

DESERT FRIENDS

TRAVELS WITH THE PACK



by **Linda Harkey**
Illustrated by Mike Minick

2nd Edition
Parent • Teacher
Activities
Included!



Story Monsters Press
Chandler, Arizona

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Linda F. Radke, Publisher
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4696 W. Tyson Street
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480-940-8182
Publisher@storymonsters.com
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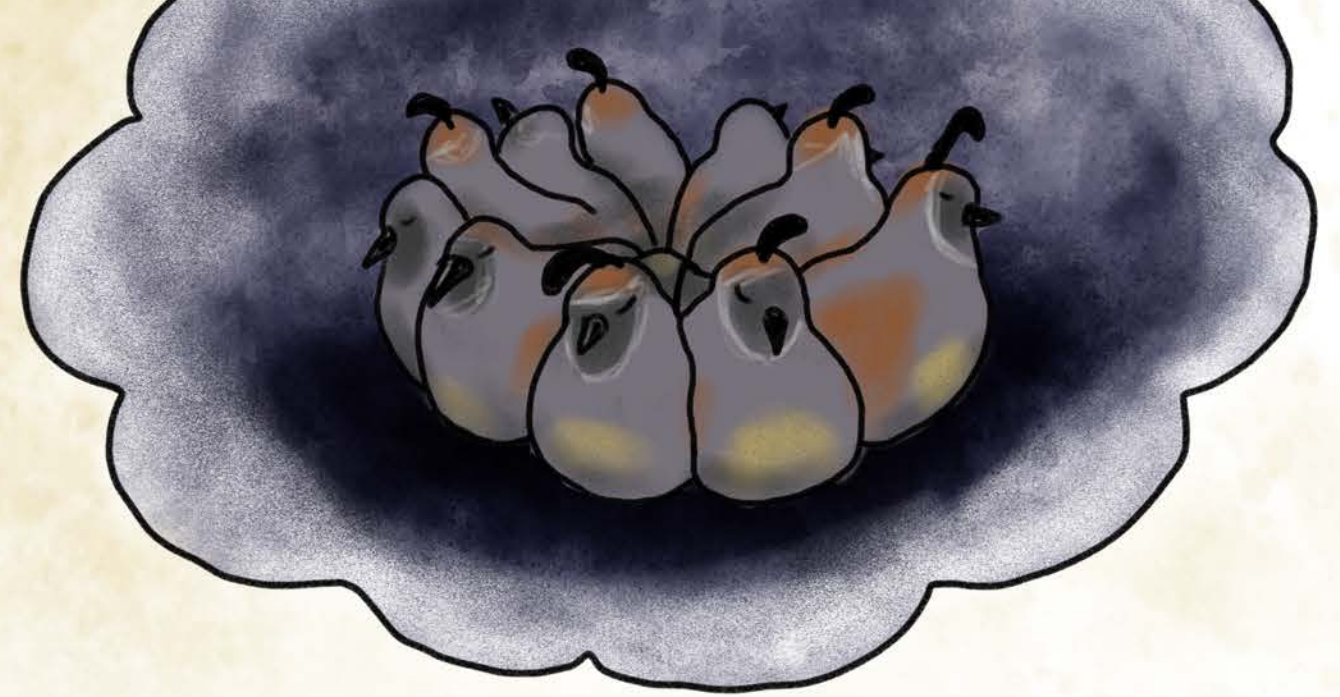


To my husband, Michael—
the source of many useful ideas, especially
concerning hunting dogs in the field.



Animal friends in the Sonoran Desert in Arizona are found in all **sizes, shapes, and colors.** **Rodney**, a brown-and-black-speckled roadrunner, has a shaggy crest, a skinny body, a splash of red and blue by his eyes, and a long tail and beak. His best friend, **Quincy**, a gray-brown Gambel's quail, has a chubby body, square tail, a small bill, and a question mark-shaped plume on top of his head.

They spend days racing each other through a dry, barren streambed called an **arroyo**. Sometimes Rodney and Quincy play a game to see who can jump the highest over desert scrubs such as cactus plants and spiny cholla cacti.



One morning, both birds were sunbathing by several cottonwood trees. Quincy asked Rodney, “Why do you expose the **black feathers** and skin on your back to the sun?”

Rodney answered, “When it’s chilly in the morning, that’s how I warm up.”

Quincy focused on Rodney and cackled, “My covey stays warm all evening by making a circle with our rear ends facing in and our heads facing out. **We look like a ball of feathers.**”

Rodney peered at Quincy. “You have a covey to help you keep warm? I’m by myself.”



"You could join us but you're way too long and skinny with that tail and beak. We couldn't keep you warm." Then, while pecking the ground, Quincy asked, "Why do people call you a **roadrunner?**"

Rodney clucked. "I guess they've heard the story about roadrunners running on roads toward cars and getting smashed. Personally, I only run on desert floors. I'm powerful and fast! Did you know I can outrun a lizard?"

"Well, I can **outrun** ants and spiders," Quincy chirped as he scratched the ground.

Rodney turned around to face Quincy. "Sometimes I see you walking backward. Why do you do that?"

"I poop better that way." Quincy chuckled.

After **squawking** some more, both birds took their morning nap.



Later that day, Quincy found Rodney perched on a **prickly pear cactus** pad near the arroyo. A plump brown-and-gray lizard had become an easy target for Rodney.

Quincy squealed as he hopped through the desert floor toward Rodney.
“Rodney, what’s that hanging out of your beak? What’re you doing?”

Rodney thought, *Wouldn’t you know?*

Quincy wants to talk while I’m eating.

Rodney mumbled as he held onto the lizard.

