



MindForge

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Mindforge 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.

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This is Volume 2 of 2 of the *Mindforge — 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 Mindforge 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*

Vane

EMOTIONAL GRANULARITY — moving from "I feel bad" to the precise feeling underneath, because the exact name changes what actually helps.



- beat-after: 1
prompt: "Vane believes 'bad' is just the front door, and the real feeling is somewhere down the hall. The next time you feel 'bad,' what do you think you might find if you went a little further in?"
 - beat-after: 4
prompt: "Vane helped Wren find out she wasn't angry — she was left out. Have you ever named a feeling more exactly and felt something loosen, just a little, once you knew its real name?"

High on the roof of the MindForge academy sat a small bird named Vane, and on the very tip of her tail spun a tiny copper arrow.

It was not a pretend arrow. It really turned. When the wind came from the east, it pointed east. When the wind shifted, it shifted. Vane had grown up with it and never thought it strange. What was strange, she thought, was how many creatures said the wind was "just wind," as if there were only one kind.

"There's never only one kind," Vane would say. She had a quick, light voice, like someone sharing a secret she was delighted by. "There's the wind that smells like rain coming. The wind that pushes you uphill. The wind that sneaks under the door. They feel the same for about one second. Then they don't."



Vane tilted her head. Her copper arrow gave a small, interested spin.

Vane came down from the roof in three soft hops and landed on the bench beside Wren. She did not say *calm down*. She had never once said that to anyone. It seemed to her a strange thing to ask of a feeling — like asking the weather to stop being weather.

"Bad," Vane repeated, as if tasting the word. "That's a good place to start. But you know what I've noticed? 'Bad' is usually the front door. The real feeling is somewhere further down the hall."

Wren frowned. "It's just bad."



The copper arrow stopped turning. It pointed, gently, at nothing Wren could see — but Wren felt it point, somehow, straight at the sore spot.

They walked the long way around the courtyard while the arrow held its direction.

"There's a word for the small sharp one," Vane said. "Actually there are lots. That's the thing nobody tells you — there are dozens of feelings wearing the same coat called 'bad,' and they all want different things." She hopped along the low wall, keeping pace. "Angry wants to *push*. Scared wants to *hide*. Embarrassed wants to *disappear*. Lonely wants to be *found*. They look alike from far away. Up close, they're as different as four kinds of wind."



Wren turned that over. She had always thought naming a feeling was like getting a sticker on a chart. She had not thought of it as a direction to walk.

"Okay," Wren said slowly. "Let's do the small sharp one. Where does it point?"

Vane settled beside her and let the arrow turn free. "Don't reach for the word," she said. "Let it come. When did the pinch start?"

"At lunch," said Wren. "Everyone was planning the weekend. The whole table. And nobody — " She stopped. The arrow had begun to swing, sure and steady, away from a word and toward a different one. "Nobody asked me," Wren finished, very quietly.

"Hm," said Vane, not pushing. "Angry would want to push the table over. Does that fit?"



Wren breathed out. It was the strangest thing: nothing about lunch had changed. Nobody had come back to ask her anything. And yet the knot in her tail had loosened by exactly one loop, because the feeling finally had its real name, and the real name was so much smaller and so much more solvable than "bad."

That evening, Sage — who watched over all of MindForge with the patience of someone who had named a great many feelings in their own time — found the two of them still on the wall, the copper arrow turning idly in the cooling air.

"She thought she was just 'bad,'" Vane reported. "Turned out she was left out. Whole different wind."

Sage nodded slowly. "And how does *left out* feel," they asked Wren, "now that it has its name?"

Ballast

REGULATION-AS-STEADYING — a big feeling is a wave, not a flaw. Ballast is the weight low in the boat that keeps you from tipping while the wave passes — you don't have to make the wave stop.



Down at the edge of the MindForge harbor, where the academy met the water, lived a round, low, heavy-bottomed creature named Ballast.

He looked a little like an otter and a little like a smooth river stone that had decided to grow paws. He was wide at the bottom and calm all the way up. When he sat in a small boat, the boat sat *still* — not because the water was still, but because Ballast was so steady that the boat seemed to borrow it from him.

"People think my job is to stop the waves," Ballast said, in a low unhurried voice that came from somewhere near his belly. "It isn't. I can't stop a wave. Nobody can. My job is to keep the boat from tipping while the wave goes by. That's all. That's enough."

