



GrowForge

Meet the Cast

ADVANCED EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This advanced edition collects 5 chapter books from the GrowForge 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.

Contents

CONTENTS

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Contents

Introduction

Tuck

Drip

Glow

Pot

Vigil

About Spark & Anvil

Introduction

The GrowForge 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*

Tuck



On the sunny windowsill, before he planted anything, Tuck knelt down and crumbled a pinch of soil between his paws.

He was a small, careful vole, and this was the thing he did that nobody else bothered to do. The other new gardeners had already grabbed their seeds and were poking holes in the dirt — fast, confident, done in a minute. Tuck just sat there with the soil sifting through his fingers, feeling whether it was cool or warm, damp or dry, loose or packed hard. He wasn't stalling. He was reading.

"You're not even planting," a girl said, watching him with her own seeds already in her fist. "You're just touching the dirt."

"I'm listening," Tuck said.

She gave him a sideways look, the look people gave him a lot.

He opened his paw. Two seeds sat in it — one so tiny it was barely a fleck, one round and heavy as a little pebble. "This small one's lettuce. It wants to live near the top, just under the surface, where the ground stays cool. This fat one's a bean. It wants to go down deep, where the soil holds its warmth." He tipped both back into his pouch. "If I planted them the same way — same hole, same depth — one of them would never come up. And here's the part that matters: I wouldn't have done it *wrong*, exactly. I just wouldn't have *asked*."



Tuck hadn't always known how to ask. When he was very small, he'd planted his whole first row in a single proud afternoon — every hole the same depth, every seed pushed down firm, the way you'd tuck a blanket tight.

Nothing came up.

He'd checked the pot every morning for a week, and every morning the dirt was as flat and blank as the day before, and something happened in his chest that he didn't have a word for yet. It started as waiting and curdled into a small hot certainty: *other kids can grow things. You can't. This just isn't a thing you're any good at.* He'd carried the pot to the edge of the garden to dump it out.

His grandmother caught him mid-tip. She didn't tell him he'd failed, and she didn't tell him to cheer up. She knelt, dug one of his buried seeds out with the tip of a careful claw, and held it on her palm where he could see it.

"Look how deep you put it," she said, not unkindly. "This is a lettuce seed. It's so small it hasn't got the strength to punch all the way up through that much dirt. It started to grow, down there in the dark, and it ran out of push before it ever reached the light." She turned it over. "It didn't die because you're no good at this, little one. It died because it was planted for a soil it never got. The seed's not bad. The soil's not bad. You're not bad. The two of them just didn't *agree*."

Mismatch. The word landed exactly where the hot knot had been sitting, and the knot didn't quite know what to do with it. He'd been so sure the trouble was *him* — a fixed, permanent, all-over fact about who he was. But a mismatch wasn't a fact about him at all. It was a fact about two things and the space between them.

"So it's not my fault," he said slowly, testing it.

"It's nobody's fault. Next time we change one thing — just one — and we watch, and we listen again. That's all growing ever is." She pressed the seed back into his paw. "You don't fix the gardener. You fix the fit."

He planted that same seed shallow the next morning. Four days later a thread of green broke the surface, and Tuck stood over it for a long time, learning by heart the exact difference between *I failed* and *these two didn't match*.



He walked to Growforge when he was twelve, because a place that studied growing things ought to understand the kind of growing that begins with listening.

Sprig, the old mentor who kept the greenhouse, met him at the gate. Sprig didn't ask him to recite plant names or show off a lush garden. He just handed Tuck one unmarked pot of soil and one pale seed and asked a single question: "Where does this go?"

Tuck didn't answer fast. He crumbled the soil first — cool, a little dry, crumbly rather than packed. He turned the seed in the light, small and flat. He glanced up at the greenhouse glass and traced where the sun actually fell.

"It's a cool-soil seed, and this dirt's on the dry side," he said at last. "So — shallow. And I'd water it soft, not flood it. I'd keep it clear of the hot corner over there." He set it in, gentle, and smoothed the surface. "But mostly I'd watch it a few days. If it sulked, I'd change one thing and watch again."

Sprig's eyes crinkled. "Most people tell me what *they'd* do to the seed," he said. "You told me what the *seed* wanted. That's the whole difference. You belong here."



Tuck's corner of the greenhouse turned out to be a windowsill, four small pots, and four seed packets. Kids arrived expecting big tools and bigger yards, and they always looked a little let down by how small his whole setup was.

A boy came in one grey afternoon, shoulders up around his ears. He'd planted marigolds on his own windowsill, nothing had bloomed, and he'd already decided the verdict: he simply couldn't grow things.

Tuck knew that slump from the inside. He'd worn it himself over a flat blank pot.

