

A warm breeze rolled over the emerald hills of Chrysalopolis's outer rural sector, where the soil was soft, the sky a bright tangerine, and the worms respectfully quiet. Here, nestled among looping fences and dappled shade trees, stood Darling's burrow-farm—a quilted patchwork of tidy rows, winding pathways, and fat vegetables bulging beneath the earth.

Darling wriggled from the front stoop of her cottage with a yawn. She wore a colorful green and pink set of coveralls and dragged behind them a tiny cart stacked with seed satchels.

"Today's the day," she chirped musically. "Today Amara learns the secret of true joy!"

Darling looked around before noticing a length of blue in one of her vegetable patches, walking over she can see Amara hard at work biting and fighting a rather rude (in her mind at least) turnip that was refusing to come out so she could eat it, leading to Darling just giggling at the sight of the young Snekket's antics.

Amara chirruped and looked to Darling, giving a little hiss to the turnip as she bounded over to watch Darling take her to the garden that had been plowed yesterday to prepare for today's lessons.

"Potatoes and Onions? They look different than I would expect Miss Darling!" Amara speaks out softly, not used to using her limited but growing vocabulary of language often.

Darling grinned, small leafy antennae twitching. "Two humble root vegetables. But don't be fooled by their common looks! There's a miracle under the dirt."

Darling trundled off, leading Amara past the younger field—the soil tilled into soft, raised mounds, bordered by flagstones shaped like blazing suns. Rows of small green shoots peeked out between leaf mulch. Darling stopped and gestured with a stubby leg.

"This is where we sow," they explained, voice soft as moss. "The soil must be turned and aerated. If it's too packed, the roots can't breathe. And no one wants suffocated spuds."

Amara watched as Darling gently loosened the earth with a small rake, then nudged open a satchel labeled Butterbloom Potatoes. The seeds were nubby and purple-skinned, each cut to expose their buds.

"Every bud sees its own way to grow," Darling whispered, placing each chunk with near reverence. "Give them space. Give them cover. And a little song doesn't hurt."

Darling sang as they buried the seeds:

*"Down you go, sweet tuber child,
In silty dark so soft and mild.
Sleep with worms and dream with rain,
Then rise and fill the world again."*

Amara blinked, her tongue flicking. "Do songs... work?"

"Not in the way a spade works," Darling said. "But the heart hears. The crops feel it. Joy isn't required, my dear—it's invited."

"Joy is invited... So basically farming is as much about having fun as it is doing hard work?" Amara asked as she helped plant more of the tuber starters into the field.

"Now you're starting to understand my dear, yes the more fun you have the more likely you are to have a full garden or field of crops or flowers or anything you grow, for to have fun with it means the more likely you will keep tending to them, and the more nurtured and tended to they are the better they will yield bountiful harvests for you to acquire," Darling says with a lovely laugh that is high and lilting as they proceed to the next field.

After they moved on to another row. Darling handed Amara a bulbous onion, with tangled roots like tangled thoughts. The young Snekket held it delicately, confused.

"Pointy side up," Darling said. "Tuck it just below the surface. Onions don't like to be smothered."

Amara did as told, tentatively pushing it in. It wobbled, then stood still. "How do you know when it's ready to grow?"

"You don't," Darling said. "You trust. That's the first secret of farming. You trust the dirt. You trust the sun. And you trust that something invisible is happening below while you wait."

Amara looked back at the rows behind her—neat lines of nothing much. “That seems... scary.”

Darling nodded. “That’s the second secret. It is. But that’s what makes it worth doing.”

After the sowing, they wound through a narrow arch of overgrown rosemary, into the older field—taller, richer in color, buzzing with bees and the scent of earth after a good rain shower. Darling paused at the edge, letting Amara soak it in.

Here, the onions had risen into thick green shoots curling toward the sky, their bulbs poking aboveground like pale golden moons. And the potato plants had flopped, their vines yellowing

Darling’s many feet rustled softly in the loam as they led Amara to a mound. “See this?” They touched the fallen potato leaves. “When they droop and yellow, they’re telling us: I’ve given all I can aboveground. Look below.”

With careful motions, Darling plunged a three-pronged claw into the mound and lifted. A clump of earth broke apart—revealing a cluster of round, dusty potatoes like hidden treasure

Amara’s eyes lit. “They were there this whole time?”

“Yes. While we watered. While we weeded. While we sang and waited and fretted. Life was happening where we couldn’t see.”

Darling handed her one. It was warm from the soil, dimpled, and oddly heart-shaped.

Amara cradled it. “I never thought about potatoes having...secrets.”

“Every root does,” Darling said, beaming. “They teach you patience. Humility. The art of watching nothing—and believing in everything.”

They moved to the onions next, where Darling showed how to gently pull them from the soil by their greens, brushing off dirt and placing them in a shallow basket woven from nettle-fiber. Amara copied with fierce concentration.

"This one looks like my owner's head," she said, holding up a particularly bulbous onion.

Darling laughed so hard her cottoned tail shimmied, "Then your owner must be a wise woman. Nothing grows in this shape without learning a few hard lessons."

Amara tilted her head. "And you do this every day?"

"Not always harvesting. But yes—tending, watching, mending fences, writing poems to cabbage, scaring off particularly rude crows..."

They sat under a shady tree after the work was done, the baskets full, the scent of sweet earth hanging around them. Amara held a small onion in her lap, quietly brushing its skin.

"I think I understand," she said. "It's not just food. It's..." she searched for the word, tongue flicking in thought, "...becoming."

Darling looked at her, eyes gentle. "Exactly. They grow, and so do we. Each season."

Amara nestled beside the Pacapillar, tail coiled loosely.

"Tomorrow," she said, "can we plant carrots?"

Darling's smile stretched from fuzz to fuzz.

"Oh yes, my dear. Carrots have lots of secrets."