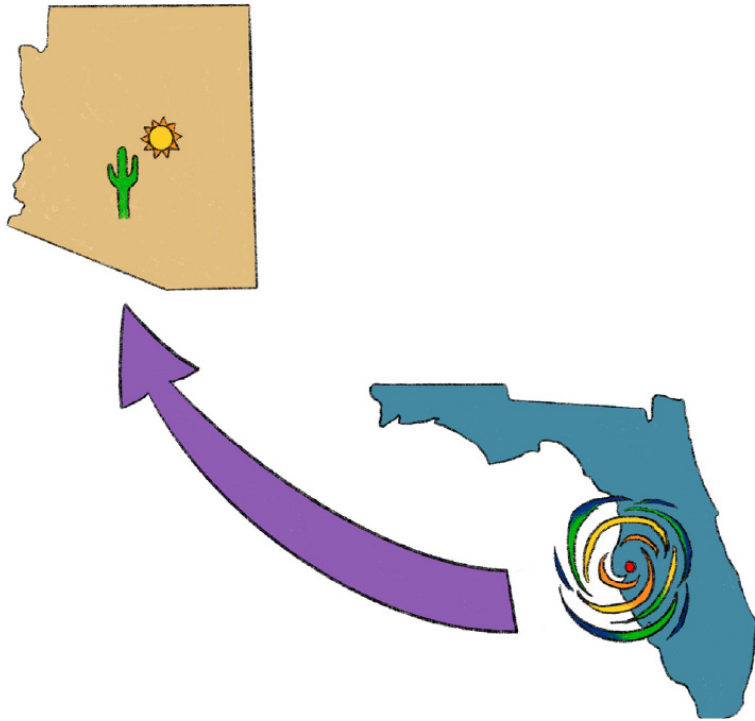
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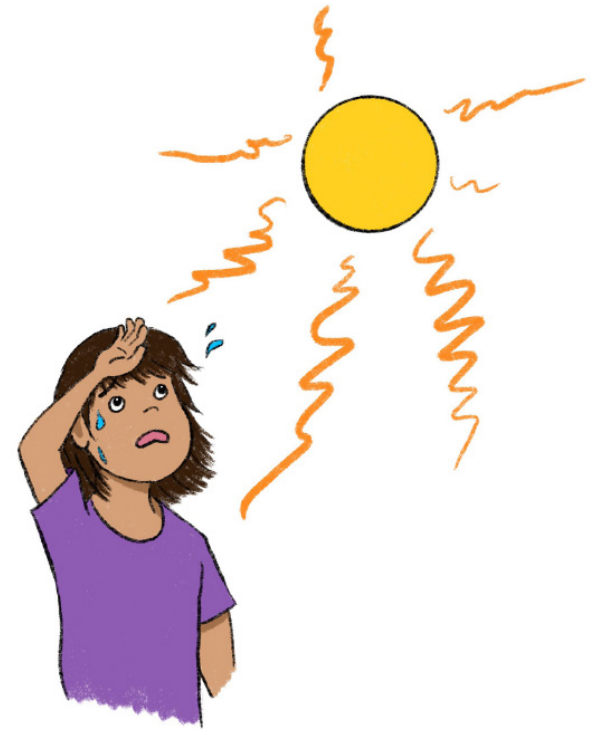
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*Dedicated to
the future generations that will
make a difference in the world*

After a hurricane hit Melanie's family in Tampa, Florida they had to move states and find a new place to live.

