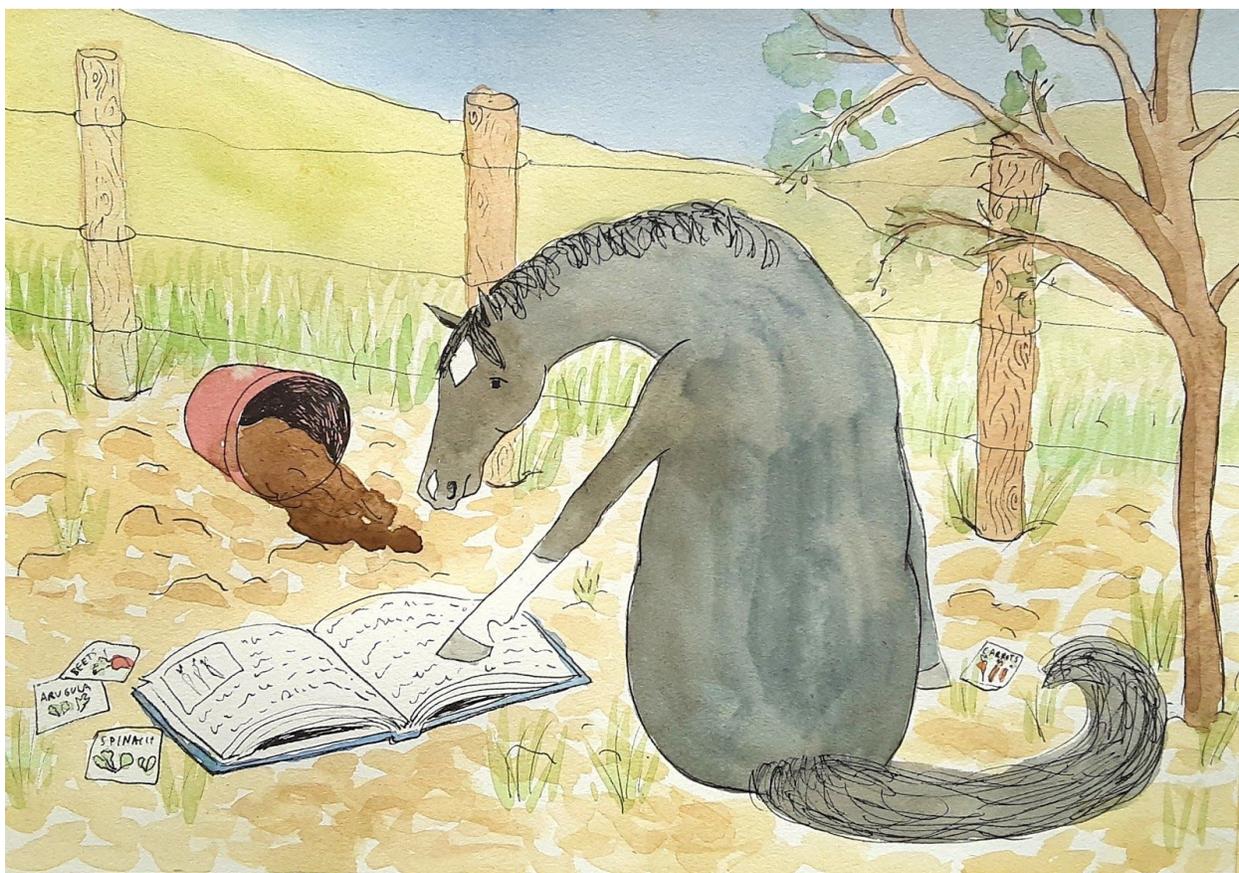


## Chapter 6

### Willy's Big Decision

Finn stood at the edge of the lower pivot field, surveying the land. Where would be the best place for a garden? According to Ginger, she needed to choose somewhere that had lots of sunlight. But it also needed to be somewhere protected from traffic. She didn't want the other horses (or Steve or Annie!) trampling through it everyday. She walked up to the burn pile area. *Yes, she thought, this seems like a good spot. I will plant it on the south side of the fence here, which will get plenty of light and is hidden from view by the burnpile. Nobody walks back here.*

She bent down to investigate. The soil was hard and dry. It didn't look too promising. *Hmm, maybe I can find some compost somewhere.... Maybe Kam has some!* Finn hurried down to Kam's backyard and poked around in the bushes by the creek. After several minutes of searching, she found a compost pile!



She filled a bucket and carried it up to her soon-to-be garden. As she mixed the compost in with her hooves, she could smell the earth, feel the gentle breeze on her face, and the warm sun on her back. She took a deep breath in and closed her eyes. It was so nice to be close to the earth!

