

*Saving The
Winged
Explorers*



BY STAR WRITERS' COLLECTIVE 4



THE KIDS' CANCER PROJECT
WRITE A BOOK IN A DAY

Parameters Form

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Published by Year 10 Team, Star Writer Collective 4, Star of the Sea College, 80 Martin Street, Brighton, Victoria, 3186.

Eleanor Anderson
Alexis Boug
Quinn Donga
Heidi Heath
Ruby Higgins
Jayana Ingram
Sienna Miglino
Mars Saunders
Gray Zisopoulos
Jiah Chung (Illustrator)

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Title: Saving The Winged Explorers
Aged recommendation 8-14 years

The Prologue

Not too long ago and not too far away, there was a cosy little bird-watching club called *The Winged Explorers*.

If you were lucky enough to enter the dwarf structure through the colossal, scarlet red door, you would walk into a lively building stacked with hundreds of bird encyclopaedias and decadent drawings of birds hung up proudly on the walls that were not crowded by bookshelves. The rustic building replicated an old Scout Hall with high ceilings, polished floors and the large hall echoed with the excited chatter of members as they sat around thick wooden tables placed on worn, persian rugs.

The clubhouse, located in the heart of the sanctuary, was also home to gorgeous, exotic birds who soared through arched windows and the ornate ceiling rafters, creating a colourful blur above the chatter. There were always an abundance of these winged creatures, yet the dark, wooden floors managed to stay squeaky clean. This was the work of the club founder, Mr Fowler, who prided himself in 'potty training' every bird that flew into his fine establishment.

Mr Fowler was an often frazzled man, who, although small in size, had one of the largest hearts you could find. His blazer was overwhelmed with metal brooches displaying his favourite flying creatures: native birds such as the Tawny FrogMouth, and his favourite, the Fairy Wren. The lapels of his brown twill blazer, sagged under the weight of these brooches from in a sad V towards his waist.

The Winged Explorers had been bubbling along for many decades, being joined by members young and old who shared a singular passion. The sanctuary's forest became the regular meeting spot for hundreds of these statue-like watchers, whose chests proudly possessed gold-winged club badges, and whose eye wear almost permanently ringed by the impression of their binoculars.

Yet, as any story goes, the pleasure did not last. The beautiful grassy land and neighbourhood surrounding the clubhouse had been bought by a construction company called *Develop & Co.*, which seemed to have a never-ending list of plans and schemes that prevented the club from thriving.

Members gradually decreased after noting the decline in birds due to the polluting work sites, professors refused to come out and provide their feather-filled lectures when forced to compete with the crashing of metal next door. The clubhouse became an empty shadow of what it once was with a towering structure of scaffold that now lurked above it.

Soon, *The Winged Explorers* began to surrender to their fate and the club grew into a ghost house. They desperately needed someone to pull them out of this monochrome nightmare.



Chapter 1

Wren didn't want to move to a place so drab and unforgiving, but she had no other option. This was the only studio hiring and she needed something stable.

Maybe she shouldn't have become a yoga instructor. Too late now. She had no clue how she was going to survive in this kind of society, one without any sense of life. All she knew was that she needed to find colour and she needed it fast.

After some research, she stumbled upon a semblance of hope. A beacon amidst this stark darkness. A bird sanctuary.

Warmth and invitation radiated out from it, but it was barricaded on all sides by a seemingly impenetrable cold. The deathly buildings loomed over the sanctuary like it were a young child, the picture of innocence, swarmed by a crowd of ghouls. The buildings stood sharp, as if they were pointing their wirey fingers towards the small patch of green, whispering in their hoarse voices.

You don't belong here.

Wren shook away the thought and turned her back on the protruding building, centring her vision on the 'welcome' sign greeting her, dwarfed on either side by massive red doors. Yet, as she walked she could still feel the bulging grey eyes of the structures behind her, their lifeless pupils following her into the sanctuary and boring into the back of her skull.

Despite this, once she crossed into the sanctuary it was as if the horrors of her prior journey dissipated. No evil could reach her here. This was safe.

