



ClimateQuest

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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

Methodology: story-based learning, where the characters embody the ideas being taught, with a trauma-informed, emotionally-safe approach.

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This is Volume 2 of 2 of the *ClimateQuest — Meet the Cast* series; each volume is a complete standalone book you can read on its own.

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The ClimateQuest 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.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Stitch

*COLLECTIVE ACTION — *one stitch is small. many stitches make a repair. you are one of the many.**



- prompt: "Stitch says no one has to carry the whole climate on their shoulders. Have you ever felt worried that a big problem was all up to you? What might it feel like to know you are just one of many helping hands?"
 - prompt: "When Stitch pauses her mending to rest, she says the repair waits patiently. When something feels like too much, does your body ever tell you it needs a break? What helps you feel steady again?"



Stitch was small. Her feathers were warm, like a sunset. They were russet red and creamy white. She was super patient. Especially when it came to fixing things. Stitch loved to say, "You are one of the many. The many can fix what one cannot." Her best thing was that embroidery hoop. The cloth inside always showed a repair happening. Each stitch was tiny. But many stitches made the whole thing strong. The cloth didn't need to be perfect. It just needed to hold together.

Sometimes, when kids heard about climate change, they felt really sad. Or super worried. "It's too big!" they might think. "What can I even do?" Some kids felt guilty. "I rode in a car today," they'd whisper. "Is it my fault?" Stitch knew these feelings. She knew they weren't helpful. Climate change was a huge problem. But it wasn't one person's fault. And one person couldn't fix it alone. It needed *everyone*. It needed lots of people working together. That's what **collective action** was all about. Things like new rules, better roads, voting, and choices families made. Even small habits, when millions of people did them, added up. Stitch's job was to show kids this. She helped them feel like they could actually *do* something. Not just feel sad or guilty.

Stitch always said it clearly. "One stitch is tiny," she'd chirp. "But many stitches make a strong repair." She'd look right at you. "You are just one of many," she'd explain. "And many people together can fix what one person can't." Stitch never wanted anyone to feel bad. "Don't carry the whole climate on your shoulders," she'd insist. "No single person caused this. No single person can fix it all." She'd tap her hoop. "But your stitch matters. It joins all the other stitches. That's how we make things better."



Stitch was twelve when she walked to ClimateQuest. A wise old bird named Cirrus met her there. Cirrus was a mentor. "What is **collective action**?" Cirrus asked. Stitch didn't even blink. "One stitch is small," she chirped. "Many stitches make a repair. You are one of the many." She explained that the cloth got mended by lots of stitches. Not just one perfect stitch. "Fixing the climate is the same," Stitch said. Cirrus nodded slowly. "You have a very important job," Cirrus told her. "Without you, kids might feel sad and hopeless. But with you, they will learn to act. They will learn to fix things."

One sunny afternoon, a new visitor named Alex came to Stitch's workshop. Alex looked a bit worried. Stitch was busy mending a ripped kite. It was bright yellow and had a long tail.

"Hello," Stitch chirped, not looking up. "Welcome to my mending place."



Stitch finally looked up. She held the kite. "Big problems need many small fixes. See this kite? It has a huge tear." She pointed with her beak. "I could try to fix it all at once. But that would make a mess. It would probably rip again."

She picked up her needle. "So, I do it one stitch at a time." She showed Alex a tiny, neat stitch. "This is one stitch. It's small. But it holds this little bit." Alex watched closely. "Your actions are like these stitches. Carrying a reusable water bottle is one stitch. Talking to your family about saving energy is another. They all matter."

Stitch put down the kite. She picked up a drawing. It showed a city. "Some stitches are very big," she said. "Like when the city decides to use only solar power. Or when the government makes new rules. Those are like giant stitches. One person can't do that alone. But we can encourage those big stitches. We can vote for leaders who want them. We can support schools that use less power."



Stitch picked up her own embroidery hoop. The cloth inside had many stitches. Some were neat. Some were a bit crooked. "See these?" she asked. "Some are wonky. Not perfect at all. But the cloth still holds. It's okay if your actions aren't perfect. Don't wait for the perfect plan. Don't feel bad if you make a mistake. A wonky stitch still holds the cloth."

Alex sighed a little. "It just feels like so much."

Stitch nodded gently. "It can. If you feel overwhelmed, just pause. It's like needing a break from stitching. The repair waits patiently. You can always come back. Taking a break is part of fixing things." She smiled. "Hope isn't just wishing. Hope is action-shaped. Doing even small stitches keeps us from feeling stuck. Even tiny stitches are a way to repair."