The compost helped the soil considerably, and she felt more confident that her plants would grow. Next, the seeds! Finn had lettuce, spinach, radish, beet, arugula, pea, marigold, and (of course) carrot seeds. After consulting the back of the seed packets, Ginger's gardening book, and Ginger, Finn made a map of

where, how far apart, and how deep to plant the seeds. Then she set to work making little holes, delicately dropping in seeds, and covering them with earth. When everything was planted, she went down to the bathroom and got the watering can from under the sink. She filled it with water, carried it up to her garden and sprinkled it with water. Just in case the deer came and were hungry, she placed some chicken wire from the burn pile in an arch over her garden, sheltering it like a tent. She stepped back to admire her work. She was so excited. Her seeds were sleeping peacefully beneath the earth, ready to grow!

Everyday Finn went up to her garden to give it water, pull up weeds, and check if her seeds were growing yet. After four or five days, she started to see little green sprouts poking their heads out of the earth. She was extra careful watering, so she wouldn't crush them with the weight of the water. Finn found herself dreaming about her garden all the time. There was something so peaceful and hopeful in a garden. She just couldn't believe that big, bountiful plants could grow out of such tiny, shriveled up seeds!



Before long, her seedlings were turning into real, big plants. The arugula started to grow spiky leaves, not just the two round ones they had at first. And her lettuce was starting to almost look edible. One day, Finn decided it was time to harvest a little lettuce and spinach, enough for all the horses to have one bite each. She couldn't wait to share her garden's harvest with the other horses! But when she reached her garden, she gasped and fell to her knees. The chicken wire had been cast aside, and the ground was pockmarked with some kind of hoofprints.



But worst of all--all her plants were gone. Finn put her head in her hooves and cried, and cried, and cried. She knew it wasn't the end of the world, that she could always plant more seeds, but somehow all her stress from the past month of coronavirus came tumbling out. She had planted more than seeds in her garden, she realized. She had planted hope. Her garden had been hope for the future, and now it was gone.

Back in the pasture, Ginger noticed that Finn had been gone much longer than usual tending to her garden. *I wonder what she's doing up there?* she thought. When Finn finally appeared, Ginger went up to her.

"How's your garden today?" she asked.

"It's," Finn paused. "It's gone. The deer ate it."

Ginger nuzzled Finn's shoulder. "I'm sorry Finn. I know you put a lot of work into it. But we can get more seeds. You can try it again."

Finn sighed. "I don't know if I even want to try it again." Ginger watched as she walked off to stand in a corner alone.

Willy had been eating grass on the other side of the fence when Finn came back. He stopped chewing long enough to listen, and what he heard made his stomach clench tight with guilt. Willy never intended to destroy Finn's garden. The problem was, he didn't know she had a garden! He went up to the burn pile yesterday evening to see if he could find a late night snack, usually just tufts of grass growing here and there along the edge of the road. It was dark, and he stumbled into some chicken wire, knocking it over. He couldn't see, but he could smell delicious plants growing. It was a smorgesboarg! Tender, fresh plants growing. Oh, how he loved spring!

But now, the thought of those delicious plants made him start to sweat. For the next couple days he hardly ate anything. *Should I tell her I did it?* he wondered. *She thinks the deer did it. She doesn't need to know that I did it. Why does it matter anyways, if I did it or the deer did it? Either way, her garden's ruined.* He tried to convince himself it was okay to not tell her. The thought of telling her made him so nervous he didn't know if he could go through with it. But before long, his conscience got the best of him. He went out on a secret mission one night, and the next morning went up to Finn, who was still moping by herself in her pasture.

"Finn, I need to tell you something."

Finn looked up in mild surprise. What would Willy have to tell her?

Willy took a deep breath. "I ruined your garden." Finn gasped, pinned her ears, and turned her back on him. But Willy kept going. "I didn't mean to ruin it, I promise. It was dark out so I couldn't see that it was a garden. I just thought I had found a really good patch of weeds. I didn't even know you had a garden, or else I might have put it together that that was your garden." Finn remained silent. "Anyways, I just wanted to tell you that I'm really sorry. I would give anything to undo my mistake and bring your garden back. I got more seeds for you, here they are." He lay them on the ground next to her. "And I really hope you plant another garden. I'm sorry." Willy turned to walk away. His heart was heavy. *Poor Finn! Drat my hungry belly! Why did I have to ruin her garden?*

He was almost back to his pasture when he heard hoofbeats behind him. "Willy, wait!" Finn came up next to him. "Thank you for telling me the truth, Willy, that took a lot of bravery. I know it wasn't your fault." Finn smiled at him. Willy smiled back.

"Hey Finn," an idea occurred to Willy. "Do you think you could teach me about gardening? Maybe I could make a garden plot next to your new one, if you decide to make a new one that is..."

Finn's face brightened. "That's a great idea! I'd love to. And I also meant to say, thanks for getting me more seeds. I really appreciate it!"

From that day on, Finn and Willy were gardening buddies. Finn showed Willy how to prepare the soil, plant the seeds, and care for the plants. Willy learned to be more delicate, so he didn't accidentally break off his seedlings. And Finn learned how kind and fun Willy is, and how nice it is to share her love of gardening with others. One day, Willy painted a sign for the garden. He stuck it into the earth, and they stood back to admire it. It said "Hope Garden." Finn smiled. As she had learned this spring, there is always hope!