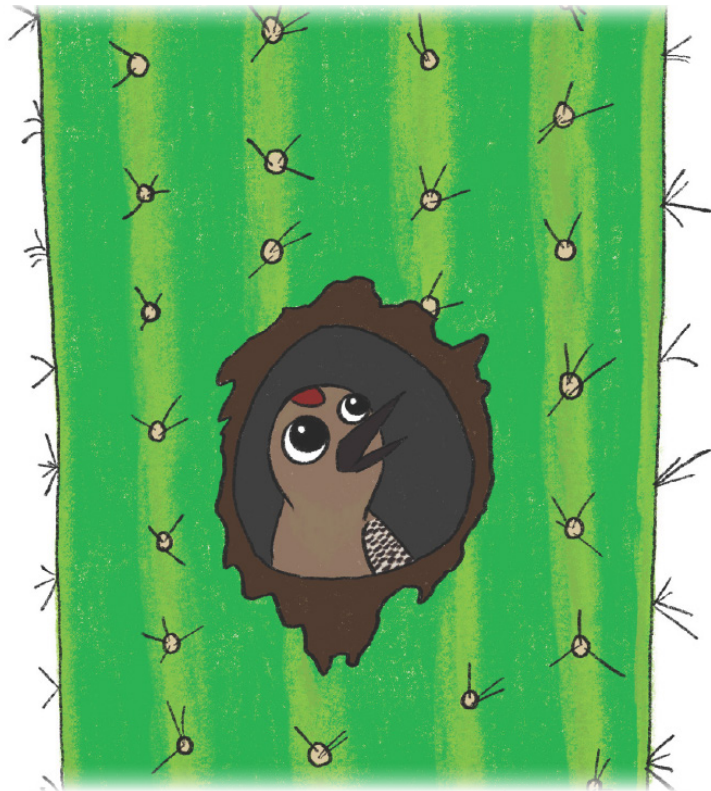


Melanie and her family moved across the United States to Scottsdale, Arizona where hurricanes never happen. Melanie's parents say Arizona is a bright and sunny place with lots of friendly people.



One Saturday, Melanie's parents decided it would be fun to go on a local hike near a place called South Mountain. Melanie hated being out in nature plus Arizona was too HOT to play outside.

Wren was out on her daily adventure, flying to different cacti to visit her friends. Her friend Saguaro was her favorite cactus of all. He was bright green and had beautiful pink flowers all over him. Saguaro was telling her that he was worried about his family members on the other side of the mountain. They said that men with really big machines were threatening to take them away to build more houses in their place.



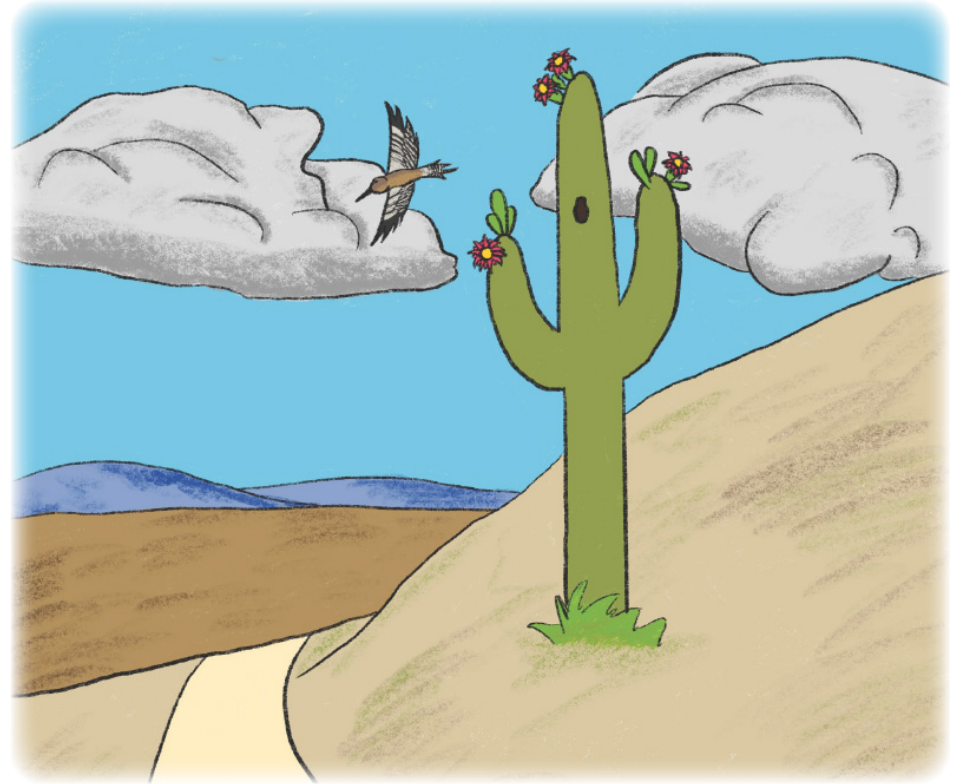
Wren was confused how Saguaro knew this was happening to his family on the other side of the mountain when he remained in the same spot every day.

Saguaro told Wren that it's a thing called **Biosemiotics**. It allows living things to send codes and signals to one another. The cacti have large root systems that spread out to right below the surface of the dirt, they are about the size of a school bus. They are used to pull rainwater and communicate with one another.