Read it? Now hear Stitch's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/climatequest/stitch>

Glint

ALBEDO & FEEDBACK — bright surfaces bounce the sun's warmth away; dark ones soak it up. When bright shrinks and dark grows, the warming speeds itself up. A loop that runs one way can be slowed.



On the bright edge of a snowfield, a snowshoe-hare-tween named Glint was teaching a squinting fox two things at once: how a white coat works, and why she kept a square of coal-black slate in her pocket.

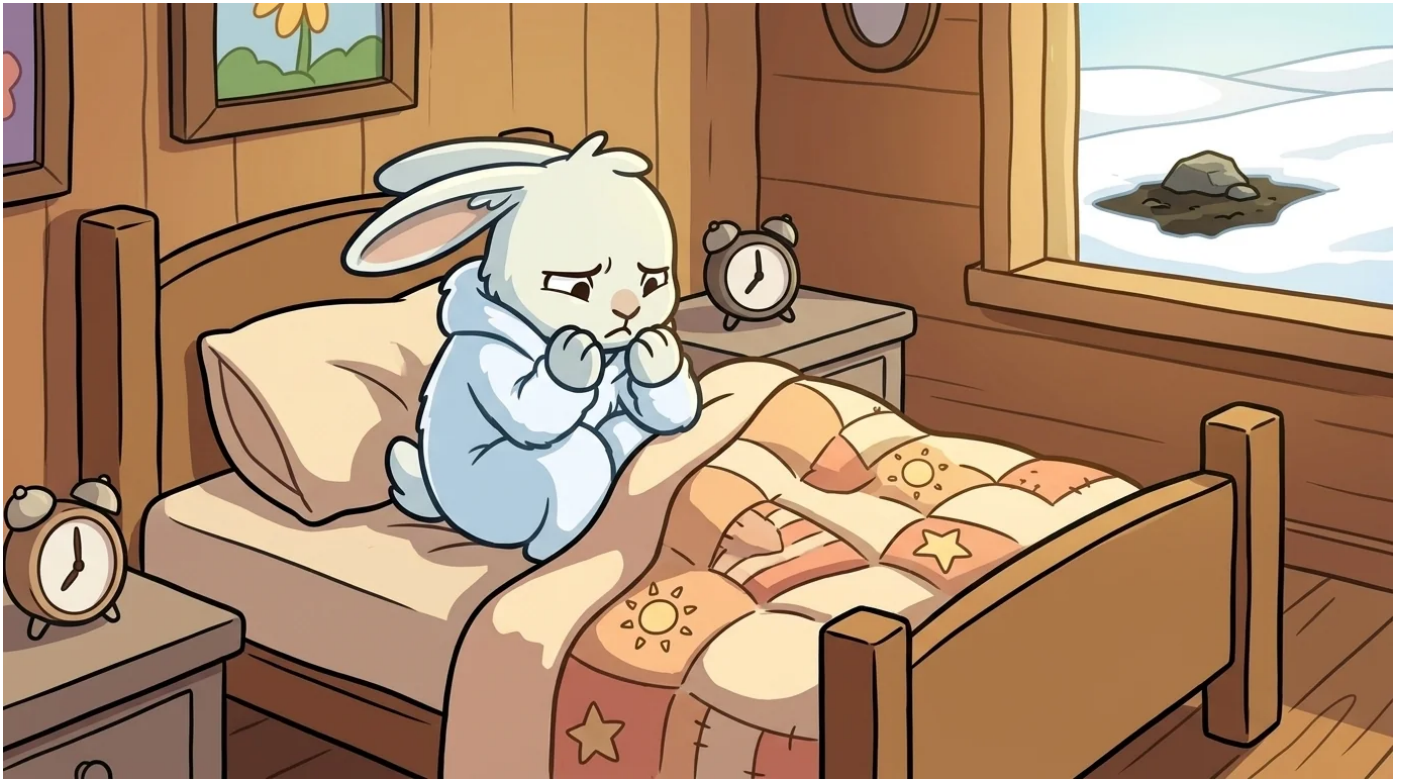
"Watch my paw," Glint said. Her winter coat was the clean white of fresh snow. She held her white paw flat under the noon sun, then laid the black slate beside it. "Touch both. Quick, before you decide anything."

The fox pressed a pad to each. "Your fur's cool," he said, surprised. "The black rock's already hot."

"Same sun on both," Glint said. "The white bounces most of it right back up to the sky — barely keeps any. The black drinks it in and holds it." She wiggled her pale ears. "Bright throws warmth away. Dark soaks it up. That's the whole first idea, and it's just true, everywhere, all the time."

The fox looked out at the dazzling white field, then at the dark stones poking through where the snow had thinned. "So the snow keeps the ground cold by throwing the sun back."