A young goat named Bram stood on the dock, vibrating with a feeling far too big for him. His ears were back. His breath was high and quick. Something had gone wrong at the academy — a project, a friend, a moment he couldn't take back — and the feeling had risen up like water over the side.

"Make it stop," Bram pleaded. "Make it go away."

Ballast shook his round head slowly. "I won't lie to you and say I can," he said. "But climb in. I'll keep us from tipping."



Bram climbed into the little boat, and it rocked hard — once, twice — under the weight of his churning feeling. Water slapped the sides. For a second it really seemed they might go over.

Then Ballast settled, low and heavy, right at the center of the boat. He didn't grab the sides. He didn't paddle frantically. He just *lowered* — got wider, got heavier, got closer to the water — and the boat, which had been about to tip, steadied around him.

"There," he said. "Feel that? The wave's still here. We're still in it. But we're not going over."

Bram's breath was still fast. "It's not gone."

"No," Ballast agreed, with no apology in it at all. "Big feelings aren't supposed to be gone in a second. That's not a thing that's broken about you. A wave takes the time it takes. Our whole job, you and me, is just to stay upright until it's passed under us."



They sat together in the rocking boat. Ballast did one quiet thing, over and over: he breathed all the way down, slow, so that Bram could feel the boat sink and rise, sink and rise, with him.

"You don't have to copy me," Ballast murmured. "But if you want a thing to hold onto, hold onto the bottom of the boat. The lowest part. The heaviest part. Feel where it sits in the water."

Bram pressed his hooves flat against the boards. He felt the boat's low belly resting in the harbor. He felt how it wanted, naturally, to come back to level — how a wide-bottomed boat is built to right itself.

"That want-to-come-back-to-level," Ballast said, as if reading him, "that's already in you. Same as it's in the boat. You don't have to make steadiness. You just have to stop fighting the water long enough to let it find you."

Slowly, slowly, Bram's breath began to drop from his throat down into his chest. Not because he ordered it to. Because he stopped ordering it to do anything at all.



The wave passed under them. It really did. It lifted the little boat, tilted it, and then set it gently down on the far side, and the water went smooth and ordinary, the way water does once a swell has rolled through.

Bram blinked. The enormous feeling that had felt like it would last forever had — not vanished, exactly — but *moved through*. It was behind them now, a swell heading off toward the far shore.

"It went by," Bram said, amazed.

"They always do," said Ballast. "That's the part nobody believes while they're in it. The feeling tells you it's permanent. It's very convincing. But it's a wave, and a wave is a thing that's *passing*, even when it's right on top of you." He gave the smallest smile. "We didn't make it leave. We just didn't tip. And not tipping was enough to still be here when it left."

Bram looked back at the smooth water where the wave had been. He hadn't fought it. He hadn't won. And somehow that was exactly why he was still upright.



Later, on the dock, Sage came to sit with them, letting their old feet hang over the edge toward the water.

"He wanted me to make the feeling stop," Ballast told Sage. "I told him I couldn't. We just stayed low and let it pass."

Sage nodded the way they did when something true had happened. "And now?" they asked Bram. "How does it feel, on this side of the wave?"

Bram searched himself for the answer. The feeling wasn't gone — he could still find its edges if he looked. But it no longer felt like something that would drown him. It felt like weather he had lived through.

"Steady," Bram said at last, and the word surprised him by being true. "Not happy, exactly. Just — steady. Like I found out I'm heavier at the bottom than I thought. Like I won't tip as easily as I was scared I would." He let out a long breath toward the calm water. "It feels good to know the boat comes back to level. Even after a really big one."

Ballast settled lower in the boards, content, a round steady weight at the center of everything, and let the harbor rock them both as gently as it pleased.

Vantage

PERSPECTIVE-TAKING — climbing to the exact spot where another person stands, so you can see what they see from there, instead of guessing from your own.



Vantage was a long-legged mountain hare with a habit that drove some creatures wild: before she would say one word about what anyone was feeling, she insisted on going and standing exactly where they stood.

"You can't tell me what the hill looks like from your spot," she'd say, already lacing up, "until I've stood on your spot. From here it's just a guess. And a guess wearing a confident face is still a guess."