Wren smiled to herself as she looked up into the much kinder eyes of the scene before her. Rich forest, alive with a plethora of pigments, their branches dancing amidst the soft breeze whispering within her ears. The tallest trees canopied together atop her head as if they were shielding her from the destruction she knew to be just beyond this seemingly impossible slice of

heaven. Their thick branches wrapped around each other in a harmonious embrace, ensuring that no harm could enter beyond their bushy barrier.

And the birds. They were everywhere: from the foliage of the forest floor to the tip of the tallest tree, every bird a colour as unique as the next. Wren couldn't suppress her excitement as a warmth bloomed from within the depths of her chest, spreading outwards to the soles of her feet, spurring her to run. And she did. It was as if her feet had a mind of their own, carrying her along the trodden path. Her eyes flitted from bird to bird, and were filled with hues so utterly vibrant that she became almost dizzy. To her left sat a tiny yellow bird peppered with black spots, its casted foot splayed out in front of it as it soaked up the morning sun. To her right was a much larger bird, sitting regally atop a branch despite its bandaged wing. And above her, a greyish bird with a broken beak that, when it noticed her gaze, spread its wings broadly, presenting to her a series of rainbow under-feathers. Upon seeing her blooming smile, the bird puffed out its chest and released a gorgeous call that echoed between the tree trunks. More and more birds filled her vision, she couldn't stop moving, their beauty was impalpable, impeccable, unreachable.

And then she saw it.

She almost missed it too, so tiny in the vast pool of hues, but nonetheless breathtaking. Before her stood a tiny little creature, its feathers coated in the deepest, most awe-inspiring blue. Despite its pin-thin legs, it stood strong and unmoving, looking at her with just as much concentration as she did it. It was as if every other colour around it was inadequate, every other animal in envy, and yet simultaneously impressed.

If he hadn't spoken she would have completely missed the man beside her, standing in the same silent appreciation that she was.

"He's gorgeous isn't he?"

"What is he?", she whispered, not quite ready to look away, afraid that if she did he'd be gone.

"He's a fairy wren. Only one we have here. He's been pretty skittish since we rescued him so I'm surprised he's this close to us."

She nodded silently, now irrationally concerned that any sound she made would scare him away. Yet, there was one question that itched bitterly at the back of her tongue.

"Rescued? What happened to him?"

"He was a housebird, malnourished, mistreated. The lot. Eventually, the family handed him over to our care a few days ago. Poor fella doesn't even have a name yet."

"Jasper."

“Sorry?”

“I think his name is ‘Jasper’,” she said, her voice now hardened in resolve. Only now did she turn to the man and face him, only now did she take him in. He was a round man, plump and joyful. His face was etched and deeply **wrinkled**, either from smiling or stress, she couldn’t decide. Maybe both. Huge, almost comical glasses lay on the bridge of his nose, the dazzling sun reflecting from their lenses. He wore a raggedy brown blazer with a matching hat, each clutching onto years of age and wear, almost as weathered as the man himself. And there, pinned onto the lapels of his blazer, was a solitary brown feather, lying beneath a plethora of various bird badges. Nothing special about it, certainly not as special as Jasper’s feathers, but it was there, hovering directly over the man’s heart.

“I think so too, it suits him”, the man responded, pulling Wren out of her thoughts.

“I’m sorry, but I best be off. I have... *things* to attend to.” And as he spoke, the man’s face grew sombre, the light in his glasses dimming down until it was nothing but a memory. And then he was gone, and Wren was left to bask in the sweet song of Jasper as he soared somewhere into the canopy, his song eventually absorbed into the many voices composing a delicate terrestrial symphony.

Maybe this town wasn’t as bad as she first thought, all she needed was more time in this sanctuary.

Wren milled around for a few moments, taking in her surroundings once more as she moved out of the sanctuary toward the building at its centre. Birds were scattered around, sitting on the roof or flying in and out of its windows.