"Which way does your window face?" he asked.

"North, I think."

"So not much sun." Tuck held up the marigold packet and tapped the fine print. "Marigolds want six hours of light and warm soil. A north window in spring is cool and dim. You didn't give them a bad home — you gave them a good one that just wasn't *theirs*." He crumbled a little soil between his fingers and offered it. "Feel that. Cool. Marigolds hate cool."

The boy's jaw tightened. "So I did it wrong."

"You did it *kind*," Tuck said. "You matched them to the wrong spot, that's all. That's a fixable thing, not a *you* thing." He slid a packet of lettuce across the sill. "Lettuce loves exactly what your window's got — cool, dim, gentle. Plant these instead. Barely under the surface. Water them soft."

"That's it? A different seed?"

"That's it. You don't change *you*. You change one thing." He pressed a seed into the boy's palm. "The seed knows what it wants. The soil and the light tell you what they've got. You're the one standing in between, matching them up. When they agree, things grow. When they don't, nobody's bad — you just listen and try one more thing."

The boy planted the lettuce shallow, the way Tuck showed him, and some of the stiffness went out of his back.



Later, when the greenhouse had gone quiet and gold, the boy came back with one last question. He asked it softly, like it cost him something.

"When the marigolds didn't come up," he said, "I really believed it was because I was no good. How do you *stop* believing that?"

Tuck thought about the flat blank pot, and the hot knot, and his grandmother turning a seed over on her palm.

"You give the feeling its right name," he said. "*I failed* and *these didn't match yet* are two different sentences, and they do two different things to you. One makes you want to quit and never touch dirt again. The other one just makes you curious what to change." He nodded at the green threads already reaching up in the boy's new pot. "Every gardener I know still gets it wrong sometimes. The good ones didn't get better at not failing. They just stopped calling it a fault and started calling it a mismatch."

The boy nodded, and Tuck watched it happen — the same thing he'd felt years ago when a seed finally broke the surface and proved the trouble had never lived inside him. The boy's shoulders came down from around his ears. His breath went slow and even. The heavy, all-over certainty that he was *just no good* loosened and lifted and floated off somewhere, and what settled in its place was quiet and warm, a small steady gladness sitting easy in his chest, like something he'd been carrying too tight had finally been set gently down.

Drip



On the windowsill at the edge of the GrowForge greenhouse, a small newt in a soft garden-vest knelt beside a tray of lettuce and did the hardest thing a gardener can do.

Nothing.

She had a watering can in reach, half full, its spout tipped and ready. But instead of pouring, Drip pressed one finger into the soil — slowly, right down to the second knuckle, an inch deep — and held it there, eyes half closed, listening the way you'd listen for a heartbeat.

"Damp," she said, mostly to herself. She drew her finger out, wiped it on her vest, and set the can back down without a single drop leaving it. "Not today, little ones."

A young gardener named Pot had been watching from the doorway, and he could not stand it anymore. "You're just going to leave them dry?"

"They're not dry," Drip said. "They're damp. There's a difference, and it's the whole job." She tapped the soil once, gently, like knocking on a door she wasn't going to open. "Watering is easy. Anybody can pour. The craft is knowing when *not* to."



Drip had not always been a waiter. Once, she had been the most enthusiastic waterer in her whole marsh-village, and she had nearly killed everything she loved.

She was small then, given her first windowbox of seedlings, and she adored them so fiercely she visited three times a day. Morning: a splash. Noon: a splash. Evening, before bed, one more — because how could she sleep knowing they might be thirsty in the dark? She poured out of love. She was *sure* it was love.

The seedlings yellowed first. Then they went soft at the stem, the way things go soft when they've been wet too long. Then, one grey morning, they simply tipped over — collapsed, blackened at the roots, drowned in the very kindness she'd been so proud of.

Drip had cried over the box. An old marsh-frog named Sedge, who had grown things by that water for longer than anyone could count, sat down beside her on the mud.

"You didn't neglect them," Sedge said. "You loved them to death. That's a harder thing to learn from."

"I gave them everything," Drip whispered.

"You gave them *more*. That's not the same as *enough*." Sedge reached over and pressed one wrinkled finger into the ruined soil, right to the knuckle. "Roots need to breathe as much as they need to drink. Water fills the little air-pockets in the soil, and when you never let those pockets empty, the roots gasp. You weren't feeding them. You were holding them under." He pulled his finger out, dark with mud. "Feel first. Pour second. And most days — most days, little one — the answer is *wait*."

Drip looked at her hands, at the watering can, at the terrible soft stems. And something in her decided, right there in the mud, that she would rather learn to wait than ever drown another living thing with love.