She had grown up on a strange two-topped hill where the same afternoon could be sunny on one side and shadowed on the other. As a kit she'd learned the hard way that "it's a sunny day" depended entirely on which top you were standing on — and that arguing about it from your own top got you exactly nowhere.

In the academy courtyard, two young creatures had their backs to each other. A badger named Pell sat hunched and silent. A weasel named Tig stood with her arms thrown up.

"He's ignoring me on purpose," Tig declared. "I *know* he is."

Vantage's ears swiveled with interest. "Do you?" she said, lacing up. "Or do you know it from your top of the hill? Come on. Let's go stand on his."



Tig did not want to go stand on Pell's top of the hill. From where *she* stood, the whole thing was obvious: she'd waved, Pell had looked away, end of story, ignored on purpose.

"Why do I have to move?" Tig grumbled. "I can see fine from here."

"You can see *your* view fine from there," Vantage agreed, perfectly friendly. "That's the trick of it. Your own view always looks complete. It never has a little sign that says *warning: there's more of this hill you can't see from here*. But there always is." She started across the courtyard toward where Pell sat. "Come look. You can always go back to your spot after. I promise it'll still be there."

Reluctantly, Tig followed. With every step the angle changed. Halfway across, she could suddenly see something she hadn't from her own side: Pell's shoulders weren't proud and dismissive. They were curled in, small, the way shoulders get when something hurts.

"Huh," said Tig, slowing. "He looks different from over here."

"Everybody does," said Vantage softly. "That's the whole reason to make the trip."



They reached Pell's spot. Vantage crouched low, right down at his eye level, and looked out the way he was looking — and gently waved Tig down to do the same.

From Pell's spot, the afternoon sun came straight across the courtyard and hit you full in the eyes. From here, anyone walking up would be a dark shape against a blinding glare. From here, you might wave at a friend and genuinely, completely, not see them wave back — because you couldn't see much of anything but light.

"Oh," said Tig, very quietly, the glare in her own eyes now. "Oh. He couldn't see me. The sun's right there. From his spot you can't see anybody."

Vantage didn't say *I told you so*. She never did. Telling-you-so was a thing you said from your own top of the hill, and she'd already left hers. "Now you know," she said simply. "Not because you guessed kindly. Because you went and looked from where he was."

Pell glanced over, squinting against the light, and saw — for the first time — two friends crouched right beside him, sharing his impossible glare.