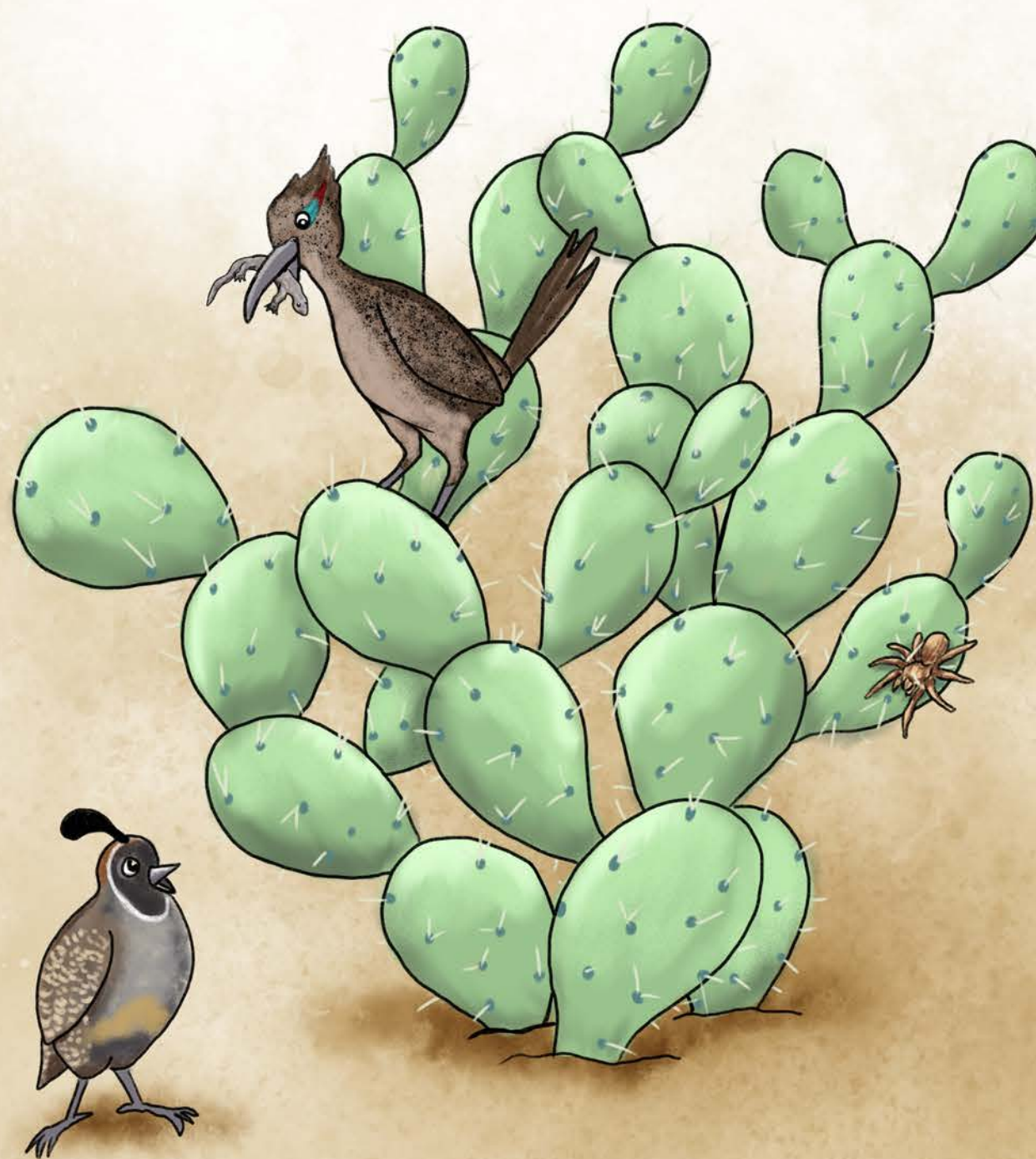
“Today is the best hunt ever! I just caught my favorite meal—a lizard!”

Quincy glanced at Rodney and the cactus.

“Is that a **tarantula** stuck on the needles of the green cactus pad?”

Rodney sighed. *All I have to do is keep my beak partially closed, so my meal won’t fall out!*

“I picked up this blonde tarantula last night and forced it on the pad to save it for another meal. I thought you might be hungry and would want to eat with me. You know, it just doesn’t get any better than this—food, water, and **friendship**—all in one meal!”