She came to GrowForge many seasons later, because a greenhouse full of eager young gardeners is exactly the place where things get loved to death the most.

Sprig, the mentor who kept the greenhouse, met her among the seedling trays and asked the question the greenhouse always asked its cast. "Drip. What is watering?"

Drip didn't reach for the watering can. She reached for the soil. She pressed one finger an inch into the nearest tray, closed her eyes, and left it there a long moment before she answered.

"Watering is listening," she said. "Everyone thinks it's pouring. It's not. Pouring is the last thing, and the smallest thing." She withdrew her finger, showed him the damp tip. "This is watering. Feeling whether the plant is thirsty before you decide it is. Most of what I do here is talk people out of the can." She met his eyes, steady and quiet. "The plant already knows what it needs. I just teach hands how to hold

still long enough to hear it."

Sprig looked at the damp on her finger, and at the trays behind her that had gone leggy and yellow under too much care. Then he nodded. "You belong here," he said. "Every child who walks in wants to *do* something for these plants. You're the one who'll teach them that sometimes doing nothing is the kindest thing there is."



Pot came back to Drip a week later, close to panic, cupping the watering can against his chest like something he was defending.

"They look fine," he said fast, "the lettuce looks fine, but you said don't water and it's been two days and what if I *ruin* them by waiting, what if —"

"Finger," Drip said.

He blinked.

"Put your finger in the soil. All the way. Don't tell me what your eyes think. Tell me what the soil feels like."

Pot set the can down — reluctantly, like it hurt — and pressed his finger into the lettuce tray. He held it there. His frantic breathing slowed a little without his noticing.

"...It's dry," he said, surprised. "It's actually dry now. Down where I can't see."

"Down where the roots are," Drip agreed. "That's where it matters. Not the top — the top always dries first and fools you. So *now* you pour. Slow, and deep, until it runs out the bottom. Then you don't touch that can again until your finger says dry." She watched him lift the can, tip it, let the water sink in slow. "Feel how that's different? You're not watering because you're worried. You're watering because they asked."

Pot poured until it ran clear from the drainage holes, then stopped. He looked at his damp finger, then at Drip, then at the can he'd been clutching all week like a lifeline.

"The waiting was the whole thing," he said slowly. "Wasn't it. Not the water."

"The waiting was the whole thing," Drip said.



That evening, after the greenhouse had emptied and the light through the glass had gone gold and low, Pot lingered by the lettuce tray. He didn't reach for the can. He just crouched there, watching the leaves stand up a little straighter in the fading light, and he pressed one finger into the soil — not to water, just to know.

Damp. Fine. Cared for.

And the tight, jumpy worry that had ridden around behind his ribs all week — the one that had made him check and check and pour and pour — went quiet at last. His shoulders, hiked up somewhere near his ears from all that fretting, came down slow. He let out a breath he felt like he'd been holding for days. It was such a strange, good feeling: to love something and *not* need to fix it, to sit beside a living thing and trust it, to have his hands still in his lap and know that stillness was the gift. A small, warm gladness settled in his chest, patient and unhurried, exactly the shape of the water sinking quietly down to the roots.

Glow



Glow had her nose almost against the lettuce leaf, close enough that her breath fogged the glass tray, and she was smiling at it the way you smile at a friend who's just confessed something wonderful.

To the other kids gathered around the workshop microscope it was only a leaf — green, faintly crinkled, unremarkable. But Glow tapped the screen and the image lunged closer, past the ribbed veins, past the waxy skin, down and down until a single cell filled the whole wall. And there they were: dozens of small green bodies drifting in a slow interior current, bumping and turning like beads suspended in syrup.

"There," she breathed. "Chloroplasts. Every single one is making lunch. Right now, while we're standing here doing nothing, it's working."

A boy leaned in and frowned. "It's just sitting in a tray. It's not doing anything."

"It's doing the most anything of anything in this entire garden." Glow's edges warmed a soft gold, the way careful fireflies glow when they're happy and don't notice. "Light is coming through that window. It lands on those green dots. And inside each one the leaf takes the light, and a little water, and a gas out of the air nobody can even see — and it *builds sugar*. It cooks its own food out of sunshine." She sat back. "Animals eat food. Plants make it. That lettuce is a factory running on the sun, and nobody ever bothers to tell you that's what you're looking at."

The boy looked at the leaf, then the screen, then the leaf again — and Glow watched it happen, watched the thing get three sizes bigger behind his eyes.

"Huh," he said quietly. And Glow knew that *huh*. It was the best sound she knew.



She could still find the exact moment the world had first done that to her.