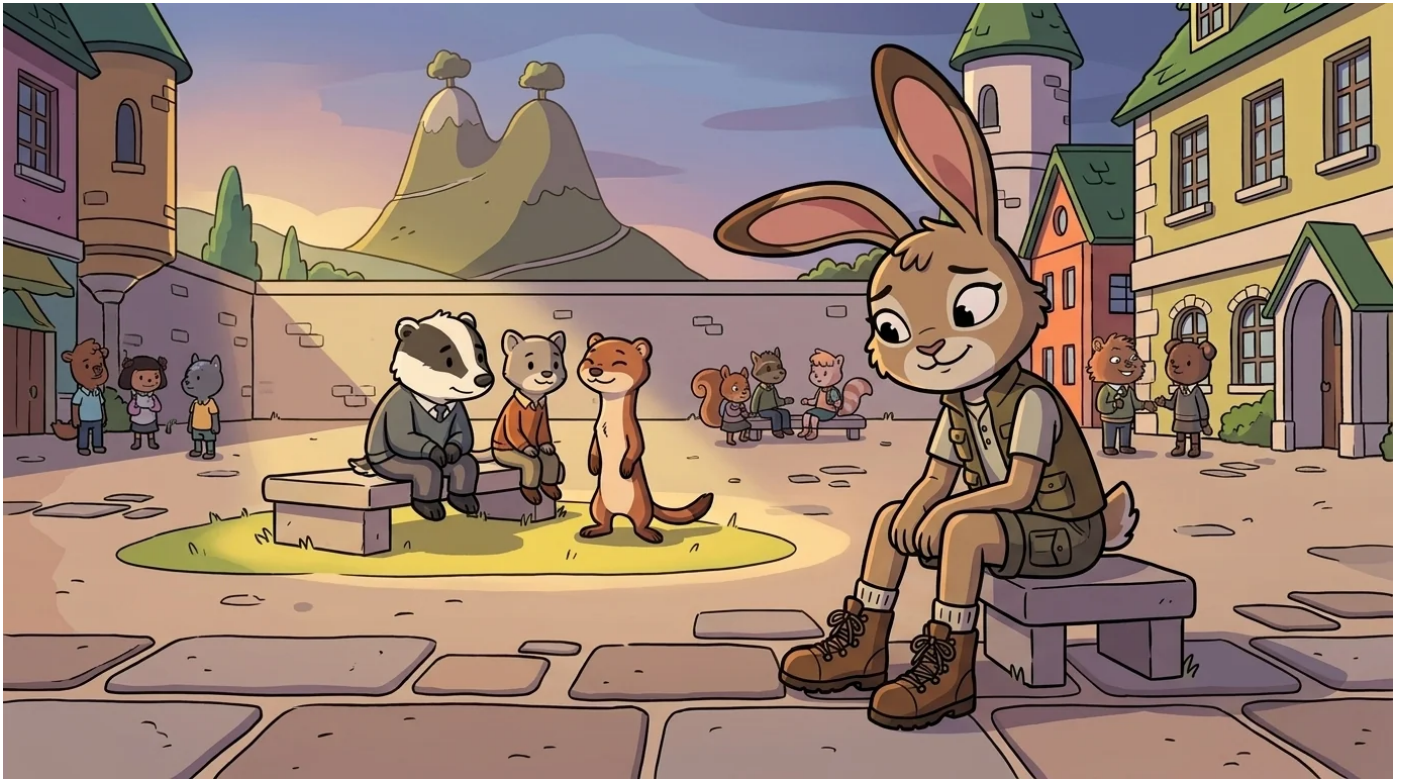
"I thought you were ignoring me," Tig told him, and there was no accusation left in it, because the accusation had been left behind on her own top of the hill. "I couldn't tell you had the sun in your eyes. I was standing where it looked like a choice."

Pell's curled shoulders eased. "I waved back," he said. "Twice. I just — couldn't see if you saw. I figured *you* were ignoring *me*."

The two of them blinked at each other in the shared glare, both realizing at once that they had each been standing on their own top of the hill, each completely sure, each completely wrong about the other's heart.

Vantage stretched her long legs, satisfied. "This is my favorite thing about hills," she said. "Two creatures, two tops, two true views — and both of them lonely, until somebody makes the climb. The view didn't change, Tig. You did. You moved your feet to his spot, and the whole story rearranged itself."

Tig found that her chest, which had been tight and prickly with *he's-ignoring-me*, had gone open and a little tender instead. The facts of the afternoon were exactly the same. But she was standing somewhere new, and from here the same afternoon meant something completely different.



That evening Sage found Vantage resting her long legs, the low sun finally off the courtyard.

"Tig was sure he was ignoring her," Vantage reported. "Turned out he had the sun in his eyes the whole time. She just had to go stand where he was standing to see it."

Sage nodded. "And Tig — how does she seem, now that she's made the climb?"

Vantage thought about it. "Lighter," she said. "And a little braver, I think. Once you find out you can be completely sure and completely wrong, you stop trusting the lonely version of a story so fast. You start wanting to make the climb first." She tilted her head toward the courtyard, where Tig and Pell were now sitting side by side on his spot, sharing the last of the glare like it was a private joke.

It made something warm settle in Vantage's chest — the particular gladness of watching two lonely tops of a hill become, for a little while, one shared view. She didn't have a fancier word for it than *glad*. But glad, she'd found, was usually the feeling waiting at the end of a climb well made.

Darn

EVERYDAY REPAIR — most friendships don't break, they tear a little; a small honest repair, done soon, keeps the small tear from becoming a big hole.



Darn was a small, careful hedgehog who always had a needle threaded and ready, tucked behind one ear.

He was not in the business of grand repairs. He left the big tears to others. Darn's whole craft was the *small* hole — the kind that shows up in a well-loved blanket, the kind everybody notices and nobody mentions, the kind that seems too tiny to bother with right up until the morning it's suddenly too big to fix.

"That's the secret of holes," Darn liked to say, squinting as he threaded. "They don't stay small if you leave them. A little tear catches on everything — a claw here, a corner there — and every catch makes it a touch bigger. Mend it the same day and it's a stitch or two. Leave it a month and it's half the blanket." He always said this without any scolding in it. "So I mend small, and I mend soon. That's the whole trick."