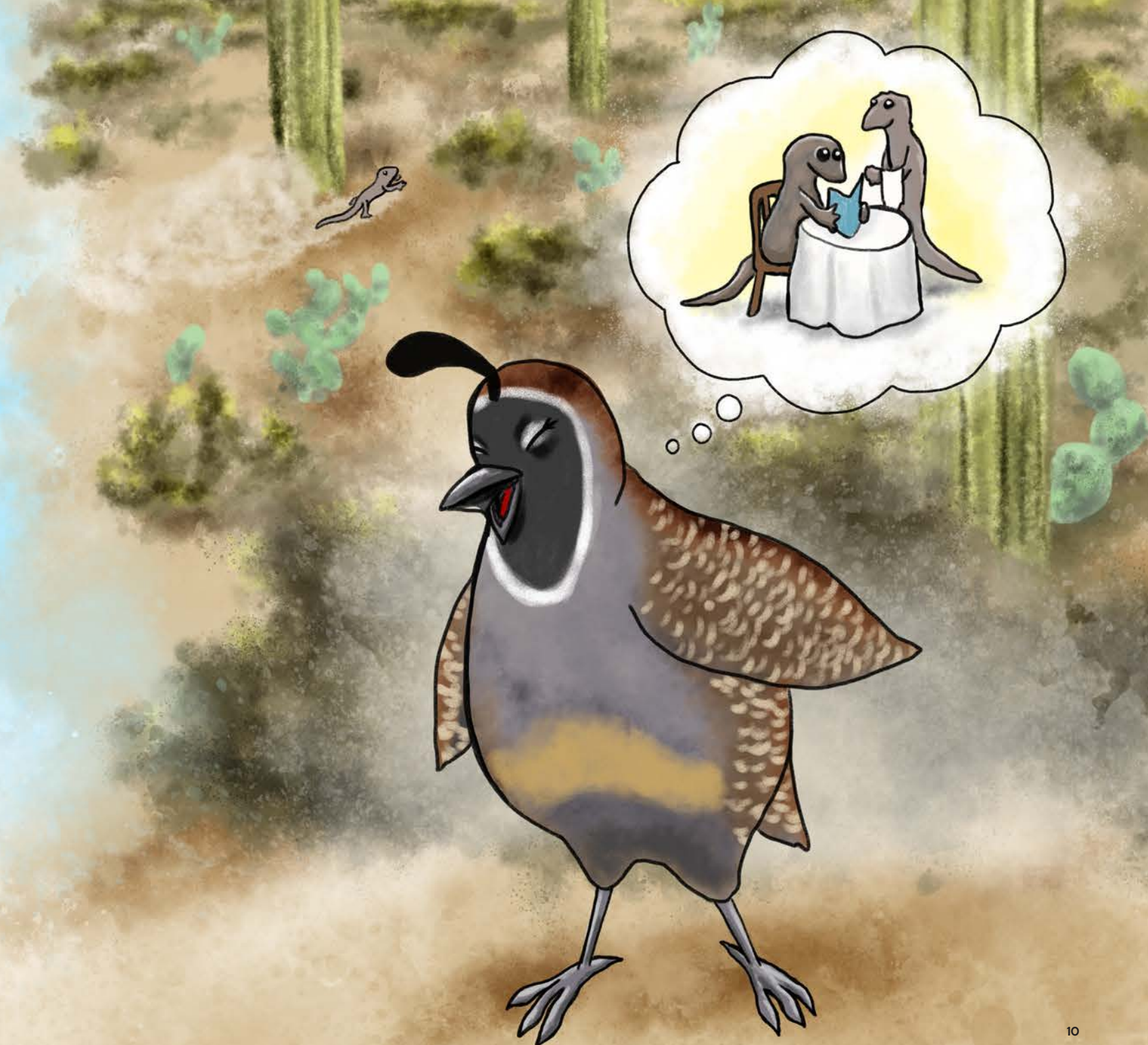


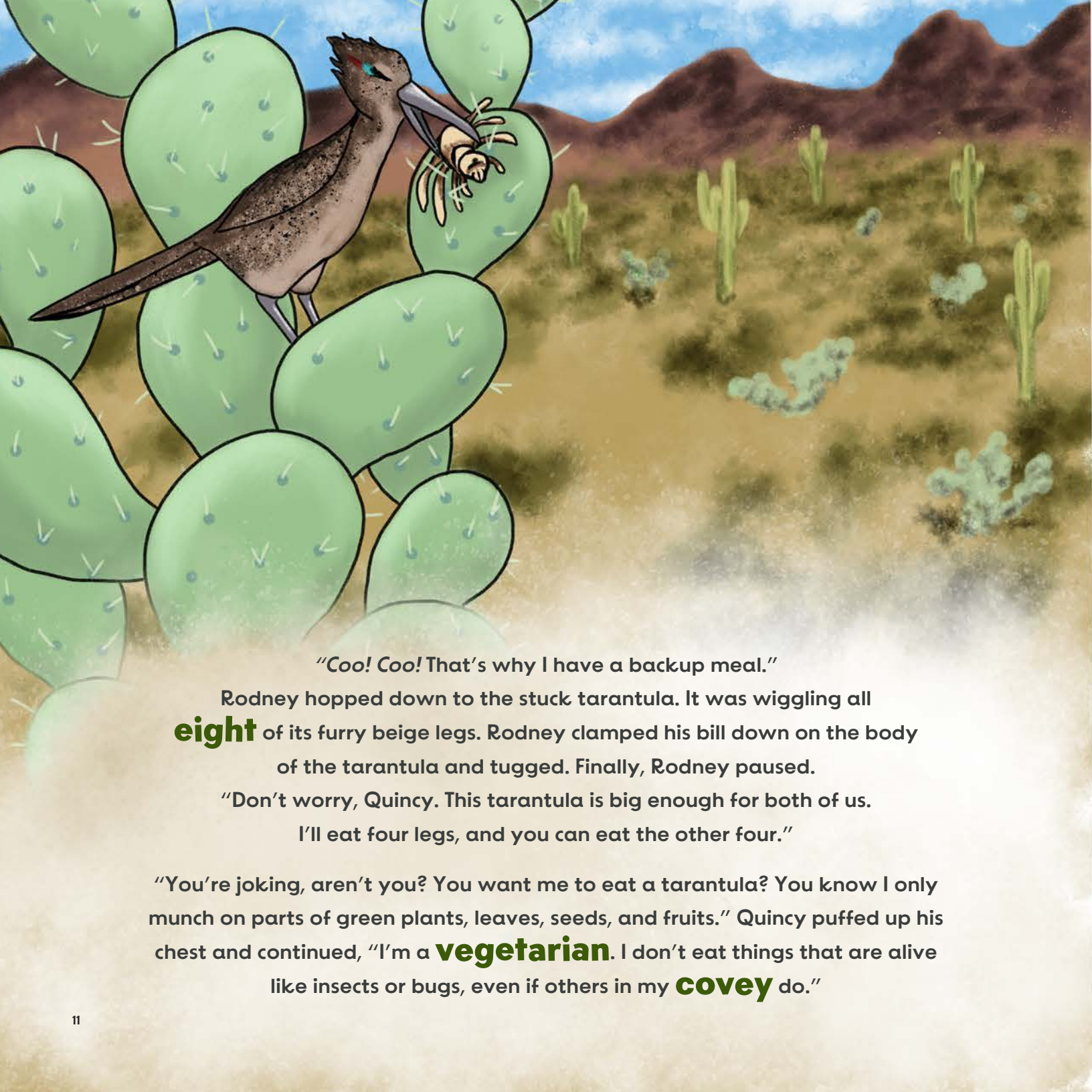
Poor Rodney. He opened his beak too wide.

Thud! Plop! Plop!

The lizard bounced down the flat cactus pad, landed on the desert floor, and darted away.

"*Kaa! Kaa! Kaa!* There goes your lizard. I wonder if he's going to the Lizard Café for lunch," Quincy chirped as he turned his head toward the cloud of dust following the lizard.



