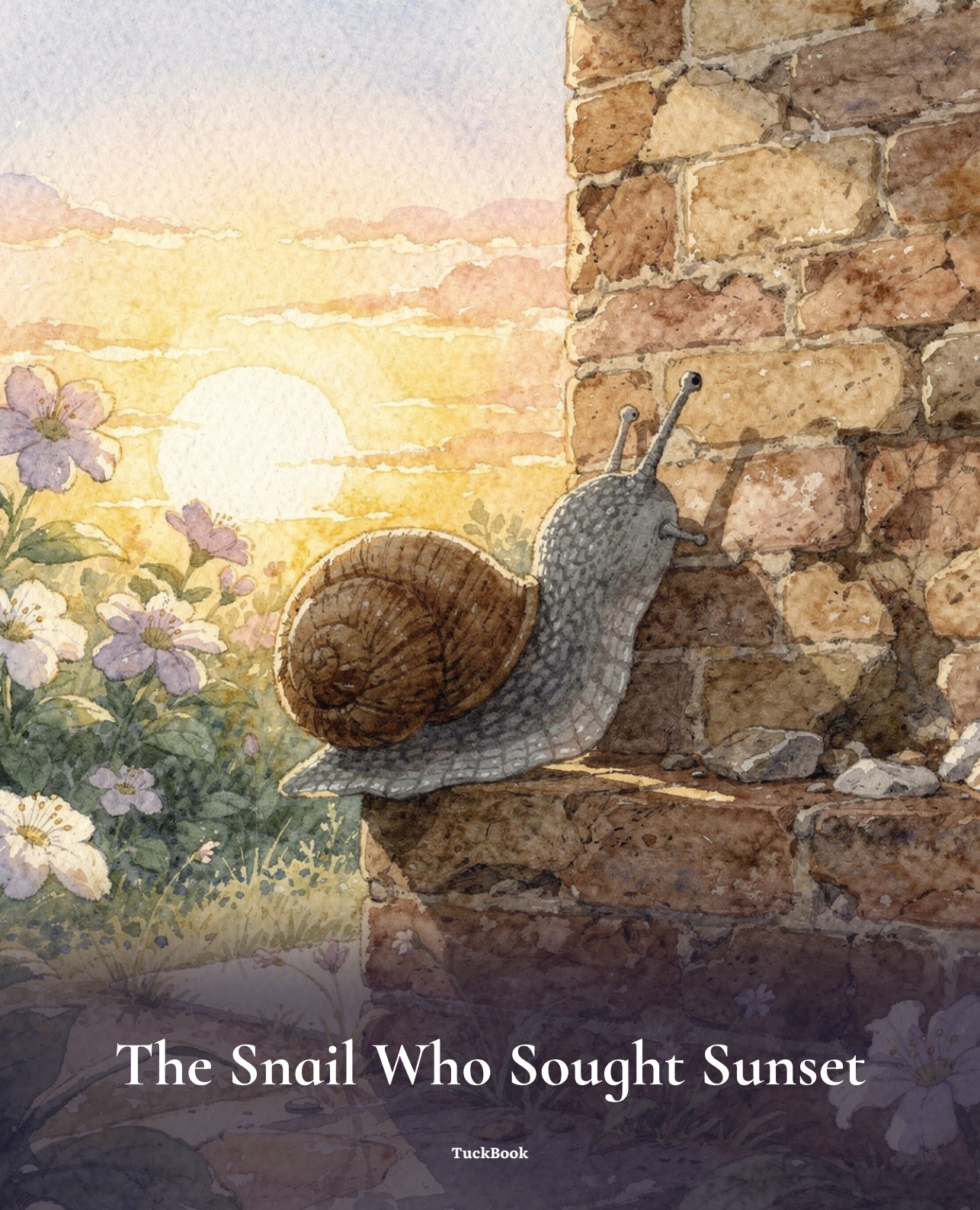




The Snail Who Sought Sunset

TuckBook

Hugo pressed the front of his soft foot against the lowest brick of the garden wall. Above him, the wall rose in warm brown rows, all the way to a rim of crumbly mortar and sky. “I am going to be on top before the sun sets,” he said. Hugo was a determined snail, even when his goal was much taller than he was.

Beside the wall, a striped leaf lay across the soil like a little green boat. Hugo climbed onto it for a better look. From there, the top seemed even farther away. He could see bean poles, rose stems, and the round back of the watering can, but not a single bit of sunset yet. Still, he turned toward a damp, dark crack between two bricks and began to climb.

The first stretch was pleasant. The crack was cool, and Hugo’s shining trail helped him keep his place. Then he came to a wide patch of dry brick. It felt rough beneath him. Hugo stretched forward, pulled himself along, and stretched again. After three very small moves, he looked up. The top had not come any closer at all.



On a lower brick, a curl of old leaf was tucked into a nook. It looked shady and comfortable. Hugo slipped underneath it for just a moment. He listened to a bee buzzing past the lavender. He watched a tiny spider pull a thread across a crack. Just a little longer, he thought. The wall will still be there.





But when Hugo peeped out, the sun was no longer above the tallest bean pole. It had moved toward the garden shed. “Oh!” Hugo said. He hurried, which for Hugo meant he stretched his foot as far as he could. At the next crack he aimed too eagerly, slid sideways, and landed with a gentle plop on the striped leaf he had climbed from earlier.

The leaf bent under his shell and tipped him onto his side. Hugo wiggled and wiggled. At last he rolled upright again, with a smear of soil on his shell. He did not feel like climbing. The wall looked taller now, because he was back at the bottom.

A red ladybug with seven black spots walked along the edge of the leaf. She paused beside Hugo’s silver trail. “That is a long trail,” she said. “You have already travelled from the wall to this leaf, then up past the dry brick, then all the way back down.” Hugo sighed. “But I am not at the top.”



The ladybug pointed one tiny leg toward the brick. “Look where your trail ends now, then choose only the next place it can go.” Hugo looked closely. Above the leaf, a thin line of moist mortar curled upward like a pale road. It did not reach the top. But it reached the next brick.

Hugo considered resting under the leaf again. It was still a very good leaf. Then he thought of the sky from the wall’s rim, open and wide. “One brick,” he decided. He eased onto the mortar line. When he reached the next brick, he did not stare at the faraway top. He found one more crack. Then one more.





A fat raindrop left from watering sparkled in his path. Hugo stopped to drink its coolness, but he did not settle in. A loose flake of mortar blocked his way. He went around it. A patch of moss tickled his foot. He crossed it. Each time he finished a small stretch, the bean poles below looked shorter, and the garden soil looked farther away.





At last Hugo noticed something wonderful. The striped leaf was now a small green comma at the foot of the wall. His own silver trail climbed behind him, little curve by little curve. Every bit of it had carried him higher. “Slow is still going,” Hugo said, and he chose the last narrow crack beneath the rim.





Hugo pushed, stretched, and brought his shell over the top just as the sun touched the garden fence. The sky turned golden behind the bean poles.

The ladybug arrived a moment later, her red back bright in the light. Hugo rested on the warm walltop and watched the gold spread across the garden. He had not hurried there. But there he was.





Good night.



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After the story



WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Hugo the determined snail climbs a tall garden wall one small stretch at a time. With a ladybug's gentle advice, he learns that slow progress can still carry him all the way to the sunset.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

After reading, ask which moment felt the warmest or bravest today.

AND TOMORROW...

The next morning, Hugo spots a bright blue feather caught halfway up the garden wall.





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6 minutes of reading



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