She'd been small, crouched in her family's garden, furious at a bean plant that drooped no matter what she did. She'd fed it. She'd watered it. She'd talked to it. And she remembered the hot, baffled feeling of it — *what do you even want? Why won't you take what I'm giving you?* — the particular anger of trying hard at the wrong thing.

Her uncle, an old firefly whose flicker had slowed to a patient pulse, had drifted down beside her. He didn't tell her to be patient, which she'd have hated. He just said, "You keep trying to feed it, little spark. But it isn't hungry the way you are."

"Everything's hungry," she'd shot back.

"It is. Only it doesn't eat with a mouth." He'd laid one wing near the wilting leaf. "It eats with the sun. Give its roots water, give its leaves the light, and it will cook its own lunch out of the light and the water and the air. It doesn't want your food. It wants its *ingredients*."

She'd dragged the pot to the windowsill that afternoon, half out of spite. And over the next week she'd watched the bean plant haul itself upright and lean toward the glass, unfurling, reaching, feeding on something invisible. It hadn't been ignoring her. It had been starving for the one thing she'd kept it from. And the feeling that flooded her then — bright, tingling, *oh, that's how it works* — never once got smaller in all the years since. It only ever got bigger, every time she learned a little more.



She walked to Growforge at twelve, on the plain logic that a place that grew things ought to know what was happening *inside* the things it grew.

Sprig, the old mentor who ran the greenhouse, met her at the door and didn't ask whether she had a green thumb. He plucked a single blade of grass and held it out. "Where does a plant's body come from?" he asked. "All that stem, all those leaves — where's the actual *stuff* of it made?"

Most people said the soil. Glow lifted the grass against the light until it went bright and see-through.

"Mostly out of the air," she said, "and the sunshine. It breathes in a gas you can't see, drinks a little water, catches the light — and builds its whole body out of that. The soil barely feeds it. It's making itself out of *air and sun*."

Sprig was quiet a moment. Then something in his face eased. "Almost nobody gets that right the first time they're asked," he said. "You belong here."



Glow's corner of the greenhouse became the place kids came when a plant had betrayed them.

A boy stalked in one grey afternoon holding a droopy seedling at arm's length, as if it had insulted him. "It's dying," he announced. "I keep it warm. I give it plant food from the store. And it just *droops*. I did everything right."

Glow recognized the slump — not the plant's, the boy's. She'd worn it herself, beside a bean, a long time ago.

"Where do you keep it?" she asked.

"My closet shelf. It's cozy in there."

"Any light?"

A pause. "...No."

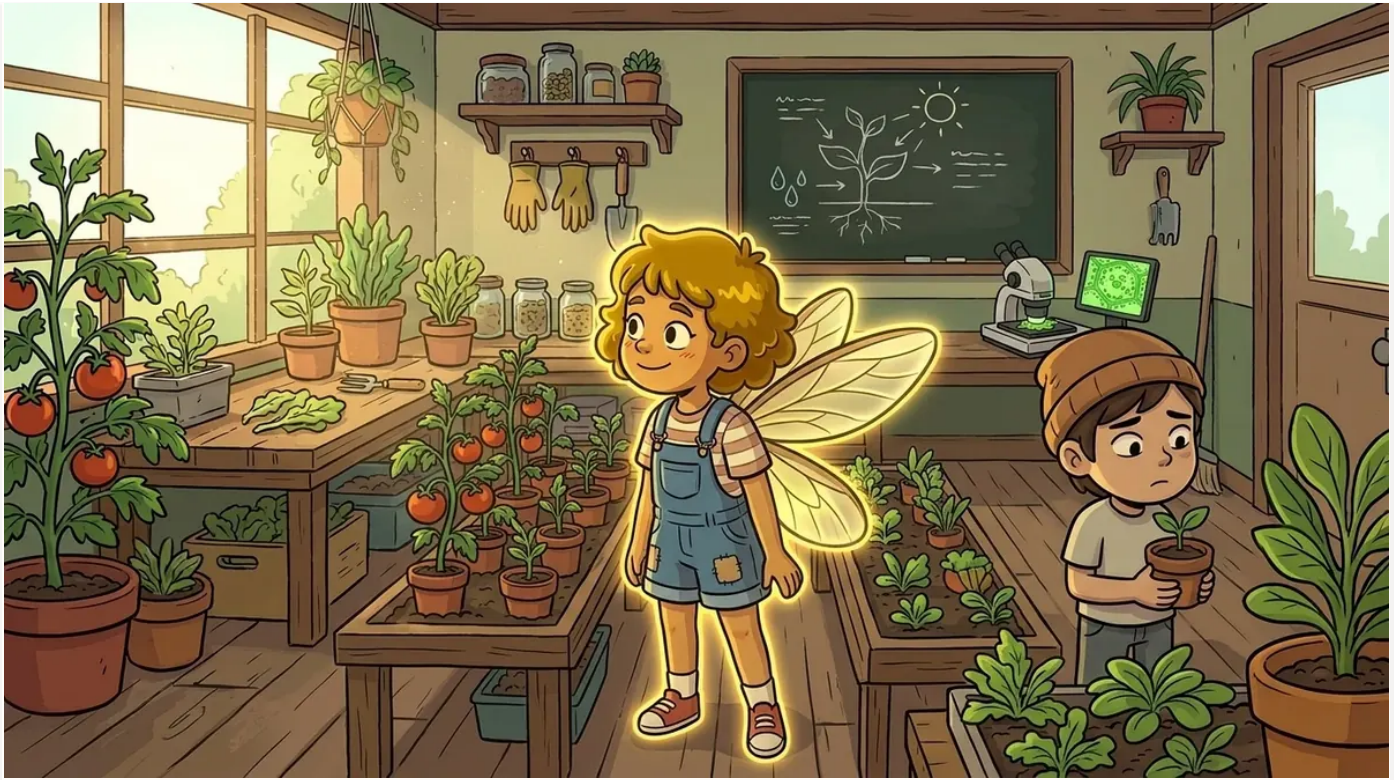
She set the seedling under the microscope and zoomed in the way she loved, down to the cells, down to the green dots. "See those? Chloroplasts. The lunch-makers. Sunlight lands on them, and inside they take water — Drip's the one who carries that up from the roots — and a gas the leaf breathes in through tiny pores, and they assemble the two into sugar. The plant lives on that sugar. *That's* its meal." She looked up at him. "You've given it a cozy dark shelf and a snack it can't even use. It doesn't eat with its roots. It eats with light. On that shelf, those green dots had nothing to work with. It wasn't sulking at you. It was starving — for the one thing you took away."