What this clubhouse lacked in size, it certainly made up for with its bright colours and **quirky** shape. As she entered, she was greeted with a chorus of ‘hellos’, before approaching one of the members.

“Good afternoon! My name’s Wren. I was hoping to join the birdwatching club! Would there be a person I could talk to?” As she continued to talk, the member’s face fell, but he sent her over to talk to an old man he called ‘Mr. Fowler’. Despite being left with a sense of unease, Wren quickly shook it off, and strode over to where the old man stood.

“Sorry to bother you, but are you Mr. Fowler?”

The man jumped at the sudden interruption, quickly scrambled his papers into a pile and then turned around, his huge, almost comical glasses, greeting her once more.

“That would be me, and ... oh! You are the nice young lady I was talking to earlier, aren’t you? I never did formally introduce myself,” he stopped and shook her hand, “My name is Mr Fowler, it’s lovely to see you again.”

“Likewise! I wanted to ask you about the possibility of joining the bird watching club! You see, when I was a child I loved to come to bird sanctuaries, I mean I always wanted to join a bird club, but ...” She started to trail off as she watched him look away, moving towards a nearby window.

Mr. Fowler sighed and beckoned her to join him. “I truly would love to have you join, and I can see you have a strong passion for birds. That’s something we’re always looking for! But I’m afraid you won’t be able to.”

“What! Why?” Wren couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She thought she had found a home, but she listened carefully as Mr. Fowler continued.

“Soon enough, I believe the bird sanctuary will be shutting down. The construction has already started to encroach around The Winged Explorers, and in a few days they’ll be starting to build an apartment complex on this land.”

Wren felt her heart slide down into her stomach. A deep, aching, sadness. The bright colours she had enjoyed only minutes before flitted through her mind. The birds with bandaged wings. The intoxicating smell of eucalypt. Jasper.

She stared forlornly at the floor and the old man sighed again. Then, as if an alarm had sounded in her head, Wren’s eyes widened and her mouth fell open before settling into a determined snarl. With a flick of her long, red locks, she turned on her heel and marched out the tall red doors. She would just have to stop the construction herself.



Chapter 2

Wren craned her neck, eyes squinting in the **dazzling** sunlight that bounced off the high windows of Develop & Co. She took a deep breath, fixing her eyes ahead and calming her nerves as she opened the wide doors of the office, cold metal pressing against her hands despite the morning sun.

Shivering slightly in the aggressively air-conditioned lobby, Wren's shoes clacked against the shiny tiles of the floor as she marched up to the blank-faced receptionist, slicked-back hair shining in the artificial lights.

“Appointment?”, the receptionist barked, not looking up from her monitor.

Taken aback by the crude statement, Wren hesitated before replying.

“I, well... I don’t have one”, she replied, pushing as much confidence into her voice as possible. Finally breaking her stalemate with the screen in front of her, the receptionist met her eyes for the first time, giving Wren a full view of the exasperation now etched on her face.

“Then get out!”

She lowered her eyes back down to her monitor, the movement barely noticeable if not for the slightest shifting of her stiff blazer. Her face was once again blank.

“But I-”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“If you don’t have an appointment, I can’t help you.”

“Why not?”

“It’s the way things are run.”

In a last-ditch effort to quell the growing pit of helplessness inside her, Wren hesitantly trod forward to the very edge of the desk.

“Please... this is important!”

“If it was so important, you would have scheduled an appointment.”

Her voice was impassive as the sharp clicks of computer keys resumed, pausing only once as the woman gestured dismissively toward the door.

Wren was not so easily deterred. She quietly made her way across the tiled floors, using light feet so as not to alert the starchy young receptionist who was once again preoccupied with her duties. Then, Wren found herself in front of a row of near identical hallways. Not even beginning to know where to start, she tiptoed down the hall that appeared to end in a staircase, hoping the higher levels would lead to some form of management where she could finally be heard.