He told Wren that as a Saguaro, he is an important figure to the whole desert, especially to the indigenous communities in Arizona. The Tohono O'odham tribe calls him a **Keystone Species**.

On the hiking trail up to the top of the mountain, Melanie's dad told her mom about his new job. The construction company he works for will be developing the land by the mountain. Melanie was excited to see the new buildings he'll be working on.

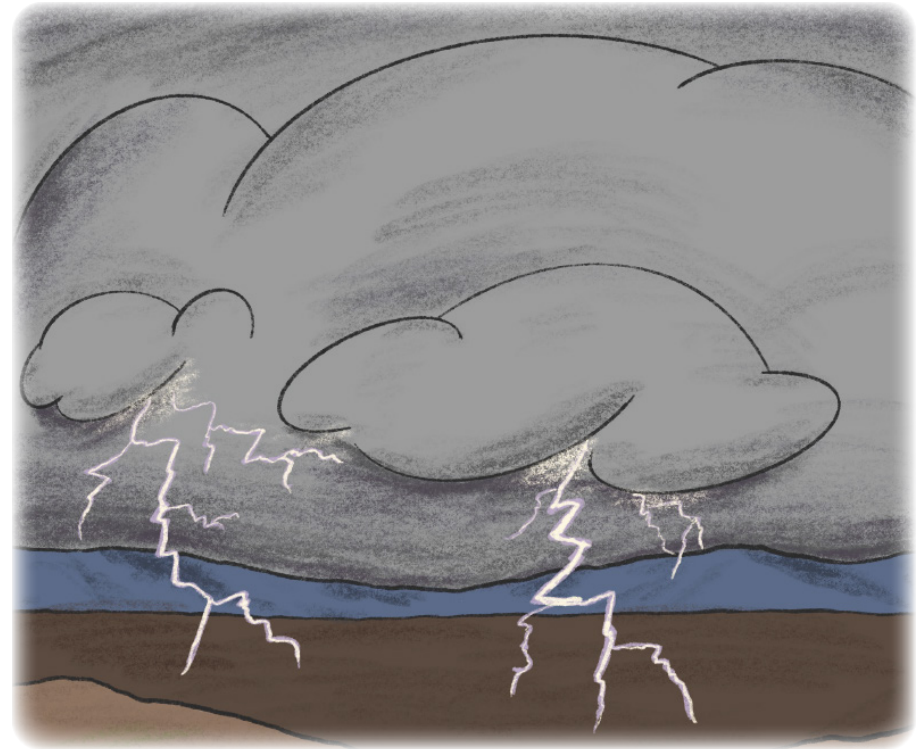


As Melanie and her family reached the top of the trail, Melanie could see big yellow bulldozers ready to work. Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted a bird flying away from a cactus and the clouds above becoming darker.

Wren looked out at the view down the mountain, sad that people would ever want to ruin it with big buildings. She noticed a human family– a little girl and her parents. She overheard the girl complain about how hot and boring the desert looked. She even heard her say that she'd rather be anywhere but Arizona!



Wren was sad to hear this. She loved the Sonoran Desert and hated leaving it for her family's annual **migration**.



“I wish I could understand why she thinks like that,” Wren said to herself. Suddenly she heard a crack of thunder overhead. It must have been a summer monsoon making its way over the desert. Rain started to pour and all the humans ran down the mountain to try and take cover. She saw a large spark of lightning overhead. Then everything went dark.

Melanie woke up with a big headache. The last thing she remembered was running down the mountain during the big thunderstorm and seeing a flash of lightning. Her eyes hurt as she tried to look around and find her parents, but instead of being in her nice cold bedroom at home, she looked up and saw the big blue sky.

