



Author's Note

I found out I had Parkinson's Disease when I was 38 and my son was three. I wrote this book to help us both understand what was happening and how we could talk about it. After sharing it with other people living with Young Onset Parkinson's Disease, I made the illustrations. I hope if you need a way to discuss Parkinson's Disease, or any other chronic illness, with the children in your life, that this will be a useful resource.

My son was born in Phoenix, Arizona. The mountains around our neighborhood looked like the ones in this book. The desert changes day by day. After rain, the plants will grow new leaves quickly. Even the smell of the desert changes after a rain, when the creosote bushes release resins from their leaves. If you ever visit the desert after a rain and fall in love with it, you will almost feel heartbroken if you return to it after a prolonged drought.

Parkinson's Disease can be the same sort of experience. As the dopamine levels in the brain cycle in response to the medicines a person with Parkinson's takes, she or he can vary from feeling totally normal with a large range of abilities to feeling unable to move or speak, all in a four hour period of time.

Adele Pfrimmer Hensley

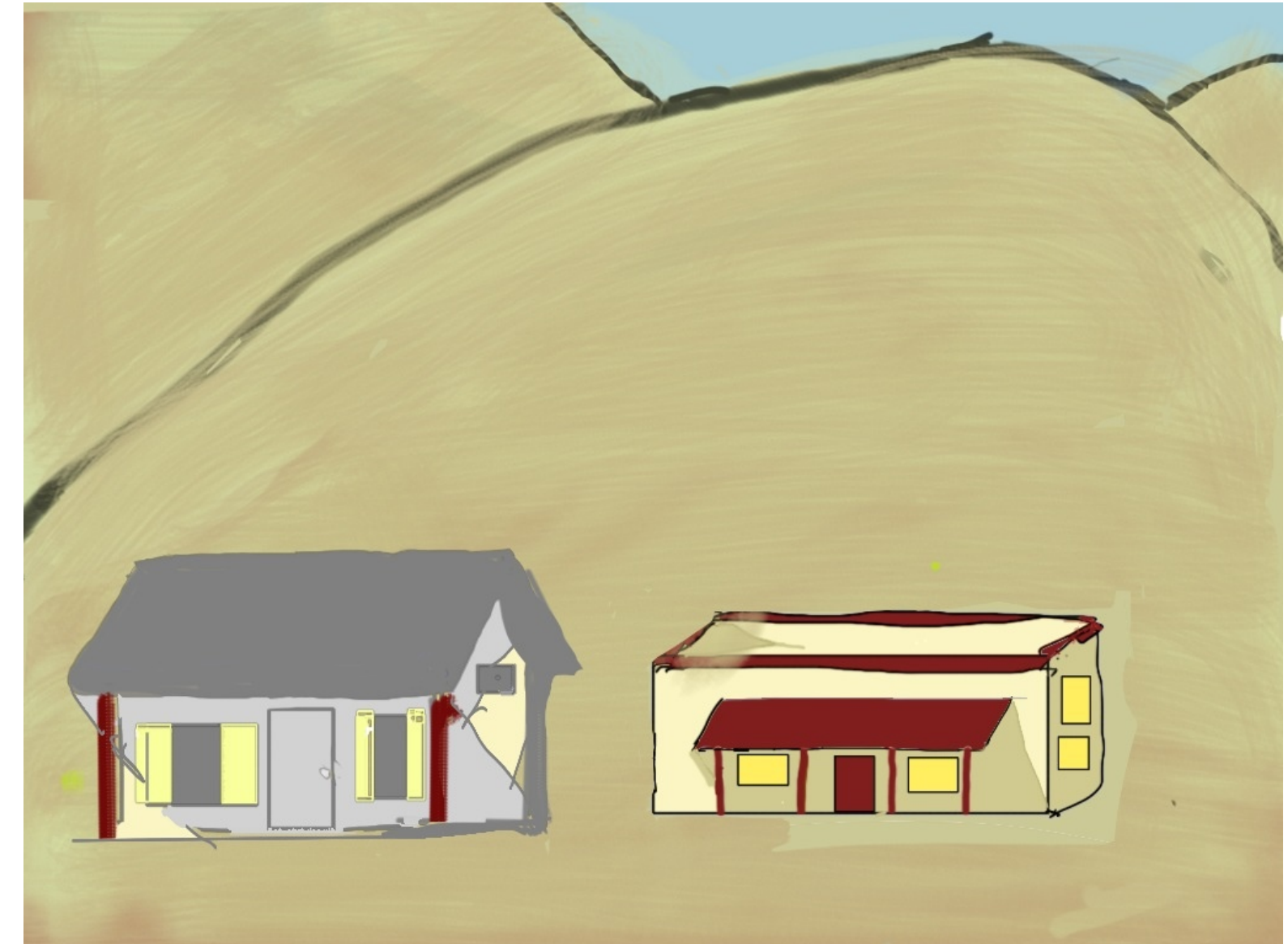
~Dedication~

To Clark Hensley who has lived with this his whole life,
To Frank Hensley, who loves me better than I will ever deserve,
and