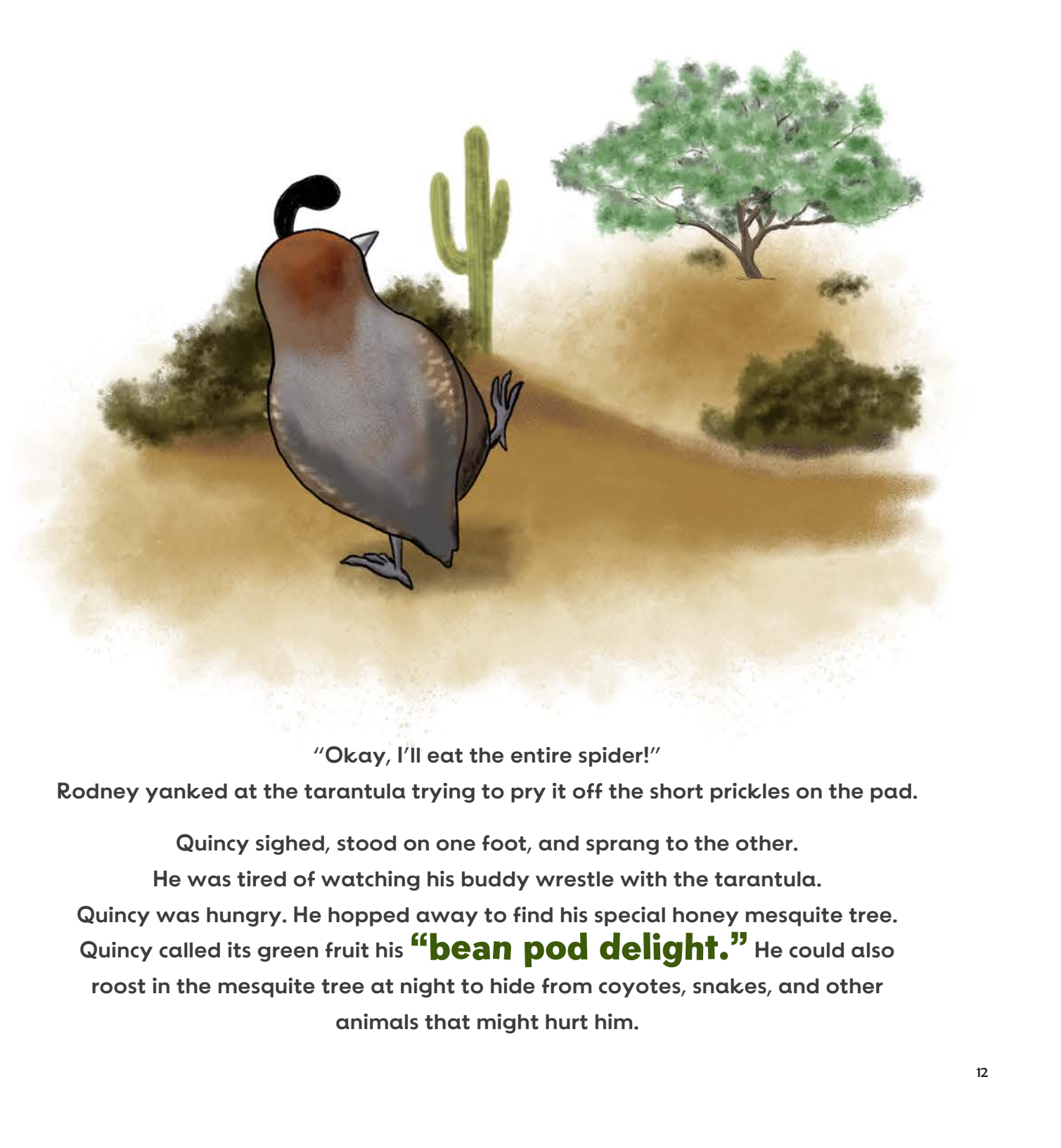


“Coo! Coo! That’s why I have a backup meal.”

Rodney hopped down to the stuck tarantula. It was wiggling all **eight** of its furry beige legs. Rodney clamped his bill down on the body of the tarantula and tugged. Finally, Rodney paused.

“Don’t worry, Quincy. This tarantula is big enough for both of us. I’ll eat four legs, and you can eat the other four.”

“You’re joking, aren’t you? You want me to eat a tarantula? You know I only munch on parts of green plants, leaves, seeds, and fruits.” Quincy puffed up his chest and continued, “I’m a **vegetarian**. I don’t eat things that are alive like insects or bugs, even if others in my **covey** do.”



“Okay, I’ll eat the entire spider!”

Rodney yanked at the tarantula trying to pry it off the short prickles on the pad.

Quincy sighed, stood on one foot, and sprang to the other.

He was tired of watching his buddy wrestle with the tarantula. Quincy was hungry. He hopped away to find his special honey mesquite tree. Quincy called its green fruit his **“bean pod delight.”** He could also roost in the mesquite tree at night to hide from coyotes, snakes, and other animals that might hurt him.



Later, Rodney and Quincy were again sunning themselves and snoozing in their favorite flat sandy bottom of the arroyo. Suddenly, Rodney heard noisy breathing and odd beeping sounds coming from behind him.

“Co-coo-coo-coooooo!” Rodney yelled.

“Intruder alert! Intruder alert!”

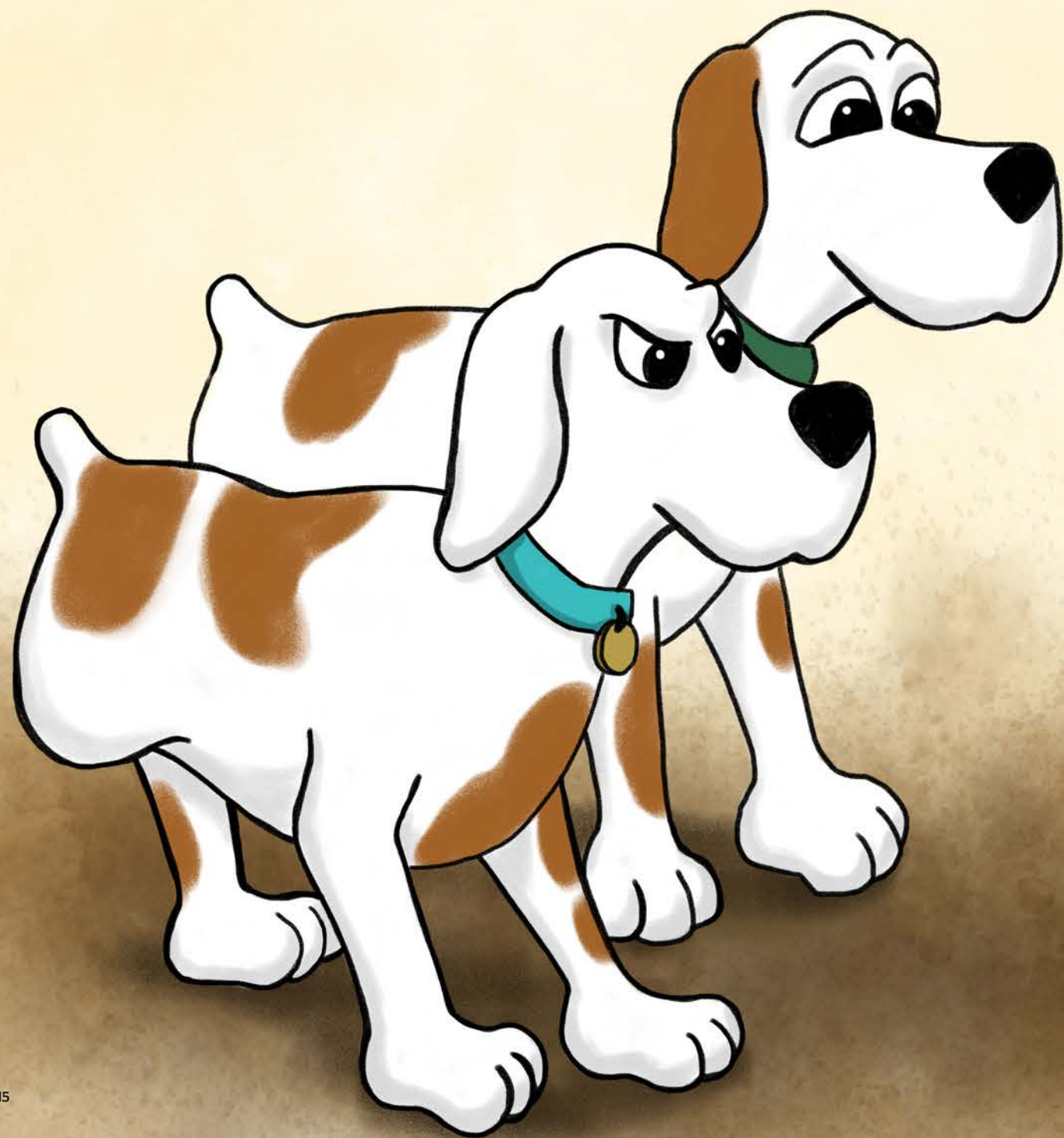
Wake up, Quincy! There are two huge shadows hanging over us!”

“Chip! Chip! Chip!” chirped Quincy, who was trembling.