The boy stared at the drifting green dots. "So the store food..."

"Helps a little. Like vitamins. But the *meal* is light and water and air, built into sugar right there in the cell." She slid the pot toward him. "Put it in the window and just watch. In a day or two it'll start reaching for the sun. You'll actually be able to *see* it eat."

He took the pot in both hands, carefully, like it might break. "That's kind of amazing," he said. "It makes its own food out of *sunlight*."

"Right? And every leaf you'll ever see is doing it. Every blade of grass, every tree in the park — free lunch from light, all day, everywhere. And the leftover, the oxygen it breathes back out, is the air *we* breathe in. We're partners. It feeds itself on light; we feed ourselves on it. The whole living chain begins in that one green dot."



Later, when the greenhouse had emptied and the light had turned amber, the boy came back with one more question, quieter this time.

"If it's really just chemistry," he said, not quite looking at her, "just cells and sugar and gas — doesn't knowing all that make it less magic?"

Glow thought of her uncle, and the bean reaching for the window, and the *huh* that had never once gone small.

"Other way round," she said. "Before I understood it, a leaf was just a leaf — pretty, and closed, and dumb. Now I know it's pulling light out of the sky and turning it into food and breathing out the very air I need to stay alive. And I know it's *true*. Not a story I'm telling myself. True." She looked out at the rows of green all leaning toward the last of the sun. "Understanding it didn't shrink it. It made it enormous. The wonder was always there. I just couldn't see it until somebody showed me where to look."

The boy nodded slowly, cradling his seedling toward the glass.

And Glow felt it rise in her again — that warm, lit-from-inside feeling that started somewhere behind her ribs and spread all the way out to the soft gold edges of her wings, the gladness that gets *bigger* the more you know, never smaller. It loosened something in her chest she hadn't noticed was tight. She had never once tired of it. She hoped, watching him carry the little plant toward the light, that he never would either.

Pot



Pot was small, like a finch, but she carried herself with a sturdy, confident posture. Her bright terracotta-orange garden vest had soft cream stripes, like sun-warmed window sills. Tucked into one pocket was a small, worn clipboard—her **container + apartment gardening** space-tracker. It listed every kind of container a kid might find: yogurt cups, takeout boxes, plastic bottles cut in half, old milk jugs, even cracked ceramic pots. Next to each, Pot had drawn tiny pictures of plants that would fit, along with notes on how to make sure the water drained properly.

Pot was creative and resourceful, always thinking about the actual space a kid had. She often said, "A windowsill is a garden too. A yard is just one kind of garden, not the only one." She believed gardening wasn't just for kids with big backyards. It was for anyone with a sunny window, a small balcony, or even a spot in a community garden. For Pot, the container was the garden bed, and the window was the field.