"It does. And here's the part that made me sit down hard the first time I understood it." Glint nudged the black slate half under a scrap of white cloth, then pulled the cloth back an inch. "When the white shrinks, more dark shows. More dark soaks up more warmth. More warmth melts more white. Which shows *more* dark." She pulled the cloth back, inch by inch, faster. "It pushes on itself. A loop. Once it starts leaning one way, it leans harder."



Glint had felt that loop in her own chest, once, long before she understood it in the snow.

She'd been small, and something at school had gone a little wrong — a joke that landed sideways, a look she couldn't read. And instead of letting it go, she'd let the first worry make a second one, and the second make a third, each one darker than the last, each one soaking up more of her until she was lying awake with a whole black field of them and no idea how it had gotten so big from something so small.

Her aunt, who tracked snow-melt in the high passes for a living, had found her curled tight the next morning. She didn't say *don't worry*. She said something stranger.

"You've got a loop going," her aunt said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Each worry's feeding the next one. That's not weakness — that's just how loops work. A thing that leans one way leans harder the longer it goes." She tapped Glint's forehead, gently. "But a loop isn't a wall. You don't have to smash it. You just have to find one place to lean it the *other* way. One. And then it starts helping you instead of chasing you."

Glint had picked one small true thing — *the joke was probably just a joke* — and held onto it. And she'd felt the black field stop growing. Not vanish. Just stop feeding itself. The relief of it, the way her breath went from short to long, stayed with her for years: *a loop that runs one way can be turned. You don't need to be stronger than the whole loop. You just need one nudge, early.*



She walked to ClimateQuest the spring her coat first turned — white fading to brown as the snow pulled back — because a place that studied a warming world ought to understand a hare who changed color with it.

Cirrus, the mentor at the gate, didn't test her. She asked, "What is a feedback loop?"

Glint took out her white cloth and her black slate and set them both in the sun. "It's when the result of a change loops back and makes *more* of the same change," she said. "Up in the far north, bright ice reflects the sun away and keeps things cool. When some ice melts, dark water shows underneath. The dark water soaks up more warmth, which melts more ice, which shows more dark water." She slid the cloth back an inch. "Each step makes the next step easier. That's the ice-albedo loop. It's why the far north warms faster than almost anywhere."

Cirrus watched the small brown-and-white hare with her two squares of proof. "And is that the end of the world?" she asked — the real question, the one under the question.

"No," Glint said, steady. "It's a loop. Loops can be slowed. You catch them early, and you find one place to lean them back." She looked up. "That's the part people forget to say."

"You belong here," Cirrus said.



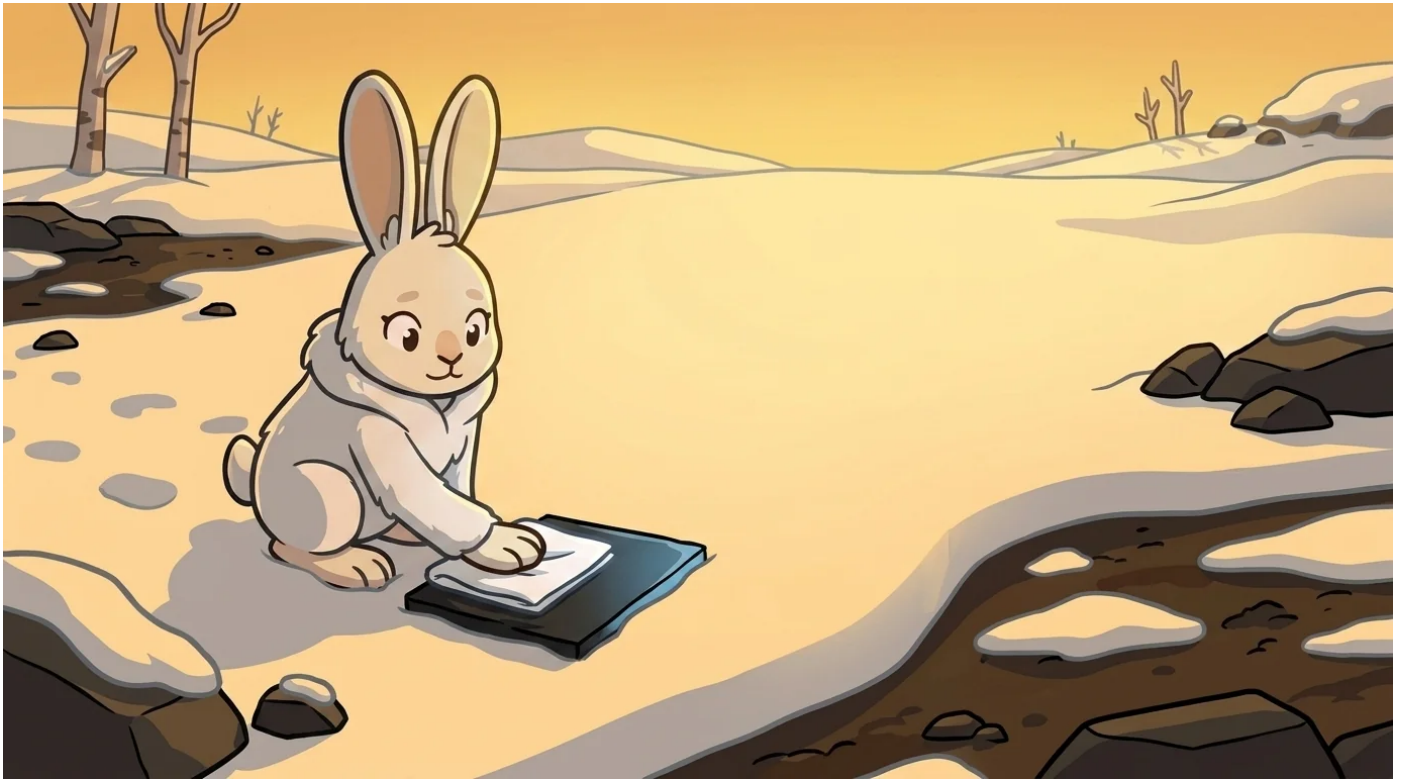
Glint's workshop was cool and bright, its walls painted the flat white that throws light back, and children came to it worried.