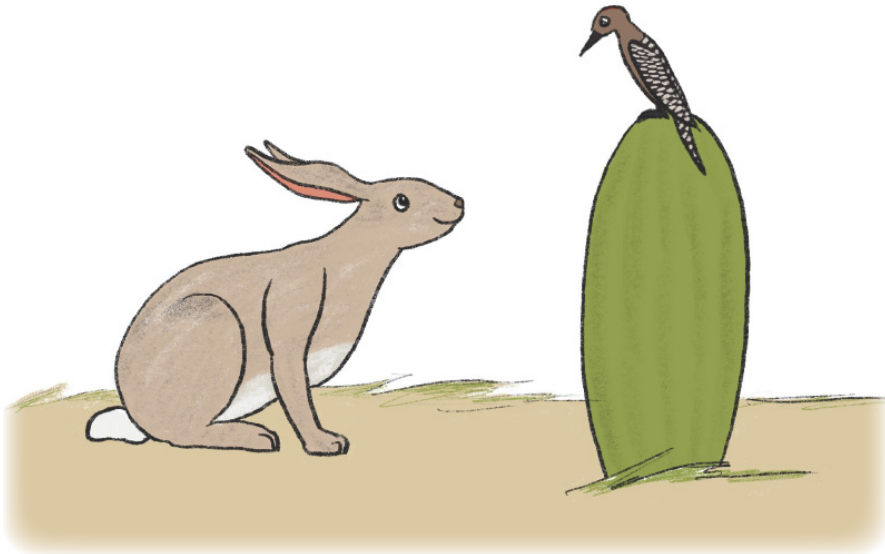


Melanie realized quickly that she was on top of a cactus! She looked down and saw that she wasn't her normal self, she was a bird!



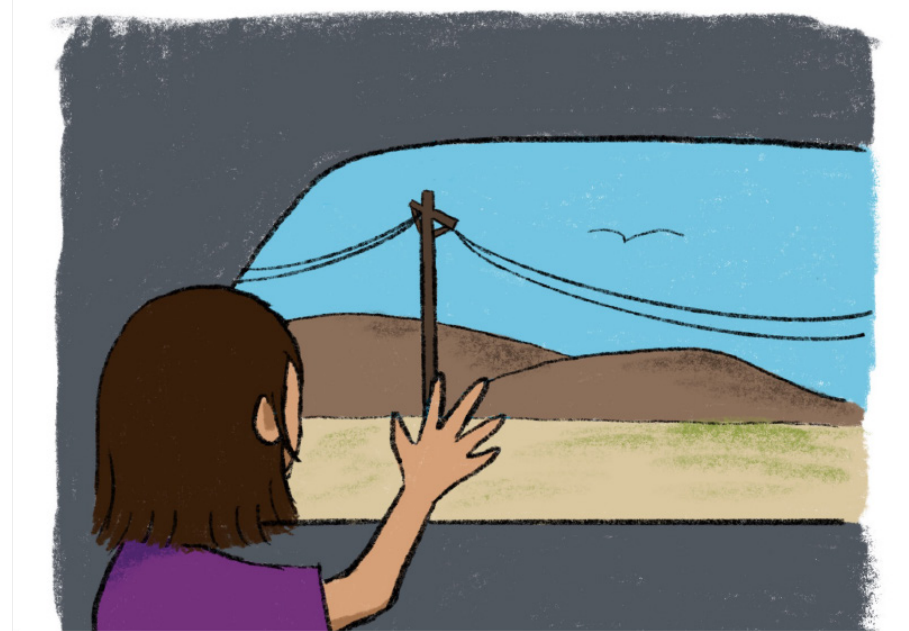
When she woke up, Wren was shocked to realize she was tucked into a bed and she had hands! Where did her feathers go? She was no longer a bird but a human. Wren quickly realized she had swapped bodies with Melanie, the little girl she saw on the mountain. She was walking funny and struggled to use her new legs.

Melanie began to fly and felt so free.



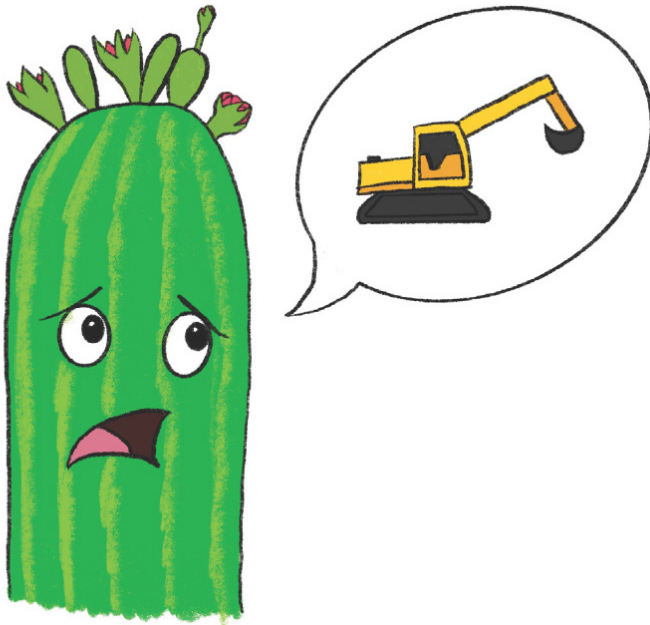
She started seeing the trees as her new playground, singing songs and having fun. She even started making friends. She realized that many trees, bushes, and cacti were where her new friends lived.