Her craft was teaching kids that gardening could happen anywhere. It didn't matter if you lived in an apartment, a condo, or a shared house. If you had a container and some light, you could grow something. Pot never talked down to kids who gardened on a windowsill. She never made kids with backyards seem like "real" gardeners. To her, a windowsill garden, a community plot, a balcony garden, or a yard garden were all equally valid. They were all peer contexts.

Pot taught kids how to be resourceful with containers. She showed them that a yard wasn't the standard; a window was. She explained that drainage mattered more than the container's shape. "Punch holes if you need to," she'd advise, holding up a plastic bottle with neat rows of tiny punctures. This idea of making do with what you have, of improvising, was a big part of her method.

"I am Pot," she'd say, her voice clear and gentle. "The craft I teach is container and apartment gardening. Remember this: a windowsill is a garden too. A yard is just one variant, not the default." She'd pause, looking around at the different spaces where plants grew. "Windowsill, balcony, community plot, yard — they're all gardens. All peers."



One afternoon, Pot was carefully misting the basil on the windowsill when her friend Leo stopped by. Leo lived in a house with a sprawling lawn and his own raised garden beds. He peered at the four small containers lined up on the sill. A cherry tomato plant, still small, reached for the sun. Next to it, a row of bright green lettuce leaves unfurled.

"You don't have a real garden," Leo said, a little too loudly. He gestured vaguely at the small pots. "You just have plants in pots."

Pot paused, her hand still holding the mister. She didn't look annoyed, just thoughtful. A gentle smile touched her lips. "That *is* a garden, Leo," she replied. Her voice was soft, but firm. "The pots *are* the garden bed. The window *is* the field. And look, the plants are growing." She pointed to a tiny green tomato forming on the vine. "That's what a garden *is* – growing plants in tended containers, however small."



Leo frowned. "But it's not like my backyard. You don't dig in the dirt."

"You don't have to," Pot explained patiently. "A yard isn't required. Lots of kids grow herbs and salad greens and even small tomatoes on windowsills. And in cities, many apartments have access to community plots. That's the same craft, just shared ground." She picked up a small plastic cup, showing him the drainage holes she'd made with a heated nail. "The plants don't know they're in a small container. They just know if there's sunlight, water, and soil. We have all three right here."

Leo still looked unsure, his eyes darting from the small pots to the bright sunlight streaming through the window. He was used to seeing rows of vegetables in wide, open spaces. This felt different, smaller.

Pot leaned in slightly. "Your yard isn't more real than my windowsill," she said, her voice dropping to a quiet, earnest tone. "Your gardening isn't more real than mine. We're peers. The crafts are exactly the same."



Sprig, their mentor, watched from the doorway. She gave a small, almost imperceptible nod. Pot had just held the gate open. There was no "real-gardener" tier. There were just gardeners – kids who tended plants in whatever space they had. And the GrowForge team would always hold that line.

Pot knew that many kids felt left out of gardening because they didn't have a big yard. She was the one who named this feeling, this "nature-deficit and privilege gate." Every other character in their group – Tuck, Drip, Glow, and Vigil – did their own craft on a windowsill scale. But Pot was the one who spoke up when someone implied that "real" gardens needed backyards. Her phrase, "a windowsill is a garden too," became their team's essential line. Whenever a friend, a family member, or even a game character suggested that gardening was impossible without a yard, Pot was ready with her gentle, firm reminder.

She also made sure to mention community gardens. Many cities had public garden plots that apartment residents could use. Pot framed these as just another type of garden, equal to private ones. It wasn't charity or a substitute. A community plot was simply a different way of sharing land, not a lesser way. It was all about access and equity, about improvising with what you had, and about urban greening

traditions that connected people across cultures.

But underneath the lesson, there was a feeling Pot wanted every kid to carry. When Leo had called her pots "not real," she'd felt that small, tight pinch you get when someone says your thing doesn't count. She knew that pinch well. And she knew the warm, steady calm that came after — the quiet, sure feeling of standing tall and knowing that what you have is enough. That calm, she hoped, was what stayed with a kid long after the words faded: not the rule about drainage holes, but the settled, unshakable sense that they belonged in the garden, exactly as they were.

Vigil



At the sunny end of the GrowForge windowsill, past the seedling trays and the little clay pots and the row of watering cans, a quiet kid stood as still as a heron in shallow water, doing nothing at all.

That was the thing about Vigil. At first glance you'd think they were doing nothing. They wore a soft garden vest, leaf-green striped with cool stone-grey, and in one pocket sat a small journal worn round at the corners. Vigil was looking at a tomato plant. Just looking. Their eyes moved slowly over each leaf, each stem, the crumb of soil at the base, the tiny insect walking the underside of a leaf like it owned the place.

