



FitQuest

Meet the Cast

ADVANCED EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This advanced edition collects 5 chapter books from the FitQuest cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register. Advanced edition: upper-middle-grade register (Wonder / Hatchet / Holes band) for readers ages 11-14 ready for longer sentences + more nuanced subtext.

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For everyone who learns by reading between the lines.

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Introduction

The FitQuest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

This is the **Advanced Edition** — written for readers who are ready for longer sentences, layered subtext, and the trust that comes with not having every joke explained. The Standard Edition covers the same characters at a lighter register; pick whichever feels right for the reader at hand.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Push



The gate to FitQuest was heavy, oak and iron, and it had swollen shut in the morning rain. Two students were shoving at it, red-faced and grunting, and getting nowhere.

Push padded up beside them. She was a small capybara, round and soft, with warm cream fur and little russet tufts on her cheeks. A wooden bead on a string swung from her wrist. She didn't look like someone who moved heavy doors. She looked like someone who took slow, comfortable naps.

"May I?" she said.

She set her feet. She breathed in, planted both paws flat against the wood, and then — as she breathed out, one long steady exhale — she pushed. Not a jerk. Not a heave. A smooth press, her whole round body behind it, force traveling from her back paws up through her shoulders and out into the door. The oak groaned and swung wide.

The two students stared.

"How," one said. "You're — you're not even —" He stopped himself.

Push knew what he'd almost said. *You're not even big.* She smiled, unbothered.

"Force into space," she said. "Door, ground, sky. The door doesn't care what you look like. It only cares which way you send the push."



She had learned that a long time ago, on the slow-creek-banks where she grew up.

Her family were the long-pushers of the village — capybaras who swam the current all day, hauling reed-rafts upstream against water that never stopped shoving back. Push had been the smallest of the young ones, and she used to watch her cousins slice through the creek and feel a heaviness settle in her chest. *I'm too round for this,* she thought. *I'll never push like them. I'm built wrong.*

Her grandmother, an old creek-swimmer with a slow warm voice, found her sulking on the bank one evening.

"You keep looking at your body like it's the problem," her grandmother said. She didn't argue. She just waded out into the current, turned, and pushed — a broad, patient stroke that moved her upstream against water three times her weight.

"Watch what my body *does*," she said. "Not what it *is*."

Push watched. Her grandmother wasn't lean. She wasn't sleek. She was round and soft and slow-looking, and she pushed against the whole river and won.

"The shape doesn't decide the strength," her grandmother called back over the water. "The pattern does. You push when the current asks. You rest when it lets you. That's the whole secret, little one. Nobody ever told you the truth because they were too busy looking at the mirror instead of the river."

Something loosened in Push's chest that evening. The heaviness she'd carried — the sense that her body was the wrong kind of body — quietly let go. She waded in. She pushed. The current gave.



She walked to FitQuest when she was twelve, because a place that studied the body ought to understand the kind of strength that didn't show up in a mirror.

Brio, the mentor who ran the workshops, met her at the gate — the same swollen oak gate, though it opened easily that day. He didn't ask her to lift anything to prove herself. He asked one question.

"What is the push pattern?"

Push stood tall. She braced her paws against the gatepost and pressed, feeling the force travel clean from her feet to her shoulders and out. "Force into space," she said. "Door, ground, sky. It's how the body sends work outward — opening a door, getting up off the floor, pressing something onto a high shelf. It's one of the ways a body does its job in the world."

Brio waited, the way mentors do when they want to hear the rest.

"It's not about looking a certain way," Push added, quieter, thinking of the creek. "A body can be round and soft and still be strong. Strong is about what you can *do*. Not what you *are*."

Brio smiled. "You belong here," he said.



Push's workshop filled up fast, because everyone had a body and everyone had a heavy door somewhere in their life.

A boy came in one afternoon, arms folded, frustrated. "I can't do a real push-up," he said. "So I'm just bad at this. My friend does thirty. I can't even do one on the floor."

Push had known that slump. She'd felt it on the creek-bank.

"Put your hands on the wall for me," she said. He did, unsure. "Now lean in — breathe out as you press yourself back. Slow."

He pressed. His body came away from the wall clean and steady.

"That," Push said, "was a push-up. A wall one. Same pattern as your friend's floor one — force going out of your hands into the wall. You just did it where your body is right now."

"But it's easier," he protested. "It doesn't count."