In the academy's reading nook, two friends shared a worn old quilt — or had, until that morning. Now a young rabbit named Fenn sat at one end of it, and the other end sat empty, and there was a small new tear right down the middle where a sharp word had snagged it.

Darn ambled over and looked at the tear with a craftsman's eye. "Hm," he said, kindly. "Small one. Fresh, too. These are the best kind — easiest to mend, if you do it before it catches."



Fenn pulled the quilt tighter and looked away. "It's fine," he said. "It's not a big deal. It'll be fine."

Darn sat down beside him, in no hurry at all. "Maybe," he said. "Some tears do close on their own. But this one's right in the middle, where the blanket gets used most. Every time you both reach for it, the tear's going to catch. And every catch makes it a hair bigger." He pulled the needle from behind his ear and turned it gently in the light. "I'm not saying it's a disaster. I'm saying a little tear is a *small* job *now* and a big job *later*. That's all. The size of the repair grows while you wait."

Fenn's ears drooped. "But if I go fix it, I have to say I was part of the tearing. I said the sharp thing first."

"Ah," said Darn softly. This was the part everybody got stuck on. "You think mending the hole means admitting you ruined the whole blanket. It doesn't. Mending a small tear isn't proof you're a bad weaver. It's just what careful weavers *do*. The best ones mend the most — not because they tear more, but because they don't let small things grow." He smiled. "Saying 'I snagged this, let's fix it' isn't a confession that you're awful. It's just good blanket-keeping."



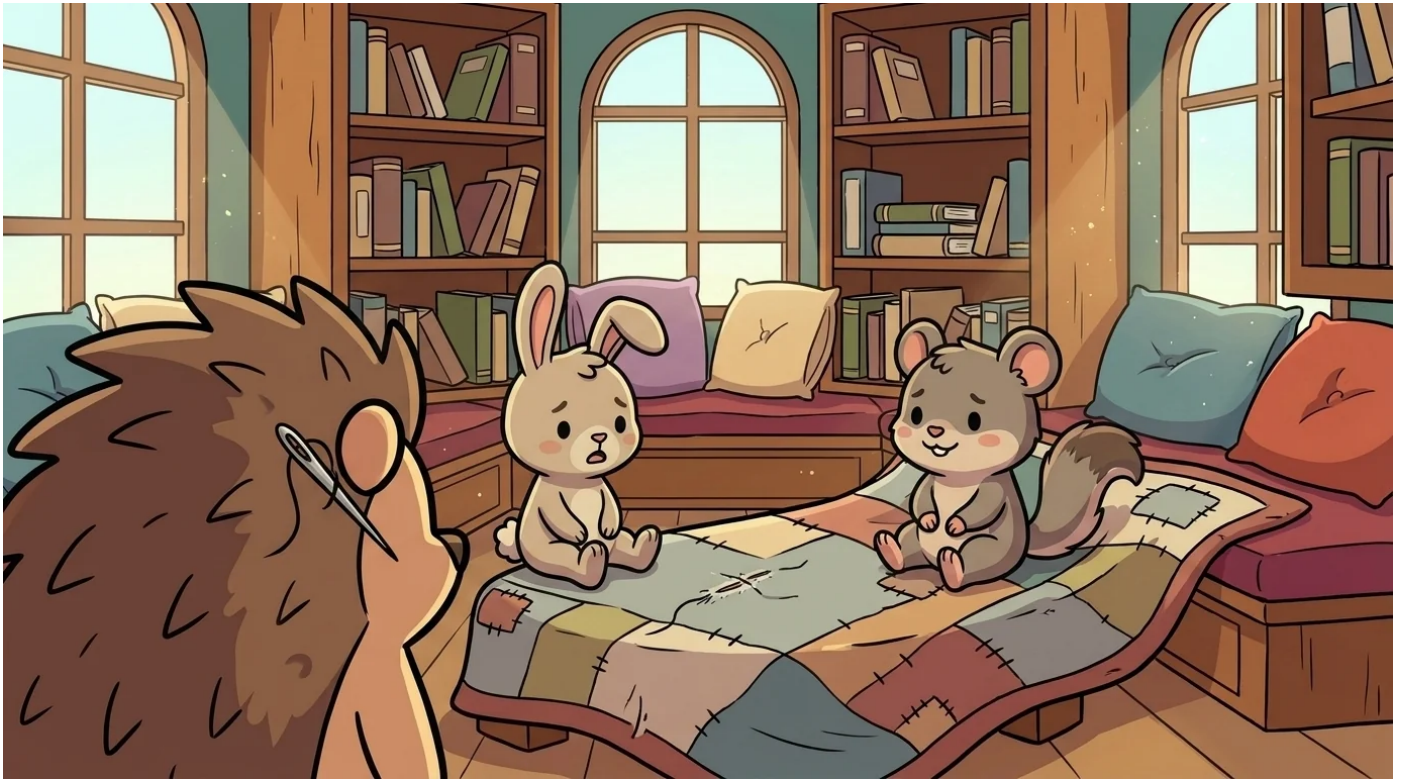
Darn showed Fenn the stitch. It was a humble little thing — nothing fancy, no knots that needed hiding.