A boy arrived one afternoon gripping a printout, his voice going fast. "It says the ice melts and then it melts *even faster* and then it can't stop — it's a runaway, it feeds itself, we already lost—"

"Breathe," Glint said. "You've read it right. It does feed itself. Now let me show you the other half nobody printed on your page." She put the white cloth and black slate in the window sun. "Watch the loop." She peeled the cloth back; the dark drank the light. "Speeding up, yes. But look what I do." She laid the white cloth back over the slate. Instantly the surface under her paw went cool. "Reflection can be *added back*. Where people keep the ice, the loop slows. Where they paint roofs and streets pale instead of black, the ground throws warmth away instead of soaking it. Cool-painted cities are doing exactly this, right now. The loop doesn't only run toward hot. It runs toward whichever way we lean it."

The boy stared at the cool white cloth over the once-hot slate. "So it's not a runaway if someone leans on it."

"A loop chasing itself is still just a loop," Glint said. "And the earlier you nudge it, the smaller the nudge it takes. That's not a reason to panic. That's a reason to move while the nudge is still small." She grinned, ears up. "You found the loop. Most people never even see it. Seeing it is how you get in front of it."



Later, when the light went gold and low, the boy came back and asked the quieter thing.

"When it feels like it's already speeding up too fast to catch," he said, "how do I make it feel catchable again?"

Glint thought of the black field of worries that had grown so large from so little, and her aunt's finger on her forehead, and the one small true thing that had turned it.

"You find the one place to lean," she said. "Not the whole loop — you'll never out-muscle the whole loop, and you don't have to. Just one early nudge the other way. Keep the ice bright where you can. Add reflection back. Pick the one small true thing and hold it." She folded the white cloth over the slate and left it there, cool in the fading sun. "A loop feels like a monster because it feeds itself. But that's also its secret: lean it back even a little, and *that* starts feeding itself too."

The boy let out a long breath, and Glint watched the fast, chased look go out of his eyes, the way the racing had gone out of her own chest years ago when the black field finally stopped growing.

She didn't say the last part aloud, but she thought it, bright and cool and certain: *the things that feed themselves are the scariest and the most hopeful, both at once — because whichever way you lean them early, they carry the lean the rest of the way.*

Read it? Now hear Glint's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/climatequest/glint>

Fathom

OCEAN SINK & INERTIA — the sea quietly soaks up most of the extra heat and much of the carbon, and it changes slowly. Slow to warm means slow to cool — there is a delay, and the delay cuts both ways.



Far out where the water went from blue to dark-blue to nearly black, a sea-turtle-tween named Fathom floated with two glass jars roped to her shell — one thimble-small, one enormous — and waited for the otter to stop being impatient.

"You said you'd show me something," the otter said, paddling circles. "I've been floating here for *ages*."

"You've been floating here for a few minutes," Fathom said, unhurried, "which for you is ages, and that's exactly the lesson." She unhooked both jars and set them side by side on a floating raft of kelp, in the sun. "Both full of water. Both in the same warm light. Come back when the sun's high and touch them."