"Move to the bench," Push said. He set his hands on the bench, leaned at an angle, pressed. His arms shook a little at the bottom. "Harder now?"

"Yeah."

"Same pattern. More demand. When your body's ready, you drop to the floor — knees first, then a full plank. Your body tells you when. Not the mirror. Not your friend's number." She tilted her head at him. "Six clean reps beats ten sloppy ones every single time. The door doesn't open faster if you thrash at it."

He tried three slow reps on the bench, breathing out on each press. On the third one, something clicked — the force finding its clean line through his shoulders.

"Oh," he said. "It's — smoother."

"That's the pattern arriving," Push said, grinning. "Can you push a stroller? Open a door with your arms full? Get up off the floor without your hands? When yes — your push is doing its job. That's the only checklist that matters. Not how it looks. What it *does*."



Later, when the workshop had emptied out, the boy came back with one more question. He was quieter now.

"When I get stronger," he said, "will I look different? Is that how I'll know it worked?"

Push thought about the creek. About the heaviness that used to sit in her chest when she compared her round body to her cousins'. About her grandmother pushing against the whole river.

"You'll *know* it worked," she said, "in your hands and your shoulders. There's a feeling that comes when you push something and it finally gives — a warm, solid, ready feeling, like your whole body just agreed to do one thing together. You'll feel it on the door that used to stick. On the floor you used to need your hands to get up from. That feeling is the truth. The mirror will tell you all kinds of things, but the door never lies."

She walked him to the workshop's own heavy door and set his hands on it.

"Push," she said. "Slow. Breathe out."

He pushed. The door swung wide, and Push watched the surprise and the warmth land in his face all at once — the same feeling that had loosened in her own chest, years ago, on the bank of a slow creek.

He didn't say anything. He just stood there in the open doorway, flexing his fingers, feeling the warm steady readiness still humming in his arms.

Push smiled and said the thing she always said. "Force into space. Door, ground, sky."

Hinge



The crate of apples was heavier than it looked, and the boy in the FitQuest courtyard had already tried twice to lift it.

Both times he'd done the same thing — leaned over from the waist, rounded his back into a low curve, and hauled. Both times he'd set it down again with a small wince and a hand pressed to his lower back. He was rubbing that spot now, frowning at the crate as though it had insulted him.

Across the courtyard, a small tortoise about the size of a sturdy backpack set down the abacus he carried and made his way over. His shell was warm cream and soft moss green, and it rocked gently as he walked. He wasn't fast. He was never fast. But he arrived, and he looked at the crate, and then he looked at the boy.

"Watch me pick that up," the tortoise said. "Then tell me what's different."

He stood close to the crate, feet planted. His knees softened — not a deep crouch, just a little give. Then his hips pushed *back*, like he was reaching his tail toward a wall behind him, and his chest stayed up and his back stayed long and flat as a shelf. His hands closed on the crate. He rose, and the crate rose with him, smooth and unhurried, tucked close against his shell.

He set it down again the same careful way.

"You folded," the boy said slowly. "At the hips. Your back never bent."

"There it is." The tortoise's voice was calm and even, the way a hand is steady when it holds something breakable. "I'm Hinge. And that fold is the whole thing."



Hinge had learned about backs before he'd learned to love them.

He'd grown up on the meadow-flats, wide open country where his family were known as the shell-stackers — the tortoises who could set down and lift again all day and never grumble about it. As a small one he'd watched an older cousin haul a water barrel the fast way, hunched and rounded, day after day, until the morning the cousin couldn't straighten up at all and had to sit in the shade while everyone

else worked.

It had frightened him. Not the barrel — the *slowness* of it. The way the hurt had crept in a little at a time, invisible, until one day it wasn't.

His grandmother had found him staring at his own hands, worried. She didn't tell him to be careful. She just knelt beside him — folding at her hips, her old shell tipping forward while her spine stayed straight — and picked up a stone the easy way.

"The body already has hinges," she said. "Right here, at the hips. They're built to fold, like a door. You don't have to make new ones in your back." She tapped his shell where it met his hips. "Use the ones you were given. That's the secret nobody thinks is a secret."

The fear didn't vanish. But it turned into something he could hold — a question he could actually answer. *Where does the fold belong?* At the hips. Every time. Somehow, knowing that made the whole worry sit quieter in his chest.



He walked to FitQuest at twelve, because a place that studied movement ought to care about the movement people did most: bending down to pick up the world, a hundred times a day, for their whole lives.