"You go in close to the edge of the tear," he murmured, demonstrating on a scrap, "and you catch *both* sides — yours and theirs — and you pull them gently back toward each other. Not yanked. Just... invited back to touching." His needle dipped and rose. "The trick isn't a perfect stitch. The trick is going in *soon*, while the edges still remember how they used to line up."

"What do I actually say, though?" Fenn asked. "When I go find them?"

"Small and honest," said Darn. "Same as the stitch. Not a speech. You don't have to explain the whole history of the blanket. You just catch both edges: 'I snagged this. I said the sharp thing and I'm sorry. Can we fix it?' That's a stitch. The other edge will mostly come toward you, because most edges *want* to line back up. They were comfortable that way."

Fenn turned the words over. *I snagged this. I'm sorry. Can we fix it?* They were so much smaller than the towering apology he'd been dreading. They were, in fact, about the size of the tear itself.



Fenn found his friend by the window — a young dormouse named Pip, sitting with her own end of the silence, the tear between them catching at them both.

Fenn's heart hammered. But he thought of the stitch: in close, catch both edges, soon. He took a breath. "I snagged it," he said. "This morning. I said the sharp thing first, and I'm sorry. Can we fix it?"

And just as Darn had promised, the other edge came toward him. Pip's shoulders, which had been hunched against the tear, eased. "I said a sharp thing back," she admitted. "I made it worse. I'm sorry too." She scooted over, and the empty end of the quilt was suddenly not empty, and the small tear in the middle pulled gently closed as the two of them leaned back into the places they always sat.

It wasn't invisible. There was a tiny line down the middle now where the mend had gone in — you could find it if you looked. But the blanket held. It held *better*, in a way, for having a place where it had been tended. And the morning's sharp words, which had felt enormous an hour ago, were now just a small mended line in a long, well-loved quilt.



That evening Sage found Darn winding his thread back behind his ear, the reading nook quiet and the quilt whole again.

"Fenn didn't want to mend it," Darn reported. "Thought saying sorry meant admitting he'd wrecked the whole blanket. I told him it just meant he was a careful weaver. He went in small and soon, and the other edge came right back."

Sage nodded slowly. "And how is Fenn, now that it's mended?"

Darn considered the question with care, the way he considered everything. "Lighter," he said. "He was carrying that tear around like it was secretly enormous. The second it was a small honest stitch instead of a giant scary confession, he could breathe again." Darn touched the needle behind his ear. "That's the thing about a fresh repair. It doesn't just fix the blanket. It takes this *weight* off the one who was dreading it."

And Darn felt it himself — the small, particular contentment of a tear caught early and a friendship leaning back into its old comfortable shape. It was, he thought, the warmest feeling his craft ever gave him: not the stitch itself, but the ease that washed over a worried face the moment the mending was done.

Forecast

ANTICIPATING CONSEQUENCES — before you choose, looking a little way down the road at what each choice is likely to bring, so the future-you isn't surprised by the choice the now-you made.



Forecast was a tall, watchful crane who could not, she was always careful to say, see the future.

"I want to be clear about that," she'd tell anyone who asked. "I don't know what *will* happen. Nobody does. What I do is read the sky over each road and tell you what that road *tends* to bring. Clouds gathering one way, clear light the other. It's not a promise. It's a forecast. You still choose which road to walk."