As Wren crept through the hall, she passed a series of doors, each with their own near-identical steel grey letter plate, with one that read ‘ongoing project management’ catching her eye. Hesitantly pushing the door open, she squared her shoulders and straightened her back, as she prepared for what was about to happen, and strode past an array of conference rooms, desks, and the occasional watercooler.

As she ventured further into the depths of the building, still treading over more of the same shiny white tiles, soaked in artificial lighting, and enveloped by cool grey walls, she saw a door labelled ‘*Develop & Co* property- bird sanctuary’. Glaring ahead, she pushed her way into the room, coming face-to-face with a short man in a grey suit who was clearly startled by her sudden entrance.

“Who-”

“I need your help!”

Pausing, the man processed her sudden statement.

“Do you have an appointment?”

“Um... no?”

“Then why are you here?”

“Because doing the right thing shouldn’t need a damn appointment!”

He stared at her in shock.

“What?”

Wren faltered after her sudden outburst.

“The, um... the sanctuary!” She paused, mustering up all her courage. “You can’t just tear it down, it is the home to hundreds of innocent, injured birds!”

“I can do whatever I want within state guidelines,” he replied sharply, with a slight quiver of his thin lips.

Giving her a displeased glare, he went back to his computer, pointedly ignoring her presence. She stood, frozen by the absolute disregard for her troubles, and then looked desperately around the room.

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a flash of blue, and, quickly turning her head, she saw walls covered in industrial plans that reached from floor to ceiling. Mouth agape, her focus zeroed in on the images pinned across the back wall, and she turned back to the short man in horror.

“What. Is. That.”

His face paled slightly at her accusatory tone.

“It’s the future of this town.”

“How could you do such a horrible thing? That is the home of hundreds of animals!” she stepped closer to the man causing him to lean back, to keep his distance.

“Miss please-”, he started, only to be cut off by more of Wren’s indignant yelling.

“You’re a despicable person, how could you destroy these poor birds’ homes!”

“Miss, if you do not leave I will be calling the police to escort you out.”

Wren slammed her hand on his desk, “How do you have the heart to do such an inhumane thing?”

“That’s it!” He picked up the phone on his desk and dialled frantically.

“Thank you for coming, Officer...”

“Marley”

“That’s her officer Marley, get her out of here!”

The officer snatched Wren by the wrists, manoeuvred her hands behind her, and tossed her out of the front door.

Chapter 3

Stumbling out onto the street, the exasperated Wren cried out to the Officer, "How are you ok with this? Is this the impression you want to leave on Australia, on our Earth? You have a chance to do something here!"

"Look, I know this is a worthy cause, but my hands are tied. There's nothing you can do to stop this. *Develop & Co* are too powerful."

The officer forced the door close behind her before she had an opportunity to retaliate. As Wren fell backwards, tears **swept** across her rosy cheeks and she was silent.

Walking home, an overwhelming sense of distress washed over Wren, her head pounding, and Officer Marley's words ringing in her head. Wren didn't know what to do, but, before she realised it, one foot was racing in front of the other. She ran to the only place that felt like home... *The Winged Explorers*. Even though Wren was rejected from the club, her love for those birds had not **faded**. Nor had her hope for them.

"Finally," Wren said wearily.

The charming red door was in sight, she was embraced with the warm sounds of her favourite birds and the soothing smell of eucalyptus that had always brought her comfort. Wren knocked on the door and waited. But she received no answer. She knocked again. Nothing.

"Hello, Mr Fowler, Wren here! Please open the door... please!"

Desperation gripped Wren as she attempted to enter the enchanting sanctuary. She started banging and kicking the door, but it would not budge. Once again, tears streamed down her cheeks.

"I just want to be with the birds!" She fell to the ground and gasped for breath. Slowly, she collected herself, and her tears began to dry.

Wren knew she needed to regain her composure, so she did this the only way she knew how, yoga. As she had done so many times before, she slowly untied her shoelaces and slipped them off. She placed her belongings beside the looming red door and started to stroll towards the fence.

Then, Wren counted down: "20, 19, 18, 17..." Her eyes closed and she planted her feet on the frigid soil.