By midday the otter was bursting. He dipped a paw in the little jar — "Warm!" — and then the big one. He frowned. "The big one's barely changed."

"Same sun. Same warmth pouring in," Fathom said. "The little jar heats up fast because there's so little of it. The big one takes in the *same* heat but spreads it through so much water that it warms slowly." She patted the deep dark below her. "The ocean is the biggest jar there is. When the sky gets warmer, the sea takes most of that extra heat and tucks it away — quietly, deep down. It's been cushioning the whole world, soaking up warmth the air never had to feel."

The otter looked at the enormous jar, barely warmer than the sea. "So the ocean's been... catching it for us."

"Most of it," Fathom said. "For a long time. Without a word."



Fathom had learned about slow-holding from her grandfather, who ferried messages between the far islands.

When she was small she'd loved how *fast* things could be — quick tides, quick minnows, quick weather. She thought slow meant dull. Then one storm season the reef went strange: hot spells above, but the deep water stayed steady and cool, and the fish that fled the shallows came down to her grandfather's depths and made it through.

"Feel how the deep barely moved?" he'd said, in the calm dark below the churning surface. "Up top, everything swings — hot, cold, hot again. Down here we change slow. That slowness isn't dull, little one. It's a keel. It's what keeps the whole thing from tipping every time the sky has a mood."

Fathom had drifted in that steady cool, feeling her own racing heart slow to match it, and something settled in her that never quite left: *the one who changes slowly is the one everyone else can lean on. Slow isn't nothing happening. Slow is holding.* She'd stopped being ashamed of being unhurried after that. She'd started being proud of it.

But her grandfather told her the other half, too, that same night. "Mind — slow to warm is also slow to *cool*. Whatever heat we take in, we give back late. If the sky ever pushed too much warmth down on us, we'd hold it long after the pushing stopped. The deep keeps its promises slowly. Both kinds."



She swam to ClimateQuest the year the shallow reefs first bleached pale, because a place studying a warming world ought to understand the slow deep that was carrying so much of the warming out of sight.

Cirrus met her at the water-gate. "What does the ocean do in all this?" she asked.

Fathom set her two jars in the light. "It's the world's biggest sponge for heat and for carbon," she said. "More than nine parts in ten of the extra warmth from a thicker sky — the sea has taken it. A big share of the extra carbon, too; it dissolves right in. The air would be far warmer already if the ocean weren't quietly holding so much." She rested a flipper on the great jar. "But it holds slowly, and it lets go slowly. So the warmth we feel now is partly from carbon added years ago — the sea is only now passing it up. And the good we do now won't show for years either. The deep answers late. Always late. Both directions."

Cirrus considered the patient turtle and her two jars. "That could sound like a trap — warmth already promised, arriving late."

"It could," Fathom agreed. "Or it could sound like time. The sea bought us years by holding what it held. The delay isn't a trick. It's a cushion — if we understand it, and don't mistake *slow to show* for *not working*." She looked up from the dark. "You belong here," Cirrus said, "and stay near the gate a while. The fast ones need someone who holds slow."



Fathom's workshop was a tide pool, deep and calm, and the children who came to it were often the frightened-fast kind.

A girl arrived talking quickly, twisting her sleeve. "We stopped so much already — my family, my town, we changed everything — and it's *still* getting warmer, so it didn't work, nothing works, why even—"

"Sit by the deep jar," Fathom said gently. "Paw in. Now the little one." The girl did; the little jar was hot, the big one mild. "Same sun on both, remember. The big one just answers slow. You didn't fail. You're standing in the *delay*." She tapped the great jar. "The warmth you feel today was mostly promised years back, by carbon already up there before you lifted a finger. And the good your town is doing now? The sea and sky will hand that back years from now, to someone your age who isn't born yet. Slow to show is not the same as not working. It never was."

The girl stared at the mild, enormous jar. "So it *is* working. I just can't feel it yet."

"That's the hardest kind of true," Fathom said. "The deep keeps its promises late — the worrying ones *and* the hopeful ones. If you quit the moment you can't feel the change, you quit right before the change you already earned comes up from below." She smiled slow. "You found the patience part. Most people never make it past 'but nothing's different yet.'"



Later, when the tide pool went still and silver, the girl came back and asked the quiet thing.

"When it feels like all my effort just sinks and disappears," she said, "how do I keep going?"

Fathom thought of her grandfather in the calm dark, and the fish that survived because the deep held steady, and *slow is holding*, and *the deep answers late, both directions*.