Only after a long while did Vigil open the journal and sketch what they'd seen — quick, exact lines, a note beside them. *New bud, third stem. One aphid, one only. Watch.* Then they closed the book and stood still again.

Another kid, Pot, watched from across the sill and finally couldn't stand it. "You've been staring at that plant forever. Aren't you going to *do* something?"

Vigil didn't hurry to answer. "I am doing something," they said. "I'm watching. That's the whole job, most days. Look every day. Don't pluck what's working. Plants are patient teachers." They tucked the journal away. "The trouble isn't that gardeners do too little, Pot. It's that they do too much."



Vigil had not always been so slow. Once, they had been the fastest hands in any garden — and it had cost them a whole windowsill of plants.

They'd been small then, given a tray of seedlings to tend. Every morning they'd found something to fix. A leaf that looked a little pale got plucked. A stem that drooped in the heat got flooded with water. A leaf with a single chewed hole got sprayed until it dripped. Vigil had felt useful, busy, in charge. Every symptom was a problem, and every problem was theirs to solve, and they solved all of them, fast.

By the end of a month the tray was a graveyard. The plucking had wounded the stems. The flooding had rotted the roots. The spraying had scorched the leaves that were only visited, not sick. Vigil had done everything right, as far as they knew — and killed nearly all of it with care.

An old gardener had knelt beside the ruined tray and not scolded them. Instead she had asked one question. "Which of these were dying before you touched them?"

Vigil hadn't been able to answer. They'd never waited long enough to find out. The old gardener had set a blank journal in their hands. "A yellow leaf can be an old leaf, letting go. A droop can be an afternoon of heat that a cool evening will cure. A hole can be one hungry bug that's already moved on. You can't tell the difference in a single glance," she'd said. "You can only tell by watching two days running. Draw it. Wait. Then you'll know whether it's a problem — or just a plant being a plant."

Vigil had waited, that time. And most of the "problems" had simply gone away on their own.