To the members of the Young Onset Parkinson's Disease Support Group on Facebook.
You have been an invaluable source of understanding and support.

Thank You all.

Monica and her Mama liked to take walks together.
When Monica was a baby, they would walk around the house.
When Monica was two, they would walk around the block.
When she got to be four, they would walk around the neighborhood.



Now that Monica was about to turn twelve years old, her Mama and she would take bigger walks. They liked to hike into the desert that surrounded their neighborhood.

Mama used to lead the way up the hill from the houses to the desert. Monica used to practically have to run to catch her. Since last October, though, Monica had become the fastest uphill walker.

"I win again, Mama!" Monica crowed as she looked back down the hill at Mama. Mama looked up at Monica and nodded in approval. Walking always used to make Mama smile. Lately, though, she frowned when she walked. She hunched over and tucked her arm in by her hip.

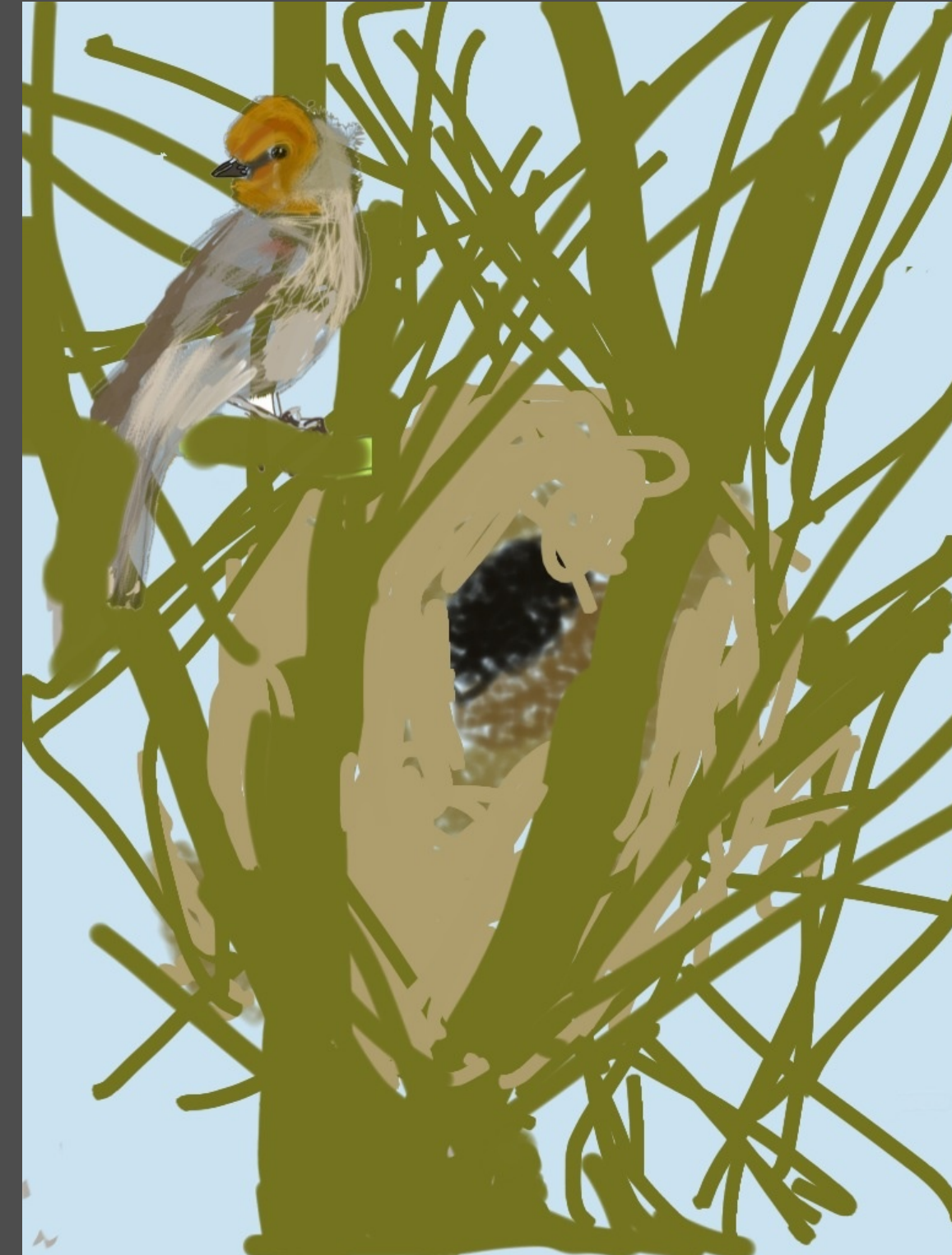


"What will we see today, Monica?" Mama called out cheerfully. Mama loved the mysteries of the desert.

"Seven birds, two ground squirrels, a lizard, and some pretty plants," guessed Monica.