“Freeze, Rodney. They won’t see us. Where’s our cover? We need a thick **shrub** to hide under—not all this sand! What are they?”

Rodney **whined** and **clacked** with his beak.

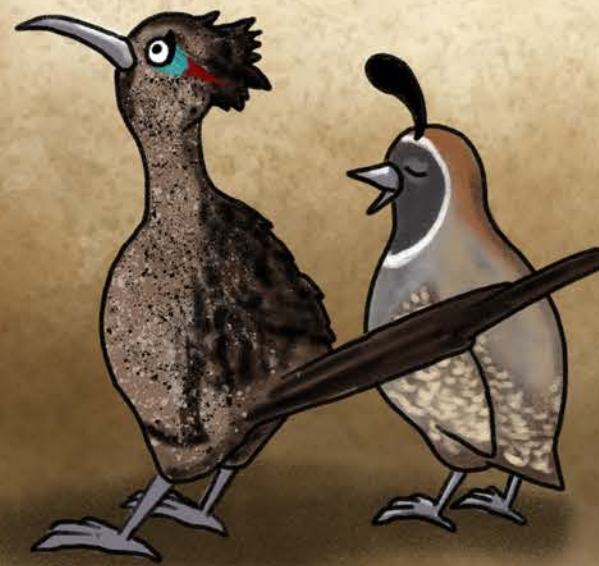
“I don’t know what they are, but we have to be brave and face the shadows.”



As they turned around, Quincy chirped,
“Oh, it’s just **Gator** and his three-legged buddy, **Tripod**.
He was born without his fourth leg. They look like twins;
both their coats are brown and white.”

Rodney trembled. “Aren’t you afraid of them?”

“No, Gator and I are friends. Last year, Gator pointed the covey I was in.
We started **gabbing**—you know, getting to know each other.
As soon as Gator heard his hunter, he jumped and barked.
That was Gator’s signal for us to fly away, which we certainly did.
His hunter didn’t have a chance to shoot us.
Uh-oh, Gator, is it hunting season again?”

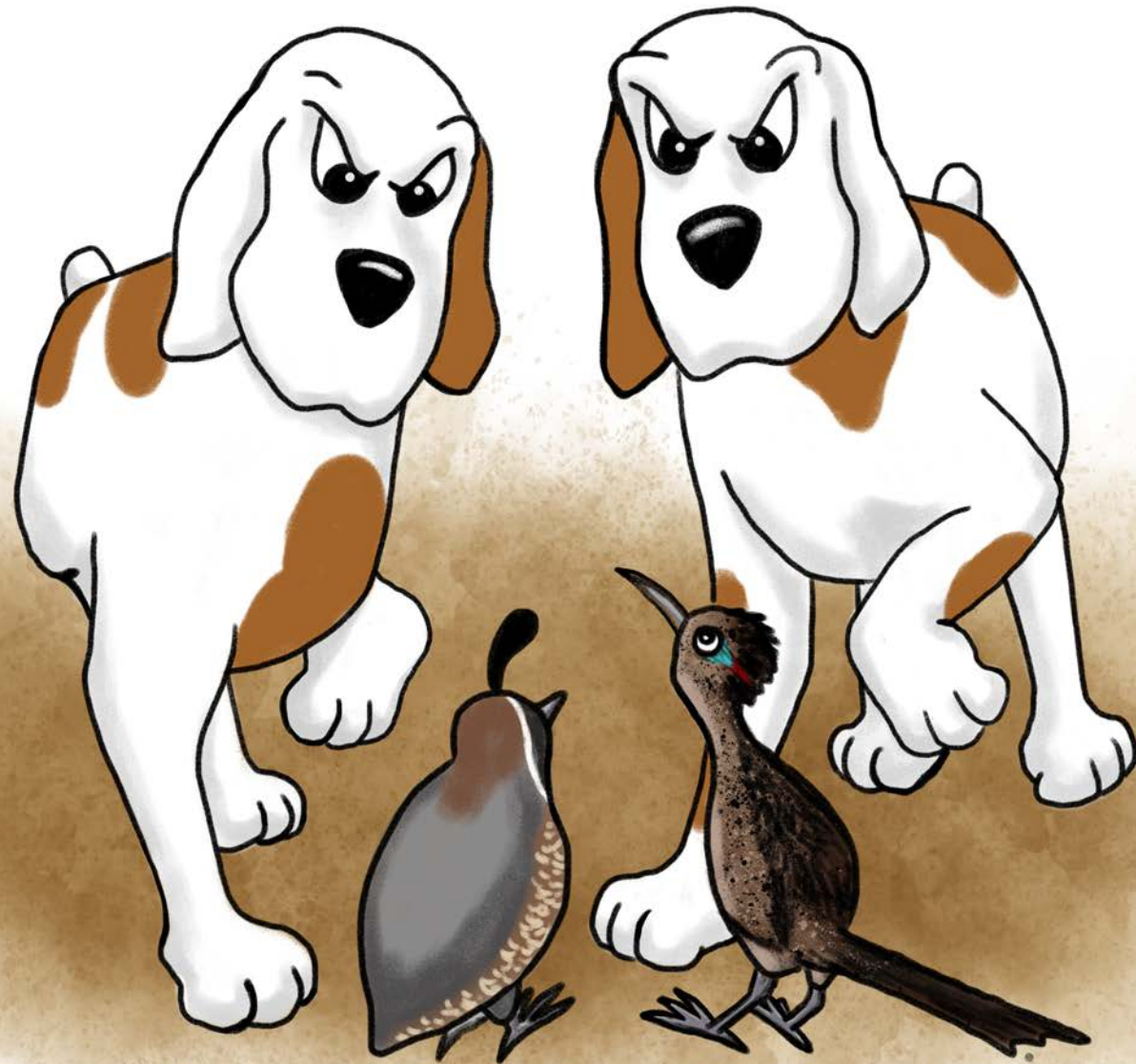


"Of course, it is. Why else would Tripod and I be **pointing** you?"

Gator growled but didn't change positions.

His body was perfectly still with his tail up and one front leg cocked.

Tripod nodded and stared at the birds. "Are these both quail? They look so different from each other." Tripod still froze with his tail straight up.




"I'm not a quail! I am called Rodney the roadrunner. Go find your own creek bed. This is ours. And what's that beeping sound around your necks?"

Gator said, "The collars start beeping when we stop to point birds. The Great One has a **receiver**, and he'll be here shortly."

Rodney stretched his neck so he could see behind the dogs.

"Who's the **Great One**?"

Tripod barked. "He's our hunter."



Rodney, terrified of the rumbling sound of water crashing against the banks of the arroyo, shouted, "Coo! Coo!" as he raced away from danger.

Quincy and Rodney didn't stop until they reached the desert floor above the arroyo.

Gator and Tripod heard the **thundering** water just as Quincy and Rodney did. They both sprinted down the **streambed**.