Brio, the old mentor with a voice like rustling leaves, met him at the gate and asked one question. "What is the hip hinge?"

Hinge didn't answer with a speech. He looked around, found a heavy book someone had left on a bench, and set it on the flagstones. Then he stood over it — knees soft, hips pushing back, chest up, spine long — and lifted it clean, close to his shell, without a single curve creeping into his back.

"Bend at the hip, not the spine," he said, standing tall with the book in his hands. "Pick up the world safely."

Brio watched the way his back had stayed stacked the whole time, straight as a tower of blocks. "You belong here," he said.



Hinge's workshop was full of skeleton diagrams and a little wooden abacus he used to count good days — days with no aches, no twinges, just smooth strong lifts. The frustrated boy from the courtyard followed him in, still half-rubbing his back.

"So I did it wrong," the boy said. "I bent from the waist."

"You bent where it doesn't want to bend," Hinge said, gentle. "Not the same as wrong. Just costly, over time." He pulled two cards from a small set. One showed a figure reaching for a box with a rounded, curved-over back. The other showed the same figure with the spine long and the hips pushed way back. "Your lower back rounded like a rainbow. All the load landed on the small parts of your spine instead of the big muscles in your hips and legs. Do that once, nothing happens. Do it for years and it adds up, quiet, until one day it isn't quiet."

He set the cards down. "Try the fold. Stand there — imagine a wall a step behind you."

The boy stood.

"Now push your hips back like you're trying to tap the wall with them. Let your knees soften a little. Keep your chest up. Feel your back stay long."

The boy hinged backward, hands sliding down his own thighs, and his eyes went wide. "Oh — my back doesn't even do anything."

"Right. The hips do the folding. The spine just stays stacked and comes along for the ride." Hinge nudged the crate of apples over. "Now the crate. Butt back, chest up, keep it close to your shins."

The boy hinged down, gripped the crate, and rose — legs and hips doing the work, back long and quiet the whole way up.

He stood there holding it, blinking. "It's not even heavy anymore."

"It's the same weight," Hinge said, and he was smiling now. "You just handed it to the parts of you that were built to carry it."



Later, when the workshop had gone quiet and the crate sat safely on its shelf, the boy came back with one more question. He was slower with it, like it mattered more.

"How do I know I'm doing it right," he said, "when there's no one here to watch me? When it's just me and a laundry basket at home?"

Hinge thought about the meadow-flats. About his cousin in the shade, and his grandmother's slow, kind hands.

"You'll feel it," he said. "That's the honest answer. When you fold at the hips the right way, your lower back goes *easy* — there's this long, loose, unbothered feeling down there, like you set the weight down before you even lifted it. And when you round your back instead, you'll feel the opposite: a tight little pull, low down, a spot that says *not here, not like this*." He tapped his own back gently. "That feeling isn't your body being fragile. It's your body being honest. It's telling you where the fold belongs."

He looked toward the window, out to the flats he'd grown up on. "You're not lifting for a mirror or a contest. You're lifting for the version of you that's still around in fifty years — the one who wants to pick up a kid, a bag of dirt, a heavy basket, and just... do it, without thinking twice. Learn the fold once, and you save that person a whole lot of hurt they'll never even know they dodged."

The boy nodded, and Hinge watched something loosen in the way he stood — his shoulders dropping, his own back settling long and easy without him trying.

He didn't say the rest out loud, but he thought it, warm and sure: *the body already knows where it wants to bend. The whole job is just listening to it — and then trusting what it says.*

Brace



In the middle of the FitQuest training yard, Brace held a heavy canvas bag in one hand and walked a slow, dead-level line across the sand.

She was a round, sturdy armadillo-tween in a loose tunic, and the bag hung off her right arm like it wanted to pull her whole body sideways. It did not. Every step she took, her upper body stayed upright and calm — no tilt, no lean, no wobble. The bag begged; her middle refused.

A kid trailing behind her frowned. "You're barely moving. That doesn't look like exercise."

"It doesn't," Brace agreed, without slowing. "It looks like nothing. That's the whole trick." She reached the far wall, turned, and switched the bag to her other hand. Now it pulled her left. Still she didn't lean. "The bag's trying to fold me in half sideways. My middle won't let it. That's it. That's the work — the not-folding."