Mama walked up and put her hand on Monica's shoulder. "You might be right, Monica. Look at that palo verde tree over there."

Monica's eyes followed the direction of her mother's pointing finger. She saw a tiny, yellow-headed verdin building a nest of sticks. The nest looked like an oval ball with a hole at the bottom. Monica laughed when the verdin disappeared inside its nest. When Monica looked up above the nest, she saw a white-winged dove.



Mama and Monica walked along the path. The rocks crunched softly under their feet. From time to time one of them would stop the other to point out a desert friend. Mama spotted the curling tail of a zebra-tailed lizard. Monica saw a curve-billed thrasher skulking under a creosote bush. They smiled at each other when they saw the first saguaro cactus of the hike.

"Monica, when you get to the top of this path, wait for me," said Mama. "I want to show you a new place."

"Okay, Mama."



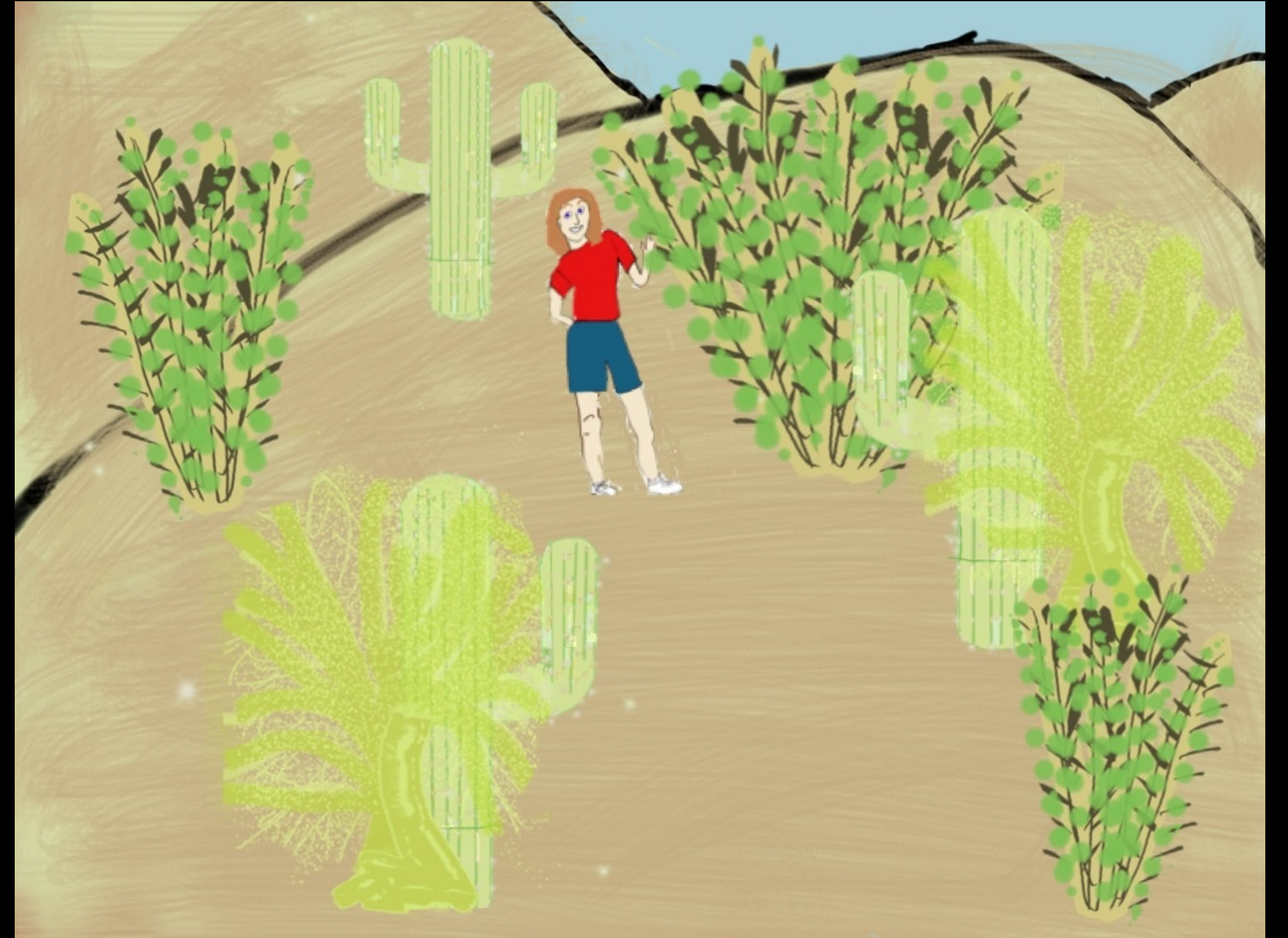
When Monica reached the top, she could see her neighborhood, her block, and her house. She could see the long path Mama and she had already walked. "I wonder where we're going?" She said to herself.