Suddenly, they all heard a low-pitched roar. It was the sound of tremendous amounts of muddy water swirling over sand and gravel and coming down the arroyo. The damp smells of **sage** and the morning's mountain thunderstorm were rushing toward them. They felt **vibrations** from under the sandy ground.

Quincy screamed as he flew out of the creek bed, "Get out now!"



The faster they ran, the faster the water rushed toward them.
Gator jumped out of the arroyo but plowed right into a **cholla cactus**.
He howled as the spiked thorns stuck high into his back right leg.

Tripod scrambled to leap out, but the force of the water swept him away.





Gator, Rodney, and Quincy ran along the bank of the arroyo following Tripod.

“Woof! Woof! Woof!” Gator howled. “Dog paddle, dog paddle, keep your head up!” The thorns of the cholla drove deeper into Gator’s rear leg so he lifted that leg up and sprinted on the other three.

Rodney, running like a streak of lightning, tried to keep up with Tripod and the charging water. He was so fast that his feet barely touched the ground.

Quincy, also a fast-moving bird, flew in short flights with fierce **wingbeats**, gliding to the ground. “Tripod!” Quincy screeched. “Head toward us! There’s a sandbar!”

Panting and splashing, Tripod struggled toward the long **sandbar**. He clawed at the sand, but the water barreled down the arroyo and swept him farther down the creek bed.

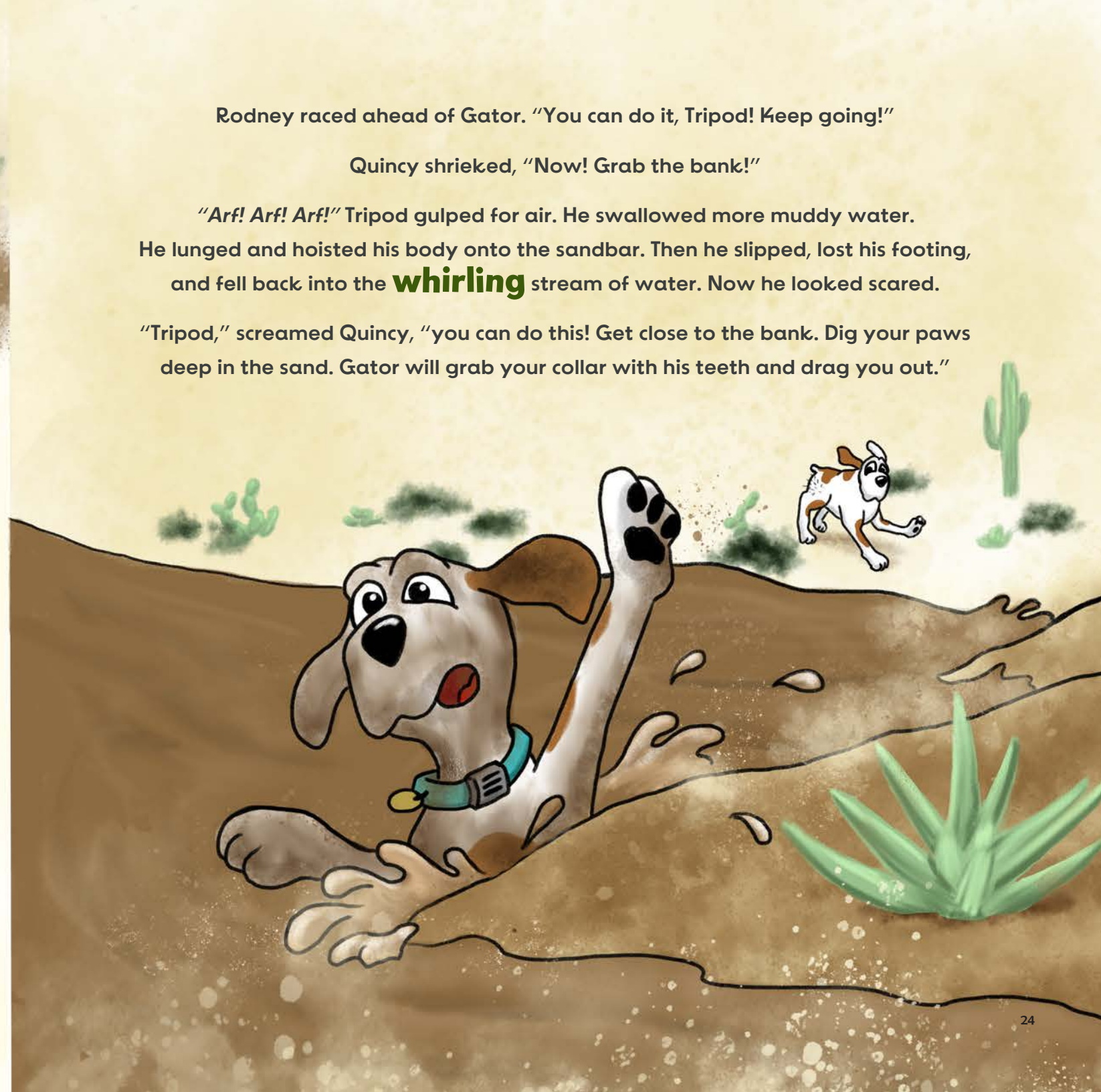
Gator, huffing and puffing from chasing after Tripod, barked, “Paddle! The bank is right here, along the **gully!**”

Rodney raced ahead of Gator. “You can do it, Tripod! Keep going!”

Quincy shrieked, “Now! Grab the bank!”

“Arf! Arf! Arf!” Tripod gulped for air. He swallowed more muddy water. He lunged and hoisted his body onto the sandbar. Then he slipped, lost his footing, and fell back into the **whirling** stream of water. Now he looked scared.

“Tripod,” screamed Quincy, “you can do this! Get close to the bank. Dig your paws deep in the sand. Gator will grab your collar with his teeth and drag you out.”



Gator, Rodney, and Quincy watched as Tripod leaped one more time, landing on the sandbar closest to the bank. Gator bit down on Tripod's collar. He yanked and tugged and finally **dragged** him out.