She lived at a crossroads near the top of the MindForge valley, where two paths split and ran off toward two different horizons. From up there, with her long neck and her patient eyes, she could see weather coming that you couldn't see yet from the ground.

A young fox named Bryn arrived at the crossroads in a hurry, the way creatures do when a feeling is loud and a choice is right in front of them. Someone had wronged him. He had a sharp thing he could do about it — right now, fast, satisfying. His paw was already halfway toward doing it.

"I'm going to do it," Bryn said. "I've decided."

Forecast tilted her head, friendly and unhurried. "You might," she said. "You get to. But before you take that road — want to know what the sky over it usually looks like, a little further along? You can still choose it after. I just like folks to know the weather they're walking into."



Bryn hesitated. The now-feeling was so loud it filled his whole head: *do the sharp thing, do it now, it'll feel good*. That much was true. The first few steps down that road were sunny and satisfying.

"It feels good *right now*," Bryn admitted. "That's all I can see. Just the good part."

"That's the thing about a loud feeling," Forecast said gently. "It only shows you the first hundred steps of a road. The weather right at your feet. It never shows you the afternoon." She raised one wing toward the sharp road. "May I? I'm not going to tell you not to walk it. I'm just going to point out what's gathering down there, past where the loud feeling can see."

Bryn nodded, paw still half-raised.

"That road starts sunny," Forecast said. "The sharp thing feels great for about an hour. Then —" she traced the wing further along — "see how the clouds pile up there? That's the part where they do a sharp thing back. And there, further on, that grey stretch — that's the days where it keeps going back and forth, sharp for sharp, and nobody remembers who started it, and you're tired and it's still not fixed." She lowered her wing. "Sunny at the start. Storm by the afternoon. That's just what that road *tends* to bring. Not always. Usually."



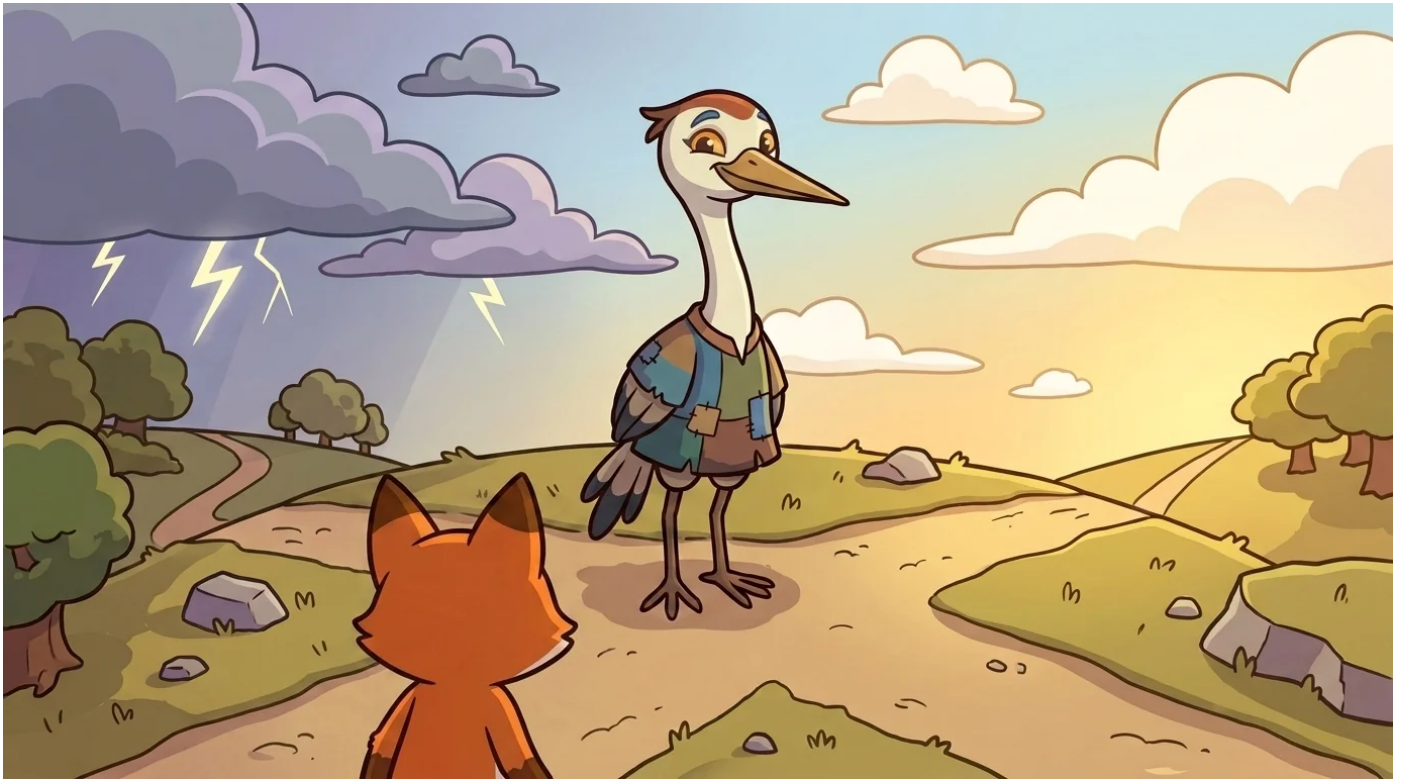
"Show me the other one," Bryn said slowly, his paw beginning, at last, to lower.