"You remember that sinking isn't the same as vanishing," she said. "The sea takes what you give it and holds it and passes it up its own slow way, on its own slow clock. You won't always feel the good land. That's not a sign it didn't. That's just the deep, keeping time the way it always has." She settled deeper into the cool. "Do the good thing on the slow clock. Then let the deep carry it. That part was never yours to hurry."

The girl breathed out, long and slow like the deep itself, and Fathom watched the frantic edge leave her, the way her own racing heart had once slowed to match the calm below the storm.

She didn't say the rest aloud, but she thought it, deep and steady and sure: *the slow ones look like nothing is happening. But the slow ones are the keel. They are holding the whole thing steady while the surface has its moods — and everything good you hand them, they give back, late and certain, long after you stopped watching for it.*

Read it? Now hear Fathom's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



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Cusp

TIPPING POINTS — some changes are gentle right up to an edge, then flip fast and are hard to undo. Knowing where the edge is means you can stay back from it — the map of the edge is a tool, not a doom.



High on a ridge where the meadow ended in open sky, a mountain-goat-tween named Cusp stood with all four hooves planted and one carved wooden bowl balanced on a flat stone, teaching a nervous marmot the difference between *near* and *over*.

"Roll the marble," Cusp said.

The marmot flicked the marble into the bowl. It swung up one curved side, slowed, rolled back down, up the other side, back again. "It just... comes back."

"Every time," Cusp said. "Push it a little, it climbs a little, it always rolls home. That's most of the world. You nudge it, it wobbles, it settles. Gentle in, gentle out." She tipped the marble higher up the bowl's wall — near the rim now — and it still rolled back. "Still fine. Still comes home. *Near* the edge isn't the same as *over* it. People forget that."

Then, slowly, she rolled the marble right up to the lip of the bowl, past the curve, onto the flat stone beyond — and it kept going, straight off the rock, gone into the grass. It did not come back.

The marmot blinked. "It didn't roll home that time."

"Because it passed the edge," Cusp said. "One tiny bit further than all the other pushes, and it stopped coming back at all. That's a tipping point. Gentle, gentle, gentle — then *flip*, and now you can't just wait for it to settle, because it won't. Getting the marble back in the bowl is a whole climb down and up. Much harder than the little nudge that sent it over."



Cusp had learned the edge the hard way, as a kid, on a snow-slope she thought she knew.

She'd crossed it a hundred times. Each step packed the snow a little; each crossing was fine; nothing ever happened. So she stopped watching. And one warm afternoon, on a step that felt exactly like all the others, the whole slab let go beneath her — slow, then horribly fast — and slid her a long, roaring way down before it stopped.

She wasn't badly hurt. But she lay in the settled snow, heart slamming, terrified in a new way: not of the fall, but of how *ordinary* the last step had felt. Nothing had warned her. It was just one step past the edge, and the edge had looked like everywhere else.

Her mother, who read slopes for the herd, climbed down to her and didn't scold. She crouched and drew a line in the snow with one hoof.

"You're thinking the mountain betrayed you," she said. "It didn't. It has edges, that's all — places where *near* turns into *over*. Your job was never to be strong enough to survive the fall. Your job is to *learn where the edges are* and cross a little higher, on the firm part, where near stays near." She tapped the drawn line. "A goat who knows the edges isn't a scared goat. She's a free one. She can go almost anywhere — because she knows the few steps not to take."

Something turned over in Cusp then, and the fright reshaped itself into something steadier: *the edge isn't out to get me. It's just there. And a thing you can see, you can stay back from*. She never stopped watching for edges again. But she never again felt trapped by them, either. Knowing where they were was exactly what set her free to roam.



She climbed to ClimateQuest the season the far glaciers first cracked strangely, because a place studying a changing world ought to understand a goat who read edges for a living.

Cirrus met her on the high path. "What is a tipping point?" she asked.

Cusp set down her bowl and rolled the marble — home, home, home — then over the lip, gone. "It's a place in a system where gentle stops working," she said. "For a long time you push and it settles back, push and it settles back. Then past one threshold it flips to a new state and won't settle back on its own — a huge ice sheet that keeps melting once it starts; a forest that dries into grassland and stays grassland. Getting back is far harder than the small step that tipped it." She looked up. "The scary part is how normal the last step feels. The *useful* part is that scientists can often see roughly where the edges are — before we reach them."

Cirrus studied the sure-footed goat on the ridge. "Most people hear 'tipping point' and freeze."

"Because they only heard half," Cusp said. "Freezing is for when you *can't* see the edge. We usually can. And an edge you can see is an edge you can stay back from. That's not doom. That's a map." Cirrus smiled. "You belong here."