She set the bag down and rolled her shoulders. "People think the middle of your body is for showing off. It isn't. It's a link. It's what lets your arms and legs do anything at all without your spine paying for it." She grinned at the kid. "I'm not carrying that bag with my arm. I'm carrying it with the tight ring right here" — she tapped her belly, her sides, the small of her back, all in one circle — "so my arm's free to just hold on."



Brace learned what that ring was for a long time before she had a name for it.

She'd grown up along the desert-burrow-edges, where the ground was uneven and the wind came sudden and hard. Her family were long-armored-walkers — armadillos who hauled and carried across shifting sand for their village. The first real load Brace ever carried, she carried wrong. She hugged it to her chest, arched her back, and let her middle go loose and floppy, and three steps in a gust shoved her and she went down hard, the wind knocked out of her, the load spilled across the sand.

She sat there feeling foolish and small. *I'm not strong enough*, she thought. *My arms gave out.*

Her grandmother crouched beside her — an old armadillo with plates worn smooth and a slow, patient voice. She didn't say *try harder*. She pressed one flat palm gently against Brace's belly.

"Your arms didn't give out, little one. Your middle did. It went soft right when the wind came." She kept her palm there. "Feel this. Before you lift the next one — before, not during — I want you to make everything under my hand go firm. All the way around. Like you're getting ready to be pushed."

Brace tried it. She tightened her belly, her sides, the small of her back, all at once, like a barrel with the hoops driven tight. It felt strange — braced, gathered, ready.

"Now stand," her grandmother said. Brace stood, load and all. The next gust hit. She swayed — and held.

"That," her grandmother said quietly, "is the armor we've always had. Not the plates on our backs. The ring on the inside. It doesn't make you tougher to *look* at, child. It makes you tougher to *break*."



She walked to FitQuest at twelve, because a place that studied how bodies moved ought to understand the part that helped a body stay still under strain.

Brio, one of the mentors, met her at the edge of the training grounds. She didn't ask Brace to lift anything heavy, or run, or prove she was strong. She asked one thing. "What is bracing?"

Brace didn't answer with a speech. She walked to a low bench, lay flat on her back on the sand beside it, and pressed the small of her back down until it was flat against the ground. Then she lifted one arm and the opposite leg, slow, into the air, and held them there, trembling slightly, her spine never lifting off the sand.

"My back stays flat," she said, from the ground. "My arm and leg move. The middle holds the line so the limbs can wander." She let the limbs down and looked up at Brio. "That's bracing. Everything else is just where you point it."

Brio watched the flat, unmoving back for a long moment. "You are appointed," she said.



Brace's workshop filled up fast with kids who thought the middle of a body was about a look.

One afternoon a boy came in discouraged, half-hiding a stomach that was round and soft. "I do sit-ups every night," he said. "A hundred of them. And I still don't have the lines. My friend has the lines and he never does anything."

Brace felt something twist in her chest — she remembered sitting in the sand feeling small. She pulled a chair over and sat, so she wasn't looming.

"Can you help me with something first," she said. "Lift that book onto the high shelf." He did — reached up, set it, easy. "Did your middle get tight when you reached?"

He thought. "...A little. Yeah."

"That's bracing. That's your core doing its actual job — holding your spine steady so your arm can reach without hurting your back." She stood and dropped into a plank, straight as a plank of wood, and breathed slow through her nose. "This. Thirty seconds of *not folding*. No crunching. No lines." She got up. "Now you."

He held the plank, shaking, breathing hard.

"Feel where it's working?"

"All the way around," he panted. "My belly, my sides, my back."

"That's the ring. That's the armor." She helped him up. "Here's the honest part, and I'll only say it once, so listen. Whether your middle *shows* lines has almost nothing to do with whether it's *strong*. Lines are about how much soft covering is over the muscle — and that's decided by how you're built, how old you are, a hundred things you don't pick. There are round, soft-bellied people with iron bracing who can carry a fridge upstairs. There are people with all the lines who fold like paper the first time something pushes on them." She shrugged. "The lines are a picture. The bracing is a job. I only ever care about the job."

The boy went quiet. "So the sit-ups..."

"Were you training the picture," she said gently, "when you could've been training the link." She handed him a canvas bag. "Carry this to the wall and don't let it tip you. That'll do more than a thousand of those."



Later, when the yard had emptied out, the boy came back with one more question. He was quieter now, standing straighter without meaning to.