Forecast turned her long neck toward the second road. "This one's harder at the start," she said honestly. "No sunny first hour. The first steps are the cooler kind — the *I'll-deal-with-this-later, when-I'm-steady* kind. Not satisfying. A little frustrating, even." She traced the wing along it. "But look further. See how it clears? That's the part where the loud feeling has passed and you're glad you didn't add a storm to it. And there, the open light — that's the stretch where the thing actually gets handled, instead of just thrown back and forth."

Bryn looked from one road to the other. He could feel both futures now, not just the loud near one. The sharp road: bright, then grey, then tired. The cooler road: dull, then clearing, then open.

"The loud feeling only wanted me to see the first road's first hour," Bryn realized.

"It almost always does," said Forecast, with no triumph in it. "It's not lying to you, exactly. The sunny first hour is *real*. It just isn't the whole sky. My only job is to hold up the rest of the day, so the *you* who has to live in the afternoon gets a vote too — not just the *you* standing here in the loud first hour."



Bryn stood at the crossroads and did the thing that, a few minutes ago, the loud feeling would never have let him do: he pictured the after. He imagined himself a week down the sharp road — tired, still tangled, the storm not done. Then he imagined himself a week down the cooler road — the loud feeling long passed, the matter actually settled, the sky open.

The choice, which had felt impossible when it was only a loud now-feeling, settled quietly the moment he could feel both afters.

"I'll take the cooler one," Bryn said. "Not because the sharp thing wouldn't feel good. It would. For an hour." He let his paw rest fully down. "But I don't want to hand the afternoon-me a storm just so the right-now-me gets a sunny hour. That's not a fair trade to make for him."

Forecast's eyes warmed. "That," she said, "is the whole skill. You didn't choose because I told you to. You chose because you let the future-you into the room before you decided. Most folks lock him out and only ask the loud now-you. You opened the door."

Bryn felt something he hadn't expected: not the hot satisfaction the sharp road had promised, but a steadier, quieter feeling, low and good in his chest — the particular calm of having looked down both roads with clear eyes and chosen the one his future self would thank him for.



That evening, Sage climbed the path to the crossroads to sit with Forecast as the real sky went gold.

"He'd already decided to do the sharp thing," Forecast reported. "Loud feeling, paw halfway up. I just showed him the weather past the first hour. He picked the cooler road himself."

Sage nodded, watching the light. "And Bryn — how did he seem, walking off down it?"

Forecast thought about the look on his face. "Steadier than he came," she said. "There's a particular calm a creature gets when they've let the future-them have a say. It's not the loud thrill of the sharp road. It's quieter than that. But it's the kind of calm that's still there in the afternoon — which is more than the sharp road ever delivers." She folded her long legs beneath her. "He left feeling like someone who'd be glad later. You can see it in how they walk."

And Forecast settled at her crossroads as the gold light spread down both roads at once, content in the way she always was when a creature had chosen with the whole day's weather in view — and felt, walking away, the steady calm of a choice their tomorrow-self could live inside.

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- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

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

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