

## Little Garlic: Enchanted Tales for All Ages

**Avideh Shashaani**

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*Little Garlic is an enchanting short story collection that follows a little vegetable as he makes his debut in the wide world.*

The allegorical short stories of Avideh Shashaani's *Little Garlic* follow the adventures of lovable Little Garlic and his best friend, Onion.

Ever since Little Garlic was blown away from his family, he has lived alone, mourning the fact that others think he is stinky. One day he is joined by Onion, who teaches him how to harness the power of the magic wind and fly. Together, they set out to help Little Garlic discover who he is meant to be. They encounter others and learn valuable lessons about acceptance, bravery, and growing up.

Onion plays the role of mentor in the story. He's always encouraging Little Garlic's questions, and he makes it clear that it is okay to not understand everything. He encourages vocabulary building, too: he often defines words for his younger friend.

While detail-rich in some areas, as when it's describing Sweetheart the Strawberry, the book is inconsistent when it comes to sharing information. Much is left to the imagination. Vegetables live alongside humans and are also eaten by them, and about half of the stories are told to Little Garlic, rather than experienced by him. Much of the book is made up of dialogue, and it is ultimately short on action. Its layered themes suggest that it should be savored, rather than read in one sitting.

Spirituality is a prominent theme in the collection, which promotes no one religion, but instead plays with the idea of a universal spirituality, drawing on New Age and Buddhist ideas of enlightenment and connection between all living creatures. Here, the self is the highest power: all of Little Garlic's adventures serve to help him uncover his secret star, which bears some resemblance to the idea of a soul. There is clear moral objectivism involved: Little Garlic is taught that hatred and intolerance are wrong, among other lessons. But human nature is oversimplified in these deliveries, presented as just good or evil, and represented by the mysterious Flower of Peace that some are given to carry.

Eventually, Little Garlic learns that it is what is on the inside that counts. This is portrayed quite literally in "Story of the Rambutan," in which Little Garlic is scared of the fruits' ugly appearances, only to be amazed by their translucent hearts inside. But the book's last story leaves many questions, as about what happened to Onion's human friend, and what Little Garlic's special gift is; these are left to be addressed in future adventures.

Rife with lessons about growing up, *Little Garlic* is an enchanting short story collection that follows a little vegetable as he makes his debut in the wide world and meets all sorts of his fellow creatures.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (September 9, 2021)

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