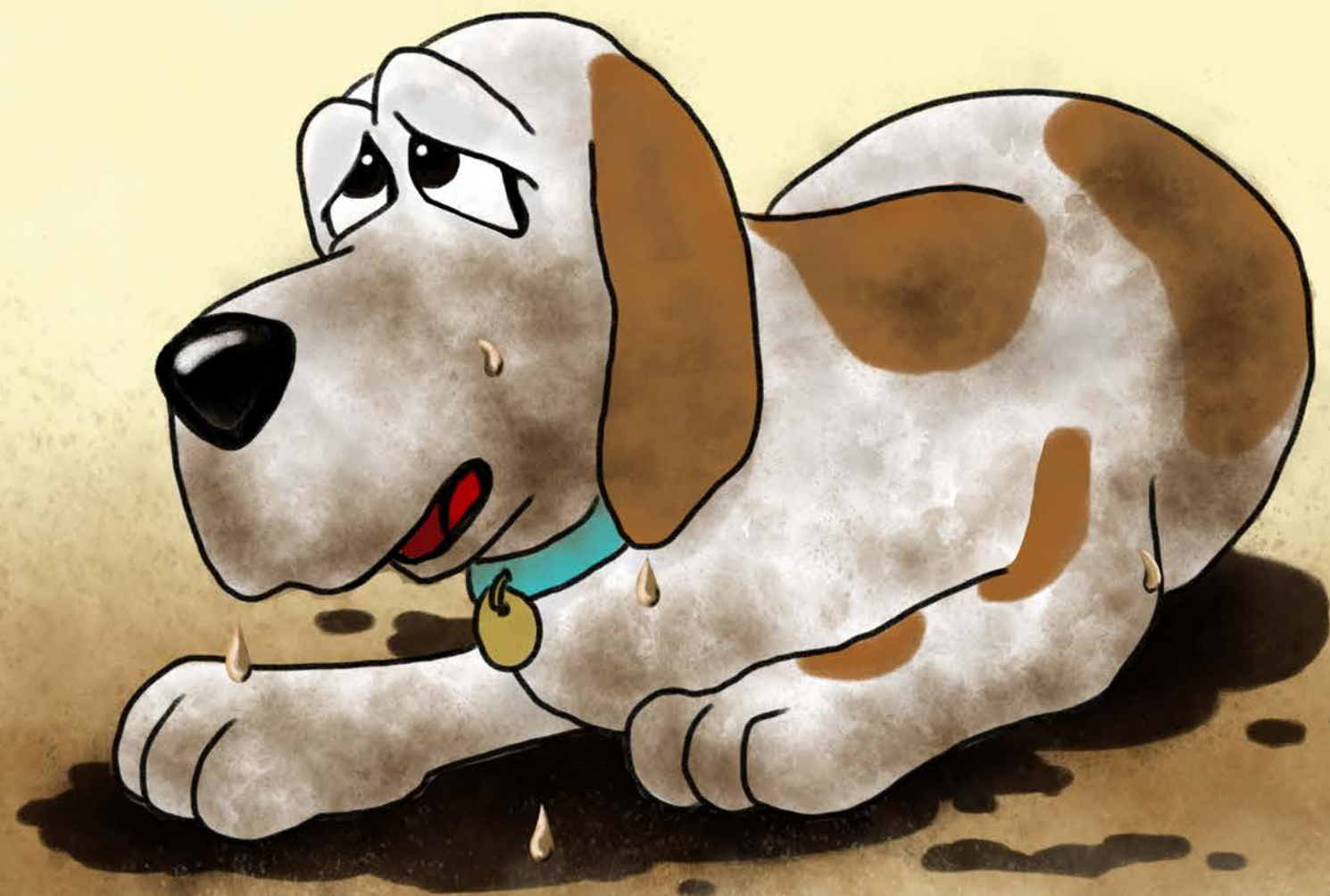
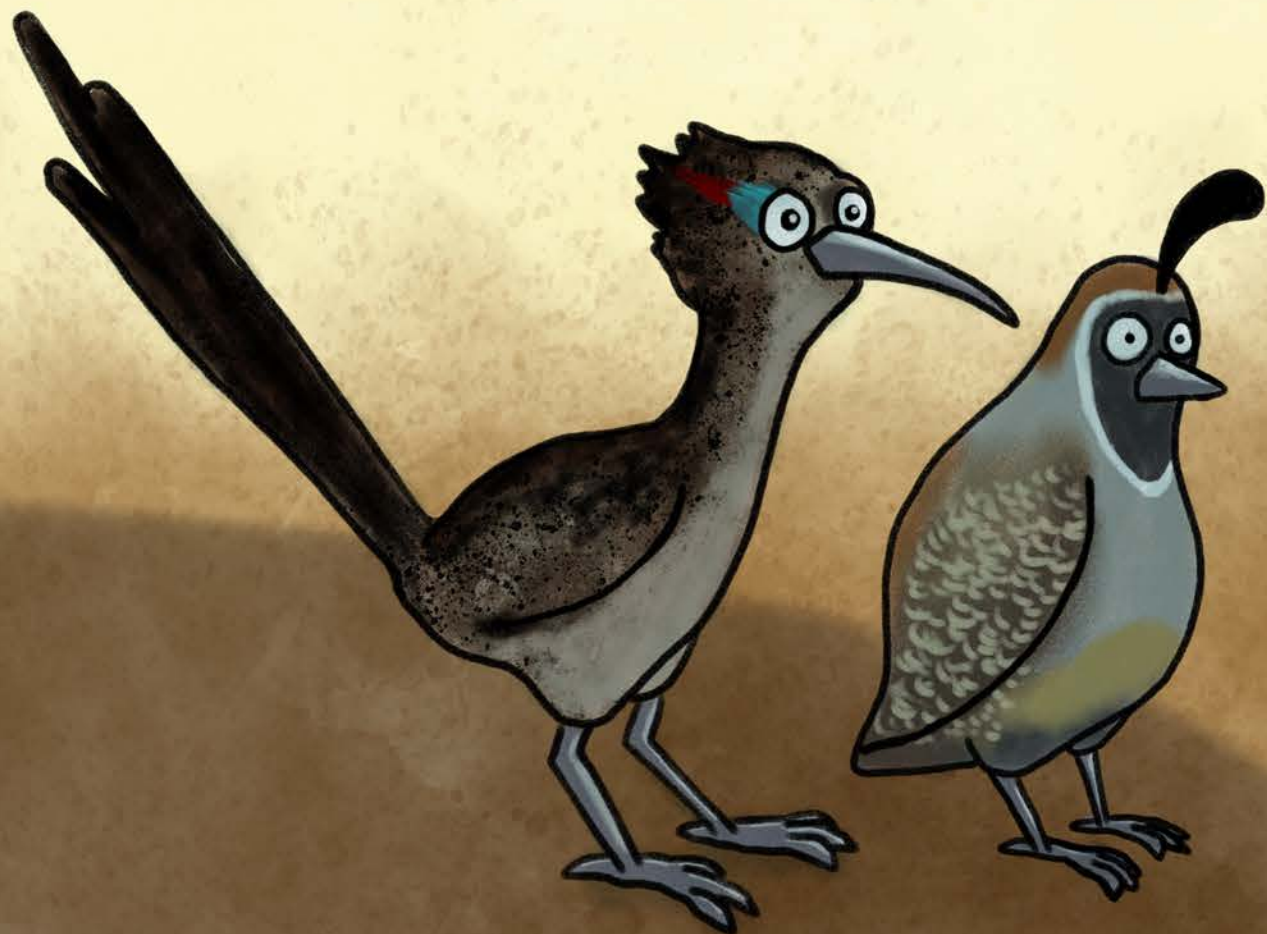
Tripod was drenched. He coughed, wheezed, and spit up brown, sandy water. Then he sank down on the sand, panting. Quincy, Gator, and Rodney surrounded him.