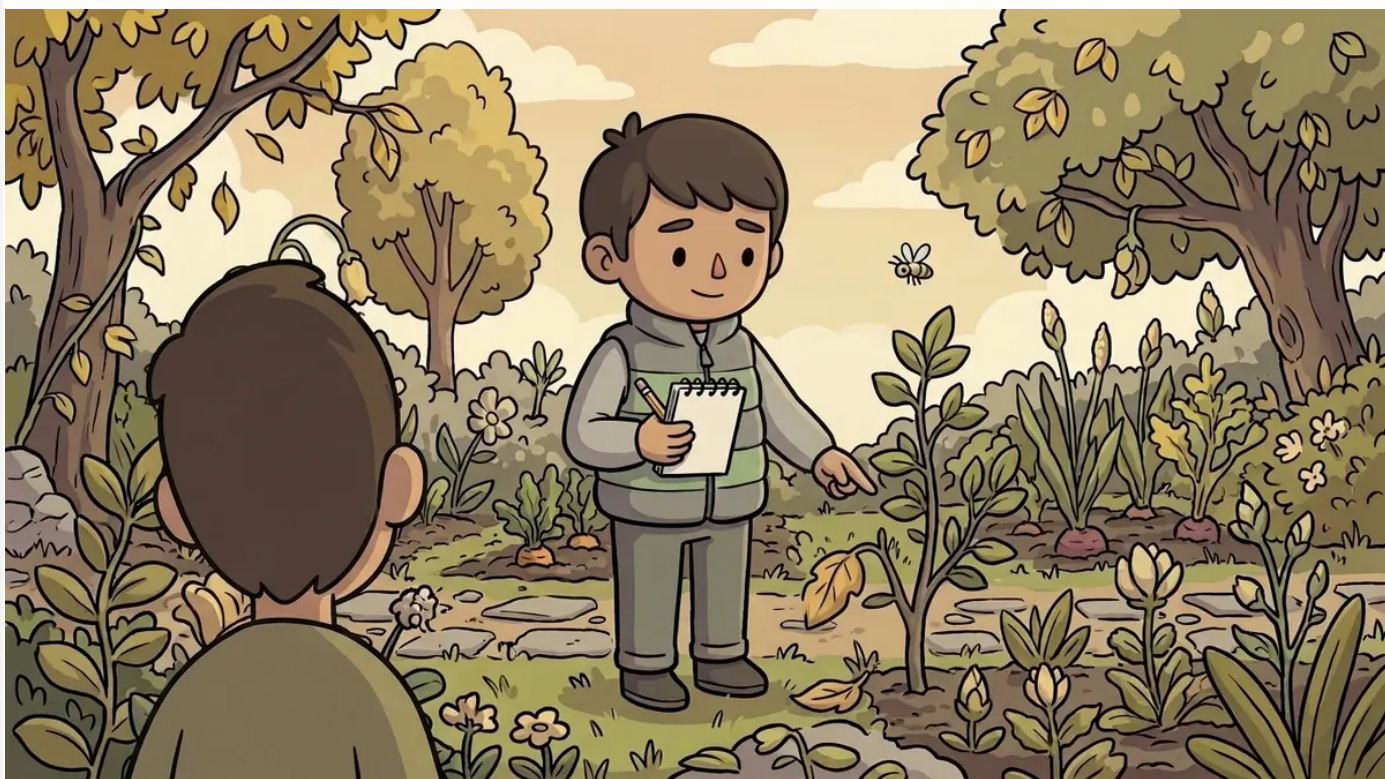


Vigil came to GrowForge because a place full of eager young hands was exactly the place that most needed someone who knew how to keep them still.

Sprig, the mentor who ran the windowsill, met them at the door with the question she always asked. "Vigil — what does a plant doctor actually do?"

Vigil didn't give her a definition. They pulled out the journal and opened it to a page from the old ruined tray, the sketches faded now. "A plant doctor mostly *doesn't*," they said. "Here — I killed eleven seedlings by treating things that weren't sick. Every one of these notes is a plant I could have saved by leaving it alone." They let the page rest between them. "So the first thing I teach isn't a cure. It's how to wait forty-eight hours before deciding there's anything to cure at all. Most 'problems' aren't problems. They're just plants doing quiet work we haven't learned to read yet."

Sprig studied the faded page for a long moment. Then she nodded. "You belong here," she said. "This whole sill is full of kids who love plants so much they'd fuss them to death. You're the one who'll teach them to sit on their hands and look."



Three weeks into the windowsill project, Pot came running with panic all over their face.

"Vigil! Look!" Pot jabbed a finger at their lettuce pot. Low on the plant, one leaf had turned a soft, sickly yellow. "It's dying! I have to pull it off right now, right?" Pot's hand was already reaching, fingers twitching with the need to *fix it*, to make the wrong thing gone.

Vigil moved with calm speed and caught Pot's hand before it closed. "Hold on," they said, gently. "Let's look at this leaf in context first." They knelt and drew out the journal, flipping to a clean page. "Where is it?"

"It's — at the bottom," Pot said, thrown by the question. "Near the soil."

"The oldest leaf, then. Now look up top." Vigil tilted the pot toward the light. "What color are the new leaves?"

Pot looked, really looked, for maybe the first time. "...Bright green. All of them. Just the one is yellow."

"So the plant is healthy and shedding one old leaf it doesn't need anymore," Vigil said. They sketched the lettuce, marking the yellow leaf's spot exactly. "If you pluck it now, you'll tug the whole plant, maybe tear the stem, and stress something that isn't even sick. We'd be the problem, not the leaf." They wrote a small note beside the sketch: *Lettuce, oldest leaf, yellowing. Observe 48 hours.* "Here's the deal. We do nothing for two days. We just watch and draw. If more leaves yellow — that's a real signal, and then we act. If it stays just this one, it's the plant being a plant."

Pot pulled their hand back, still doubtful. "So I just... watch it. For two whole days. And *not* help."

"You just watch it," Vigil said. "That's the help."



The next morning the whole cast gathered around the lettuce pot as if it might have transformed overnight. It hadn't. One leaf yellow. The rest bright and reaching. Vigil marked the journal without a word. The morning after that, they looked again — and the yellow leaf was gone. Not plucked. Not touched. It had shriveled to a small brown curl and dropped to the soil all on its own, quiet as anything.

"See?" Vigil said softly. "The plant knew what to do. We just had to keep our hands out of the way."

Sprig watched Pot's face and smiled. "Vigil closes the whole arc," she told the group. "Tuck taught you to listen at planting. Drip taught you to feel the soil. Glow showed you what happens inside a leaf. Pot learned that any space can be a garden. And Vigil ties it together with patience. A garden is a slow conversation. The kid who waits hears more than the kid who reacts."

Pot stood over the little brown curl for a moment, and something behind their ribs let go — the tight, buzzing hurry that had made their fingers twitch two days ago. It just... loosened, and drained out through their shoulders, and left a warm, easy quiet in its place. They'd been so sure the plant needed saving. It turned out the plant had only needed them to breathe, and wait, and trust that it was already doing fine. Pot pressed their palm flat to the cool rim of the pot and felt, settling into their chest, a slow and steady gladness — the good, unhurried kind, the kind that comes from finally setting something down that you never really had to carry.

About Spark & Anvil

GrowForge 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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