She tuned in to the sound of swaying gum trees and the magpies began to warble. Slowly, she contorted from mountain pose to the warrior. A thought began to form in her mind, *Officer Marley is my only hope of saving the sanctuary.*

Jolted from her zen-like stupor, Wren opened her eyes, marched to the door and called the local police station.

"Hi, um... could I please speak to Officer Marley?"

"Hi, this is Officer Marley" a static voice responded.

"I'm sorry for what I said, I wasn't myself and I've calmed down now. But I need you to come see the birds. Please just come to the sanctuary! You will not regret it."

"Fine. Only because this will put a stop to your trespassing," the Officer responded bluntly.

Wren sat on the steps and waited for the officer's police car to pull in. The minutes dragged on slowly.

As Wren watched Officer Marley approach, she straightened her back once more and took a breath. "Do you know any way to open the door? Once you see how magical this place is, you'll want to help me stop *Develop & Co too.*"

Officer Marley gave her furtive, somewhat sceptical look. But then smiled slightly.

"Being a police officer, I do have a master key for these public locations."

"Wait, why didn't you mention that earlier?" Wren exclaimed. Officer Marley shrugged, then pulled out his key to open the door.

The door unlocked with a satisfying *click*, and the two walked into the sanctuary. Wren noticed a difference in the atmosphere. The smoke and filth from the construction site had made its way into the heart of the sanctuary, corrupting the once-colourful place. Wren then heard a distressed cry, and her eyes widened when she saw a lorikeet on the ground, sickly and weak.

"What has happened?" The words came slowly from Wren's lips.

"It must be the work site," said Officer Marley, "the fumes, they're poisoning these poor birds."



Wren looked back at Officer Marley with an expression of horror. She couldn't believe what was happening. She felt terrible for those poor creatures. Was she too late?

Then came that same cry of distress, and looking down, Wren saw the same sickly lorikeet, struggling now to spread its wings to fly. Casting her gaze around now, Wren saw sickly birds everywhere. Some gave weak wheezes, others had lost their feathers, and many were shivering as if gripped by a fever. It was a horrifying sight to behold.

With a start, Wren remembered Jasper. Panic filled her as she looked back and forth among all the birds, searching for her fairy wren. Eventually, she caught a glimpse of blue feathers amongst the now shrivelling foliage. She ran towards the tiny bird, allowing herself a moment of relief as she found that Jasper was not as ill as the other birds.

Hearing the crunch of Officer Marley's boots behind her, Wren turned, and looked up at him with watery eyes.

"Officer Marley, you cannot let this construction go through!" she begged. "You have to help these birds, please."

The police officer looked down at Wren, clearly considering the yoga instructor as she pleaded with him. As if in a moment of decision, he knelt down beside her and placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Ok, Wren, I'll help you save this sanctuary."

"Thank you so much!" she shrieked. "So, what now?"

Chapter 4

"None of these ideas are going to work!" Wren groaned, as Officer Marley crossed out yet another page of his notebook, looking more and more dishevelled. His eyes shifted from the page to focus on her, and she noticed, once again, how much softer his expression was than when they first met. But there was something else now. A mixture of fear and sadness.

"Warning them isn't going to be enough," he cried suddenly.

"I know! But what are we going to do?" Reality was slowly hitting her, harder and more solid than before. Her heartbeat was thumping loudly in her ears. Her breathing was shallow. She couldn't focus on what he was saying and her vision had started to blur. *Breathe Wren. Do that... meditation stuff you're always going on about*, she thought. She counted each breath that

entered her lungs. She focussed on the morbid grey sky which seemed to be consuming everything, yet, in some ways felt reassuring. As her breathing steadied, he slowly left her side wandering deeper into the sanctuary.

“Wait, the birds are sick!” he shouted, as if he had only just connected the dots. “No, I mean they *are* sick! If we bring public attention to this we could shut them down!”

“What?” she replied. “Wait... you mean taking photos of the sick birds...? It could work!” Her vision began to clear again. He was a genius.