Tripod whimpered. "Thanks for **saving** me. I'm glad you're my friends."

Rodney screamed as he shook.

"There's another **gigantic** shadow over us!"

"Freeze! The shadow won't see us. We're invisible!" Quincy chirped.



"Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!" Tripod gasped and wheezed. "It's the Great One!"



Their hunter knelt down by Gator and patted him.
"Good boy! Good boy! That was a close one. You saved Tripod!"
He reached for his needle-nose pliers and gently removed the
stout cholla thorns from Gator's upper leg.

Gator howled, "Ouch! Ouch!"





The Great One patted Gator again and picked up Tripod.
“Boys, you must be tired. It’s time to leave. I had a hard time finding you with all that flooding, even with the beeper collars.”
He stood up and looked around. “What’s wrong with those two birds? They haven’t moved since I arrived. I wonder what **adventure** you’ve had with those birds.” The Great One shook his head.

“Come on boys. Let’s go home.”



Rodney and Quincy watched the Great One and the dogs leave.
Tripod and Gator barked and **glanced** back at the birds.

Quincy turned to Rodney. "Creak! Creak! Rodney, I'm tired from all that flying and running. It's time for our meal and another nap."

Rodney glanced at Quincy. "We weren't **invisible**. That hunter saw us!"

Quincy straightened up and glared at Rodney.

"My covey says we're only invisible when hunters are farther out.

Once they're close, they can see us.

Let's call it quits for the day and find a snack."





Quincy strolled along with Rodney, thinking about their two new friends. *I can't wait to see them again. This has been the most **excitement** we've ever had!*

Words to Learn

arroyo	a dry creek bed
cholla cactus	a cactus that has sharp needles that break off in pieces
covey	a group of birds
desert	a sandy area or place with little rainfall
mesquite	a thorny tree or shrub that grows very deep roots
prickly pear cactus	a common cactus with fruit and needles on pads
saguaro cactus	large cactus with branches or arms
sandbar	a raised area of sand in a dry creek bed
Sonoran Desert	area in the southwestern United States (parts of Arizona and California along with northwestern Mexico)
vegetarian	eats only vegetables

Five Senses

Teachers, Parents, Librarians – Use of Five Senses

Have the students pretend to put themselves in one or more of the illustrations and ask them these questions:

What do you **SEE?**

Example: p. 3-4

What do you **HEAR?**

Example: p. 19-20

What do you **SMELL?**

Example: p. 5-6

What would you **TASTE?**

Example: p. 23-24

What would you **TOUCH?** Does it feel rough or smooth?

Example: p. 25-26

Arizona Map

Have the students color and write in definitions of prickly pear cactus, saguaro cactus, and cholla cactus.



Fun Facts

Gambel's Quail

- They live in flocks during the winter.
- If you are raising quail and give them treats, they will cry when you leave.
- Gambel's quail is named in honor of William Gambel, a 19th-century naturalist and explorer of the southwestern United States.
- They are known to walk backward when they poop.
- Quail rarely fly, but do run on the ground.



Roadrunner

- They perch high in trees to sunbathe.
- The roadrunner is quick enough to prey upon rattlesnakes.
- They are known to engage in dancing which could be a form of courtship behavior.
- The name "roadrunner" comes from the fact that they are frequently seen running alongside desert roads.
- They are known to chase any intruder away.



About the Author

Linda Harkey's experiences as a mother, schoolteacher, Sunday school teacher, volunteer docent, and hunting dog owner have inspired her to write the award-winning children's book series Hickory Doc's Tales. She dedicates all her books to her family—Michael; Owen and Carrie; Morgan; Austin and Mica; Averie, Justus and Uriah; and Alec.

She is the author of ten other children's books:

The Budding Staff (2005)

Hickory Doc's Tales (The Pack: First Generation) (2017)

The Remarkable Story of Willie the Crow (A Hickory Doc's Tale) (2018)

Solitary Toes and Brown-Headed Cowbirds (A Hickory Doc's Tale) (2019)

Doc, Willie, and the Pack: Secrets, Gifts, Family (A Hickory Doc's Tale) (2019)

Doc's Dog Days (A Hickory Doc's Activity Book) (2019)

The Wayward Path of the Devil and Mr. Snake in the Garden of Eden (2021)

Chatty the Hen Pheasant (Travels with the Pack) (2021)

Desert Friends (Travels with the Pack) (2022)

Blake Jake's Unusual Day (2023)

About the Illustrator

Mike Minick is a graphic designer and illustrator based in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He lives with his wife, Joey, and their two children.

About the Publisher

Story Monsters Press, an imprint of Story Monsters LLC, is a publisher of children's books that offer hope, value differences, and build character. Each book also includes a curriculum guide complementing the story for parents and educators to use with young readers.

About the Book

Animal friends in the Sonoran Desert in Arizona are found in all sizes, shapes, and colors. Rodney, a roadrunner, and his best friend, Quincy, a Gambel's quail, spend days racing each other through dry creek beds called arroyos. One day Rodney and Quincy meet two hunting dogs—Gator and his three-legged buddy, Tripod. Danger surrounds the four friends as a thunderstorm sends tremendous amounts of muddy water down the arroyo. The force of water sweeps Tripod away. Who will come to his rescue? What will happen when the Great One (the dogs' human hunter) arrives?

Solitary Toes and Brown-Headed Cowbird: A Hickory Doc's Tale

"Author Linda Harkey has written an entertaining children's book. The personalities of all the animals will delight children. From the first page you will find the hunting dogs humorous and engaging. The artwork by illustrator Mike Minick brings Harkey's words to life. The collaboration between the two is extraordinary. Readers will enjoy the banter between BJ and the pack, especially Zeke who likes to stir up trouble and then blames someone else."

LITERARY TITAN REVIEW (FOUR STARS)

*"Linda Harkey's book, **The Remarkable Story of Willie the Crow**, left a lasting impression on my first-grade students! Several months after reading the book, we did a picture walk of the book, and here are some of the responses I received from them about the book. 'I learned about teamwork.' 'It is always important to help our friends.' 'Don't call people names.' 'Help people who are hurt.' 'Don't judge people by their cover.' 'Be respectful to your family.' And 'Don't be mean to others.' They all loved the book and want another one!"*

ROLLINDA SAUNDERS, FIRST GRADE TEACHER, EAGLE NEST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Hickory Doc's Tales Collection

"The stories are funny, outrageous, and the characters are beautifully illustrated as well: I only wish that they were available when I was 5–9 years old. The books are simply magical, well worth a read especially for youngsters progressing to chaptered stories. Great books for kids with vivid imaginations."

JOHN CROWLEY, TALKING BOOKS