APPRECIATION SPECIAL

The Maggie Hartwell Edition

WITH THANKS

A FRIEND & FAMILY APPRECIATION EDITION

STORIES4EVER FICTIONAL SAMPLE

THANKS FOR MAKING ROOM

PORCH CORRESPONDENT

A Welcome Without a Guest List

When Jo Park moved to Willow Bend, Maggie Hartwell brought out two folding chairs. Between the kitchen boxes and the pavement, a conversation began about the balcony garden Jo had left behind.

Rain moved them onto the porch. The next weekend, Nora helped her grandmother repaint an old bench in soft green. They missed a strip underneath; Maggie left it alone. There was space beside it for another chair.

Jo sometimes brings tea, and Beth brings the crossword. Maggie remembers the last conversation and asks about it next time. Ten minutes is a perfectly good visit.

Nora teased her about chairing a welcome committee. Maggie pointed out that someone still had to wash the cups. There is no guest list, and joining in can be an ordinary decision.

LIBRARY DESK

A Practice Page Comes First

At the library's Saturday repair afternoon, Beth arrived with a picture book and three loose pages. Maggie spread newspaper over the table, set out the tape and checked the order before anyone started sticking.

When a young volunteer laid a strip crookedly, she offered a practice page. She did not take over. Beth and the volunteer finished the repair together, at a pace that left room to learn.

The opening time went onto a card for Beth's fridge; the spare tools went back into their box. Beth remembers that help could be calm and practical, without the task disappearing into somebody else's hands.

NORA'S NOTEBOOK

A Folder for Trying Again

Nora's first watercolour of the footbridge put the river into the sky and turned a tree into a purple cloud. She wanted to discard the sheet. Maggie suggested a folder marked Try Again.

Nora wrote the colours on the back. A month later, she used less water and waited between washes. The second picture went beside the first, and Maggie asked which change had helped.

There was no competition and no prize to report. The folder holds sketches, notes and unfinished work. For Nora, its value is being able to see a difference without having to call the first attempt a triumph.

NEIGHBOURHOOD EXCHANGE

The Jar Makes a Return Trip

While Beth unpacked after a move, Maggie brought soup and bread. She had checked which vegetables Beth liked; the jar carried an ingredients label and a reminder to refrigerate it.

The empty jar returned the following week with two pears inside. Since then, soup and garden produce have travelled in opposite directions. There is no list of what is owed. Beth remembers a little help with an ordinary busy evening.

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THE SMALL THINGS THAT STAY

Everyday gestures, remembered in detail

WINDOWSILL FILE

The Cuttings That Travel Home

Maggie's bright kitchen windowsill holds basil, mint and jade-plant cuttings. After Jo asked for basil, two stems went into water. One grew quickly; the other took its time. Jo chose the smaller plant because it suited her shelf.

It travelled home in a biscuit tin, steadied with newspaper. A wooden label carried its name and watering notes. Weeks later, Jo brought a photograph of new leaves, and the conversation turned to light and drying compost.

Nora took home mint on another visit and put the label in the wrong pot. Maggie helped her identify the plants by their leaves. The tins and labels are reused; not every cutting thrives on its first attempt.

Jo and Nora value being able to ask the next small question. A gift from the windowsill does not have to become a test of whether they can be perfect gardeners. It can simply give them another reason to talk.

IN MAGGIE'S WORDS

Take a chair. The rest can wait.

— Maggie Hartwell

WILLOW BEND ROUTE

The Pauses Belong to the Walk

The loop past the post box, small bridge and corner shop begins with a decision at the gate. Maggie and Graham agree on the route. Rain can shorten it; an interesting notice can add a pause.

Graham stops to look downstream. Maggie reads the shop notices. When Nora joined them expecting a brisk walk, she found that the stops were part of the outing. Graham noticed a repaired handrail she had passed without seeing.

Maggie remembered to ask about the book he had mentioned the week before. Sometimes they bring back milk or a newspaper. The route does not need an errand to make it worth taking, and nobody keeps a score of the steps.

Nora now asks what sort of walk someone wants before deciding what a good one should look like. The familiar loop leaves room for different interests and an easy change of plan.

IN MAGGIE'S WORDS

Good company leaves room for another pace.

— Maggie Hartwell

A PERSONAL MESSAGE

Maggie, thank you for the spare chair, the honest encouragement and the quiet ways you notice what people need. We wanted to give some of that care back to you.

With love, Nora, Beth and your Willow Bend friends.