"When you set that ring tight," he said, "before you lift something heavy — how do you know it's on? Like, how do you *feel* it's there?"

Brace thought about the sand, and the wind, and her grandmother's warm palm.

"You feel yourself get gathered," she said. "Like you pull everything in your middle into one solid, quiet weight — belly, sides, back, all pressing gently in on the same spot. It's not a straining feeling. It's a *ready* feeling. Steady. Rooted." She pressed her own hand flat to her belly, the way her grandmother once had. "You breathe right down into it, slow, without holding your breath, and there's this moment where you're loaded and calm at the same time. That's the armor coming on. That's the part of you that stays whole when everything else has to move."

The boy set his hand on his own middle, breathed down into it, and Brace watched him find it — the gathered, grounded quiet under his palm. She watched the discouragement lift off his shoulders, the same way, years ago, hers had lifted off the sand.

She didn't say the rest out loud, but she thought it, warm and sure: *the strongest part of you isn't the part anyone can see. It's the quiet ring in the middle that holds while everything else gets to be free.*

Breath



In the quiet before the FitQuest studio filled up, a round panda named Breath sat cross-legged on the mat and did the plainest thing in the world. He breathed in through his nose. He breathed out through his nose. In. Out. His cream fur rose and fell over his ribs, slow as tide.

A kid named Leo skidded through the door, late, chest heaving, gulping air through his mouth. "Sorry — ran here — I'm ready — what are we doing?"

"We already started," Breath said, without opening his eyes.

Leo looked around the empty mat. "You're just... sitting."

"I'm setting the tempo." Breath opened his eyes then, gentle and steady. "Your breath is going about a hundred miles an hour right now. Feel it? Up high, behind your collarbones?" Leo put a hand on his own chest and, surprised, nodded.

"That's your body sprinting even though your legs stopped. Watch." Breath drew

one long, slow pull through his nose — four unhurried counts — and let it drift back out just as slow. He did it twice more. "Now try. Nose only."

Leo tried. Halfway through the second breath his shoulders came down from around his ears, and he blinked like he'd walked out of loud traffic into a quiet room.

"There," Breath murmured. "You just changed your whole body without moving a muscle. That's the tempo. Everything else in here runs on top of it."



Breath had grown up in the bamboo thickets, where his family were known, a little teasingly, as the long-slow-breathers.

He hadn't always been slow. When he was small he'd worried about everything — thunder, deep water, the dark stretch of trail between the grove and home. And when he worried, his breath climbed up into the top of his chest and stayed there, fast and thin, until his hands went tingly and his thoughts turned into a swarm of bees.

One evening his grandfather found him like that behind the grove, breathing in quick little sips, sure something was wrong with him.

His grandfather didn't tell him to calm down. He just sat, and grazed a stalk of bamboo, slow and rhythmic, the way the old pandas always ate. "Breathe like I chew," he said, mouth full. "In through the nose. Slow. Out slower."

Breath copied him, feeling silly. In. Out. In. Out. The bees in his head thinned. His hands stopped tingling.

"The breath sets the tempo for the whole body," his grandfather said. "Slow breath, slow heart, slow mind. When your breath runs, the rest of you runs with it — even sitting still. But it goes the other way too. You can't always slow your heart by wanting to. You *can* always slow your breath. And your heart, being polite, follows along."

Breath sat with that a long time. He had thought the fast, tight, high-in-the-chest feeling meant he was broken. Now it just meant his tempo had sped up — and a tempo was something you could set on purpose. Somehow that made the whole thing possible to sit inside of.



He walked to FitQuest at twelve, because a place that trained the body ought to understand the quiet thing running underneath all of it.

Brio, the old mentor, met him at the gate and asked one question. "What is breath?"

Breath didn't rush to answer. He took one slow pull through his nose, held it a beat, let it out even slower — and only then said, "The body's tempo. Nasal by default. Slow it down when things speed up." He tapped his own chest. "It's the one part of all this you can always reach."

Brio watched the panda's ribs settle back to their tide. "Most people breathe like they're always being chased," he said.

"Most people were never told they had a choice." Breath shrugged, warm about it. "I'd like to tell them."

Brio nodded once. "You belong here."



Breath's workshop was the calmest room in FitQuest, and the students who wandered in were often the ones carrying the most noise.

Maya came in one afternoon with her jaw tight and her breathing shallow, notebook clutched to her chest. Big test the next morning, she said. Every time she pictured it her heart started slamming and her thoughts scattered.