Cusp's workshop opened onto the high ridge, and the children who found their way up were often the ones who'd read a scary headline and couldn't sleep.

A boy arrived pale, the words tumbling out. "There are tipping points and once we hit them it's over, it's irreversible, we're basically already—"

"Roll the marble," Cusp said.

He did. It rolled home. Again. Home. "See," Cusp said, "most pushes settle. We are *near* some edges, and near is serious — but near is not over. And here's what the scary version skips: we can see roughly where the edges are, and every bit of warming we *don't* add keeps the marble a little further from the lip." She rolled it right up near the rim, where it still came back. "This is where care matters most — close to an edge, small nudges decide everything. That's not a reason to give up. That's the exact spot where staying back does the most good." She caught the marble before it could reach the lip. "Every fraction of a degree we hold back is one more push the marble survives."

The boy watched the marble roll home again. "So we're not past it. And staying back actually... counts."

"Counts most of all, right here near the edge," Cusp said. "The goat who knows where the edge is doesn't fall off. She just walks a little higher, on the firm part. That's the whole skill. You already did the hard part — you *looked* at the edge instead of away from it. Now you get to stay back from it on purpose."



Later, when the light went thin and gold along the ridge, the boy came back and asked the soft thing.

"When it feels like we're right on the edge and one wrong step ends everything," he said, "how do I not be frozen?"

Cusp thought of the slab letting go, and her mother's hoof drawing a line in the snow, and *a thing you can see, you can stay back from*.

"You look straight at the edge and name where it is," she said. "Frozen is for edges you can't see. This one we can see — that's the gift the scary headline forgot to mention. And you cross higher. Every choice that adds less warmth walks you a step further from the lip. You don't have to leap the whole mountain. You just have to not take the few steps toward the edge." She planted her hooves, calm on the high ridge. "Knowing where the edge is isn't the scary part. It's the part that makes you free to move."

The boy let out the breath he'd been holding, and Cusp watched the frozen look melt out of him, the way her own trapped fright had once turned into something sure-footed and free.

She didn't say the last of it aloud, but she thought it, steady as the ridge under her hooves: *an edge in the dark is a terror; an edge in the light is just a place you decide not to step. All the fear was ever really asking was — can you see it? And we can. So we get to choose.*

Read it? Now hear Cusp's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/climatequest/cusp>

Curb and Shore

CLIMATE RESPONSE = MITIGATION + ADAPTATION — Curb slows the cause (cut what we add); Shore prepares for what's already coming. Two hands, not one; each covers what the other can't.



Where the mountain stream ran down into the sea, a beaver-tween named Curb and a hermit-crab-tween named Shore stood on opposite banks of the same rising water, teaching a soggy, overwhelmed vole that there was not one job here but two.

"The rain's too much," the vole wailed, "and the water keeps coming, and I don't know whether to build a wall or run upstream or—"

"Both of us are going to answer that," Curb said, "and we're going to answer it *differently*, and that's the whole point." He nodded upstream, where he'd been packing sticks and mud. "My job is up there — slow down how much water comes rushing in. Less flood arriving means less flood to deal with. That's *my* hand."

"And *my* job is down here," said Shore, tamping wet sand into a curved little wall around the vole's burrow, "getting ready for the water that's already on its way and can't be stopped now. Some of it's coming no matter what Curb does upstream. So I shore up for that part." She patted the wall. "That's *my* hand."

The vole looked from the beaver upstream to the crab at his door. "So it's not one or the other."

"It's never one or the other," Curb and Shore said, almost together, and then grinned at each other across the water because they always ended up saying it at the same time.



Curb had learned his hand at the source, from an old beaver who read floods for the valley.

Young Curb used to wait until the water was already at the village and *then* fling himself into fixing it — exhausted, always too late, always downstream of the trouble. One spring he'd worn himself ragged bailing out flooded burrows, and he'd sat down in the mud and cried that no matter how hard he worked, the water just kept *coming*.

The old beaver had sat beside him. "You keep meeting the flood where it *ends*," she said. "That's the hardest place to fight it. Come up to where it *starts*." She walked him upstream, to a narrow place, and showed him how a few well-set sticks slowed the whole rush to a trickle. "You can't un-rain the rain. But you *can* slow how fast it charges down. Cut the cause, and every burrow below you has less to survive. This is the quiet hand — nobody downstream sees you doing it. They just notice the flood was smaller this year."

Curb had felt the exhaustion in him turn into something clear and steady: *the best place to stop a flood is before it gets big. Slow the cause, and you help everyone downstream at once, without them ever knowing it was you.* He'd been a source-worker ever since — patient, upstream, cutting the trouble down before it grew.