When Mama reached the top, she stepped in front of Monica. "Come this way. I found a hidden place," said Mama.

They walked around the curve on the side of the hill. Monica saw another hill up ahead. Mama led her between the old hill and the new one. "Look, Monica. It's a hidden valley."

"Mama," whispered Monica, "It's so quiet. I can't hear any cars."

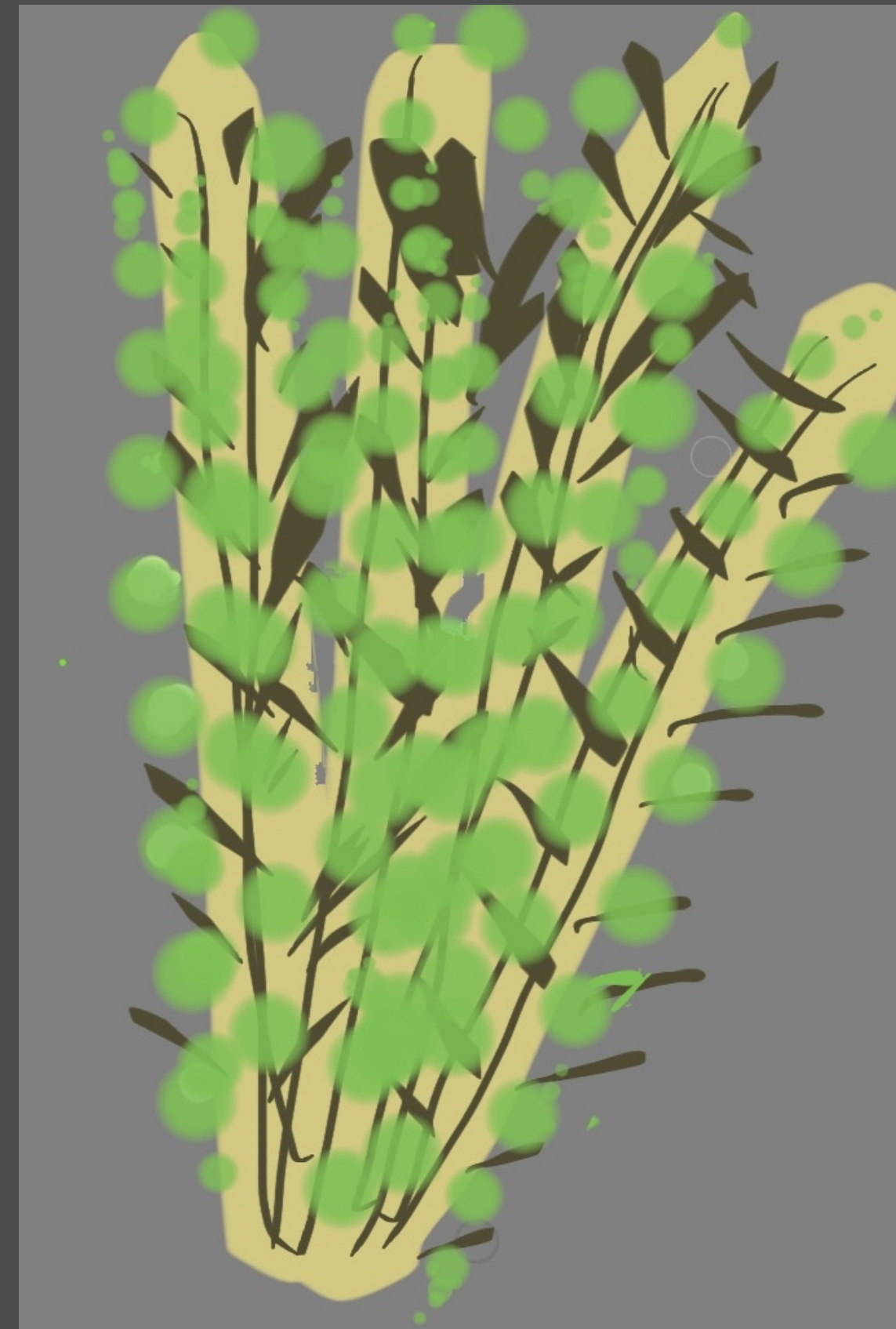
"The hills block the road noises," said Mama. This time she smiled.