Breath knew that feeling from the grove behind his home. He pulled a card from his fanned set — a plain square drawn on it — and set it between them.

"Trace the square with me," he said. "Up the side — breathe in, nose, four counts." Maya's finger climbed the edge as she pulled air in. "Across the top — hold, four counts." Her finger slid across; she held. "Down the far side — out slow, four counts." The breath drained out of her. "Along the bottom — hold empty, four counts." A pause. "Again."

They went around the square three times. Neither of them said anything.

By the third lap, Maya's shoulders had dropped and her jaw had come unclenched, and she let out a breath that was almost a laugh. "My heart slowed down," she said, half amazed. "I didn't tell it to. I just did the square."

"You told your breath," Breath said. "Your heart listened. That's the whole trick — you can't order your heart around, but it always follows the breath. People in the hardest jobs there are use that exact square before they do the scary thing. It works on kids before tests, too." He tucked the card into her notebook. "Take it. It's yours now. It costs nothing and it's always in your pocket, because your breath is always in your pocket."

Then he stood and walked to the wall and pressed into a slow push-up, showing her the other half. "And when you *are* moving — pushing, lifting, carrying — let the breath out on the hard part." He exhaled as he pressed away. "Breathe in coming back." He drew air as he lowered. "Never lock it in and strain. Move the air through the effort, and the effort gets steadier." He looked back at her, gentle. "Same tempo. Just with your body loud instead of quiet."



Later, when the studio had emptied and the light had gone amber, Maya came back with one more question. Quieter now.

"When my heart's really pounding," she said, "and everything in me is going fast — how do I remember I even *have* a slow one to reach for?"

Breath thought about the trail in the dark, and the bees, and his grandfather grazing slow.

"You feel for it," he said. "That's the honest answer. When the fast, high, tight feeling shows up behind your collarbones — that's not a sign something's wrong with you. That's just your tempo racing ahead. And a tempo is a thing you can set." He breathed in slow through his nose, and out slower, so she could watch it happen. "You put the very next breath in through your nose. Long. You send it out longer. And your shoulders come down off your ears, and your jaw goes soft, and your heart — being polite — starts to follow you home."

Maya breathed with him. In. Out. Slower. And Breath watched the tightness lift off her the way, years ago, it had lifted off him behind the grove.

He didn't say the rest out loud, but he thought it, warm and sure: *the fastest, most cornered feeling is usually just a tempo that got away from you. And the way back is never far. It's the next slow breath, and the one after that.*

Rest



High in the canopy, on a branch that swayed like a slow tide, a sloth-tween named Rest hung upside down and let the morning happen without her.

She had trained hard the day before — climbing, swinging, holding herself steady against the branch until her arms trembled. Now she did none of it. She just hung there, cream-colored fur tipped with moss, breathing slow, watching a beetle cross a leaf. A younger student had scrambled up to find her, panting, still buzzing with yesterday's effort.

"You're not even *doing* anything," the student said, half impressed, half worried.

"I'm doing the most important part," Rest said, without opening her eyes all the way. "Yesterday I gave my body the message. Today I'm letting it answer."

The student frowned. "But you get stronger when you train."

"No," Rest said gently. "You get stronger when you *rest*. Training is just the ask. This—" she gave one slow blink at the still, sunlit branch, "—this is where the strong actually gets built." She stretched one arm, unhurried. "Watch how far I can reach today, versus yesterday, when everything hurt. Same body. One extra night of quiet."



Rest had grown up in a village of slow, deliberate sloths, high where the wind moved the branches like water.

Her family practiced something they called long-rest — not as a break from work, but as work itself. When she was small, Rest hadn't understood it. She'd watched faster animals dart through the forest and felt slow, felt behind, felt like resting was a thing she should be embarrassed about.

One night, sore and frustrated after trying to keep up with a troop of monkeys all day, she'd found her grandmother hanging in the dark, perfectly calm.

"They went so fast," Rest had said. "I feel like I wasted the whole day just being tired."

Her grandmother had not told her to try harder. She'd said, "You feel heavy, don't you? Like today pressed down into you and nothing came back out."

Rest nodded, miserable.

"That heaviness isn't laziness, little one. That's your body starting the real work — the repairing, the building, the sorting-out. It only happens when you finally stop moving long enough to let it." Her grandmother had shifted, slow and sure. "The body that knows how to rest outlasts the body that doesn't. Rest isn't the empty space between the work. Rest *is* the work."