Shore had learned her hand at the water's edge, from a tide that never once asked permission.

She'd grown up believing that if she just prevented hard enough, nothing bad would ever reach her. Then the king tide came — higher than any wall of *no* could stop — and washed straight through her tidy denial and flooded everything she'd refused to prepare for.

Her uncle, who'd weathered forty seasons on that beach, found her wringing out her ruined things. He didn't say *you should have stopped it*. He said, "Some water was always going to reach you. That's not failure. That's tide." He showed her how to build a burrow that let water in and drained it out, how to raise what mattered above the line, how to bend instead of break. "Stopping the cause is one hand — a good one. But some of it's already on its way, kiddo. Pretending it isn't just means it catches you flat. The brave move isn't only *prevent*. It's also *get ready*."



Something unclenched in Shore then: *getting ready for what's already coming isn't giving up on stopping it. It's the second hand. And two hands hold what one hand drops.* She stopped being ashamed of preparing. She started seeing it for what it was — courage that looked ahead.

They came to ClimateQuest the same season, from opposite ends of the same stream, and Cirrus met them together at the water-gate.

"What does it mean to respond to a warming world?" she asked.

Curb answered from upstream-habit: "You slow the cause. Add less of the heat-trapping gas — cleaner power, less waste, forests kept standing. Every bit we *don't* add is less warming to deal with later. That's mitigation. That's my hand."

Shore answered from the water's edge: "And you get ready for the warming that's already promised and can't be un-done now — cooler shelter for heat waves, room for higher water, crops that handle a drier year. That's adaptation. That's *my* hand."

"Most people," Curb said, "grab one hand and drop the other. The ones who only prepare stop slowing the cause — so it keeps getting worse. The ones who only slow the cause refuse to prepare — so the part that's already coming knocks them flat."

"You need both," Shore finished. "Curb makes the flood smaller. I get us ready for the flood that still comes. Neither of us alone is enough. Together we're a whole answer."



Cirrus looked at the beaver and the crab, upstream hand and water's-edge hand, and said, "You two belong here. Set your workshops on the same stream."

So they did — Curb's upstream, Shore's at the shore — and a boy came down the path one afternoon carrying the flat, heavy look of someone who'd decided nothing could be done.

"It's already too warm to fully stop," he said dully, "so slowing it is pointless. But we also can't just give up and let it wreck everything. So there's... nothing. There's nothing to do."

"There's *two* things to do," Curb said, "which is the opposite of nothing." He showed the boy the upstream sticks. "Every bit of warming we slow makes what's coming smaller. Not pointless — that's the size of the whole rest of the story." Then Shore walked the boy to her sea-wall. "And everything we ready ourselves for means the part that *does* arrive hurts less. Not giving up — getting *ready*." She tapped the wall. "You thought the choice was win-completely or lose-completely. It was never that. It's: make it smaller, and get ready for the rest. Two hands. Always two."

The boy looked upstream, then down at the wall, and something came back into his face. "So I'm not stuck. I've got two jobs, not zero."

"Two jobs, not zero," they said together, and grinned across the water again.

Later, when the tide turned and the stream ran quiet and silver, the boy came back and asked the soft thing.



"When it feels like it's hopeless because we can't stop *all* of it," he said, "how do I stop feeling helpless?"

Curb thought of meeting the flood upstream instead of too late; Shore thought of the tide that taught her to get ready instead of pretend. And they answered the way they answered everything — one hand each.

"You slow what you can," Curb said. "Every bit counts, and it's never all-or-nothing."

"And you get ready for what's already coming," Shore said. "That's not surrender. That's the second hand."

"Helpless is what you feel when you think there's only one move and it's failing," Curb said. "But there were always two." Shore nodded. "Do both. Neither has to be perfect. Together they hold what neither could alone."

The boy let out a long breath, and the flat, stuck look lifted off him, and Curb and Shore watched his shoulders come down — the way their own had, years apart, on a stream and a shore, when *do-something* stopped being one impossible thing and became two possible ones.

They didn't say the last part aloud, but they thought it together, the way they thought most things: *despair is a one-handed feeling. It comes from believing there's a single move and it isn't enough. But there were always two hands. Slow the cause. Ready for the rest. Nobody who has both ever has nothing to do.*

Read it? Now hear Curb and Shore's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



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Methodology

This book uses story-based learning — the characters embody the ideas being taught — grounded in the work of Jerome Bruner (on narrative and cognition) and Sebastian Habgood (on weaving learning into the play itself), with a trauma-informed, emotionally-safe approach drawn from SAMHSA's trauma-informed care framework.

Trauma-informed design informed by Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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