Mama sat on a wide, flat rock to rest. Monica walked a short way down the path and stopped. In front of her stood a big plant. The plant looked like giant sticks poking up out of the ground. It was woody, like a tree, but it was all branches and no trunk. It looked spiky, but not like a cactus. Woody thorns poked out of each branch. Green leaves sprouted next to the thorns. Each leaf was the size of a nickel. Monica gazed closely at a leaf. It was young and bright green. Sunlight shone through the thinner spots, like rivers of light.

Mama saw Monica watching the leaves. "It's an ocotillo, Monica. It grew those leaves fresh this week, after it rained on Tuesday."

"Mama, it's so sparkly in the sun. I think it is my favorite plant in the whole desert"



They left the hidden valley and walked home. That turned out to be their last desert walk for a while. Summer came with hot winds and fiery sunshine. It was really too hot to walk, and Mama didn't feel very well. That summer they found out that Mama had Parkinson's disease. That was why her hands and voice shook when she talked. That was why her walking had gotten so slow and her face had trouble smiling. That was why her arm tucked in when she walked and her shoulders hunched forward.

Monica felt angry about it and sad, too. She had been a little scared until Mama explained that Monica couldn't catch Parkinson's disease from her. No one knew what made people get it, but they were sure you didn't catch it from other people. Monica wished she could go to the hidden valley and see the ocotillo. "I know I'd feel better," Monica said to herself



Mama's doctor gave her a special medicine that made Mama sleepy and kind of sick to her stomach. Eventually, it started to help her body work much better. One day, when the sun was not beating down so hard, Mama said, "Monica, let's go for a walk."

Monica jumped up. "Can we go to the hidden valley?" She asked.

Mama thought for a minute. "It's pretty far." Then she saw Monica's face. "Yes we can!" Mama smiled.

This time on the walk up the hill, Mama could keep up with Monica. She stood up straighter, too. When they got to the top of the hill, they smiled at each other and said, "We tied!"



When they finally got to the hidden valley, Mama sat down on her rock to rest. Monica walked on ahead to her ocotillo plant. When she got there, she stopped still and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh Mama! It's dead," Monica said as she started to cry.

Mama walked over and touched Monica gently on the head. "It's not dead, honey. It's just waiting. The summer has been so hot and dry, the ocotillo had to drop off its leaves to survive. It's waiting until it has what it needs to show its green leaves again."

"Oh Mama," said Monica, "It looked so brown and dry, I thought it was dead. I felt so sad."



Mama squeezed Monica's shoulders. "Monica, the ocotillo is just like your Mama. The plant's alive in there, but it can't always let its true face show. I'm alive and happy in here, but my smile doesn't always show. My voice doesn't always sound happy, but when I have what I need, the right medicine, and a good walk, I sound, feel, and look a lot more like myself."

"I see, Mama," said Monica, "And the ocotillo will look like itself when"
Her voice trailed off in a question.

"When the rain comes again," said Mama.

