

Sample Chapter

Mabel and the Merevale Creek Mystery · Book 2 · Merevale Creek Farm

A free sample: the opening chapter, in full.

Chapter One · Something in the Water

Autumn came to Merevale Creek Farm the way it always did, quietly, then completely. There was a morning in early October when the light shifted without announcement, the air took on a different weight, and the orchard trees went copper at the tips between one dawn and the next. The creek, which had run all summer with a sound like a long, contented exhale, picked up something in its voice, a slight urgency, a quickening, that meant the autumn rains were not far behind.

Margot's clipboard appeared before anyone had finished their breakfast. This was how the farm knew, officially, that autumn had arrived: not by the turning of the leaves or the sharpening of the air, but by the presence of Margot's clipboard and the expression on Margot's face that said the Harvest Supper was twelve days away and there were one hundred and forty-seven things to be done and she had started on forty-three of them already and everyone else needed to catch up immediately.

The farm dispersed into activity with the particular energy of a community that knows exactly what it's doing and enjoys the knowing of it. Max bounded toward the orchard before anyone had asked him to. Mayo took up a position of authority near the barn door from which he could direct the barn clearance while technically not helping with it. George fetched the first water of the morning from the creek, which was his job and had been his job since before Zoe arrived, and he was very good at it and slightly proud of the fact.

At her pasture fence, Mabel the Cow watched. She watched in the way she watched everything, without hurry, without announcement, with the kind of complete attention that most animals never quite managed because they were always moving toward the next thing. She watched the farm prepare for autumn, and the farm preparing for autumn was, she acknowledged, very fine. Then she turned and watched the creek.

She had been watching the creek for six autumns. She knew what it looked like at this time of day, in this quality of light. She knew where the water reached on the stepping stones in October. She knew the level that the water held against the third and fourth stones from the left bank. This morning it fell short. Not dramatically. Not enough that anyone rushing past with a bucket would think twice. But Mabel had stood at this bank in six autumns, and the

water this morning was lower than it should be, by a measurable and specific amount that she could feel in the difference between what she was seeing and what she knew.

She said nothing. She was not certain enough yet to say something, and Mabel did not believe in speaking before she was certain. She would watch for another day, and then another. She would walk the bank further upstream and look at it from different angles. She would listen to the sound of it, which was also different, thinner, quieter, not quite right.

The gate at the end of the lane creaked once as George came through it with his water bucket. The autumn sound of it: sharper than summer, the iron cold in the cool air.

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