Wren heard a yelling coming from downstairs. "It's time to go to school!" yelled Melanie's mom. Wren had never been to school before. She was excited.



On the way to and from school, Wren pointed out all the plants and animals she recognized. It was so cool to see things from inside a car and not flying above the mountains.

Melanie began to feel more at home in the desert. She met a cactus named Saguaro who was talking with the plants and animals around him. After listening to Saguaro talk to other animals, Melanie learned that he was 150 years old and had seen a lot. He was very sad because his family's home was being destroyed.



Melanie realized it was her dad who was destroying her friends' homes! This made Melanie very sad. Where will they go? What will happen to her new playground? She knew immediately she had to stop her dad.

When Wren got home from human school she ran back upstairs to Melanie's room. Looking around Melanie's room, Wren saw pictures of a place with a beach. Melanie was with her friends and family, she looked happier in the pictures than when Wren saw her on the hike.

Wren realized that this place was not like Arizona's **environment** which must mean that it was somewhere else in the world and humans **migrate** just like birds do.



Wren went running downstairs. She had to get back in her body. "Can we please go on another hike?" Wren begged Melanie's parents. They were surprised. "Of course we can!" said Melanie's dad.

Melanie was flying high in the air when she suddenly spotted her own body and noticed her whole family was there. She wanted to say hi and started diving directly towards them!



Since she still didn't know how to fly very well she slammed right into her own body and hit Wren who was currently in it.

Clouds started to form above them and she fell asleep.

When she woke up, she was back in her body and Wren was fluttering around them.

Melanie's parents took her back to their house so she could recover. As soon as they got home Melanie couldn't stop crying.



Her parents asked her what was wrong and tried their best to comfort her.



Melanie started to explain to her dad that the place he wanted to tear down was where many birds and animals lived. She told him that the community of animals relied on the plants for food and shelter and without them they would go extinct!

She told her dad that he couldn't build there. He told her that if that would cheer her up then he wouldn't do it.



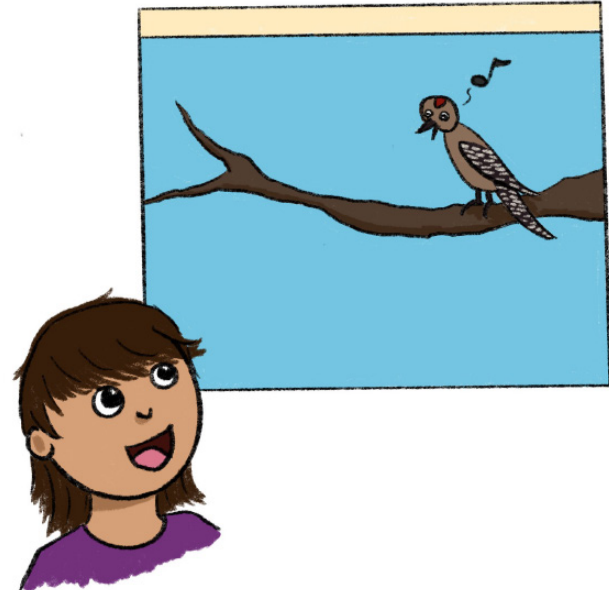
Wren was doing her usual routine flying from cacti to bushes, when she noticed that the people from the construction company were starting to leave.



She thought about what Melanie learned while being a bird and it made her proud to think Melanie just saved their entire community.

Melanie was relieved and felt happy that her dad listened to her.

She had just saved all her friends and the important **ecosystem** they lived in.



To show how thankful she was, Wren flew to her window and sang Melanie a pretty bird song in return for saving her home.

Glossary

Biosemiotics: The way that plants and animals talk/communicate with each other by non-spoken language (codes and signals).

Environment: The surrounding area in which many communities live.

Ecosystem: A community within an environment in which species live and interact with each other.

Keystone Species: A species that provides food and shelter to other animals and keeps ecosystems together.

Migration: When a group of species move to a different place because of the weather or for food.

Extinct: When a group of species no longer exists.