“They would have to stop, after all the public would be outraged!” The officer shouted with a passion that Wren had never seen before. Hope now clearly flooded his eyes. They had a chance, and they had to take it. If they didn't, who would? They had a chance to save the birds!

Quickly, the missing bird song was replaced by the clicking of the officer's camera, and soon, back at the police station, they got to work. They emailed newspaper after newspaper, drafting petitions, curating posters that displayed all the horrendous activities of the construction workers. There was no way the workers could continue their activities now! The public wouldn't stand for it.

Some days later, Officer Marley gathered his team, and soon, a convoy of police cars and other vehicles charged towards the closed sanctuary and the surrounding construction site. The sun sat high in the sky, and the heat beat down on the builders, as they continued their labour to destroy the sanctuary. They raised their heads in confusion as the sound of the sirens filled the air.

A man in a dark grey suit, with a red hard hat, strode forward with a menacing expression.

“You need to shut down this site now!” Officer Marley shouted, cutting the manager off before he could speak.

“What? No! We have the permits to be here!” the man fired back.

“Haven't you seen the news? All of these sick birds? This is inhumane! Not to mention illegal. We are taking away your licence to build here.”

The manager's face was ashen as he struggled with the information.

“Let's go guys, clear them all out.” Officer Marley barked his orders, as the disgruntled construction workers packed up their masses of equipment and left the location muttering about their next set of wages.

“We saved them!” Wren exclaimed. Happiness was painted like a rainbow across her face.

As the workers dwindled, so did the smell of metal and sawdust.

Officer Marley smiled. “With a bit of work, we can restore the sanctuary”. And as he spoke, a small hummingbird, no bigger than a paper clip, dropped down and nestled within his hair. The bird was so small compared to the burly officer it could barely be seen.

Without the need for more words, Wren and the officer exchanged a heartfelt glance before walking through the sanctuary, admiring its everlasting beauty.

Epilogue

At times, it felt like it had been a distant dream. But there she was, all these months later, standing in the middle of it all. Wren. My best friend, believe it or not. The fairy wren sat on her shoulder, her smile lighting up the room more than any natural sunlight could. We sat at a bench catching up as the various birds flew through the air.

“Finally starting to settle into town?”

“There’s nothing like taking down an evil construction company to help me fit in here,” she said slyly, her smile somehow getting brighter as she stared at the bird on her shoulder. As she fed the young wren some sesame seeds, something hit me. Something small barely touching but still there on my shoulder. I slowly turned my head and a little hummingbird stared back at me.

“Looks like someone’s been chosen,” Wren said, laughing at my shocked expression. “Go on, get your pin now, you’re part of this club.”

“I’m an officer, Wren. I don’t have the time to sit and watch birds.”

“But you have the time to sit here with me,” she retorted. I inwardly groaned.

“A coffee and a chat is one thing but coming to club meetings... Gosh this little guy is looking at me, isn’t he? How could I say no to that face?”

The little bird pressed his head against my neck and I looked down at Wren’s hand. “Got any more of those seeds for the little guy?”

She laughed softly.

“Hummingbirds don’t eat seeds, Marley, they drink nectar from flowers. Or just sugar water.”

“I knew that. I just thought he might enjoy something different for a change of pace!” We both laughed knowingly.

“I guess I could find time for this little guy.” Something that Wren and I could share, a fond memory we could always look back on.

“We did it,” she said as she looked around.

“Yeah, we did.”

“Come on, the meeting is starting! You have to get your pin!” She smiled and ran off, her fairy wren, Jasper, flying alongside her, chirping happily.

I looked around taking it all in before running after her.

A smile as wide as the tall red doors plastered across my face.





A fantastical tale of a nature-loving Yoga Instructor, Wren, who attempts to save *The Winged Explores*, an enchanting bird-watching club. Along the way, she befriends a stern and cold Police officer, Officer Marley, who helps her fight *Developing & Co.* which is suffocating the sanctuary's rich environment.

Aged recommendation 8-14 years