Rest slept ten hours that night. She woke up reaching farther than she ever had. And the tired, heavy, behind feeling finally had a different name: *building*. Somehow that made it something she could be proud of.



She came down out of the canopy at twelve and walked all the way to FitQuest, because a place that studied bodies ought to understand the part of the body that only works when everything else goes still.

Brio, the mentor who ran the workshops, met her at the gate. She didn't ask Rest to prove how much she could lift or how long she could hang. She asked one question. "What is recovery?"

Rest didn't rush her answer. "Recovery is the training," she said. "You give the body a challenge. But the body doesn't change while it's being challenged. It changes after — while you sleep, on an easy day, during a week where you do half of what you usually do. That quiet stretch isn't wasted. It's where all the gains you're chasing actually get made."

Brio looked at her for a long, warm moment. "You belong here," she said.



Rest's workshop was the calmest room in FitQuest, and the busiest bodies came through it.

A student came in one afternoon, slumped and sour. He'd been training every single day for three weeks. "At first I got so much better," he said. "Then it just... stopped. Now I feel worse than when I started. My knees hurt. I don't even want to go anymore."

Rest knew that slump. She'd felt it high in the canopy, years ago.

"Tell me your week," she said.

"Every day. As hard as I can."

"And sleep?"

"Like six hours. There's too much to do."

Rest hung a little lower, meeting his eyes. "You sent your body a huge message, every day, and never once waited for it to reply." She tilted her head. "Let me show you two friends of mine."

She brought up two athletes and ran their eight weeks side by side. The first trained seven days a week, slept six hours, never eased off. For three weeks he shot up. Then he flattened. Then — sore, sad, injured — he slid backward. The second trained four days, moved gently on two, rested fully on one, slept nine hours, and every few weeks did half her usual load on purpose. She started slower. But she never stalled, never got hurt, and by week eight she'd passed the first one completely.

"Same goal," Rest said quietly. "The rest did the heavy lifting." She counted the pieces on soft fingers. "Sleep first — eight to ten hours, more than any single workout. Full days off, every week. Easy weeks built right into the plan. Food and water, always — your body can't build out of nothing. And listen for the warnings: tiredness that won't lift, a mood that keeps dropping, little injuries that never heal. Those aren't weakness. They're your body asking for the part you skipped."

The student slid down into a chair, and for the first time in three weeks, let his shoulders drop.

Then Rest said the thing she always made sure to say, her voice soft but steady. "One more thing, and it matters more than all of it. If moving ever stops being about feeling capable — if it turns into a way to earn your food, or to control your body, or to chase how you look, or if you just can't stop even when you're hurting — that's not discipline. That's a signal to reach for help, and there's no shame in it at all." She held his gaze. "You can talk to a trusted grown-up. You can call NEDA at 1-800-931-2237, or text HOME to 741741 for the Crisis Text Line. Rest is a body that lasts — not a body that gets pushed until it breaks."



Later, when the workshop had emptied, the student came back with one quieter question.

"When I'm just resting," he said, "and I can't feel myself getting stronger... how do I know anything's actually happening?"

Rest thought about the canopy. About the heavy night, and her grandmother's slow, certain voice.

"You feel it the next morning," she said. "Not during. After. There's this loose, easy, put-back-together feeling — shoulders soft, legs steady, breath coming slow and full — like your body spent the whole night quietly fixing everything you asked of it. That feeling isn't nothing. That's every bit of effort finally becoming strength." She looked out through the leaves toward the swaying branches. "The fastest way forward almost never feels fast. It feels like being still, and trusting that still is doing something."

The student breathed out — long and slow — and Rest watched the tight, driven look ease off his face, the same way, years ago, hers had.

She didn't say the rest out loud, but she thought it, warm and sure: *the tired, heavy, nothing's-happening moments are usually the building ones. Let the body answer. It always does.*

About Spark & Anvil

FitQuest is one of 140 educational iOS apps from Spark & Anvil — a 501(c)(3) public charity making free, ad-free, tracking-free learning apps for ages 9–14.

Every app uses distributed-narrative methodology: named recurring characters embody curricular concepts. The cast you just met appears in the matching app, in mentor scaffolding, in puzzle solutions, in celebration moments. Reading the chapters first means meeting old friends when you open the app.

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