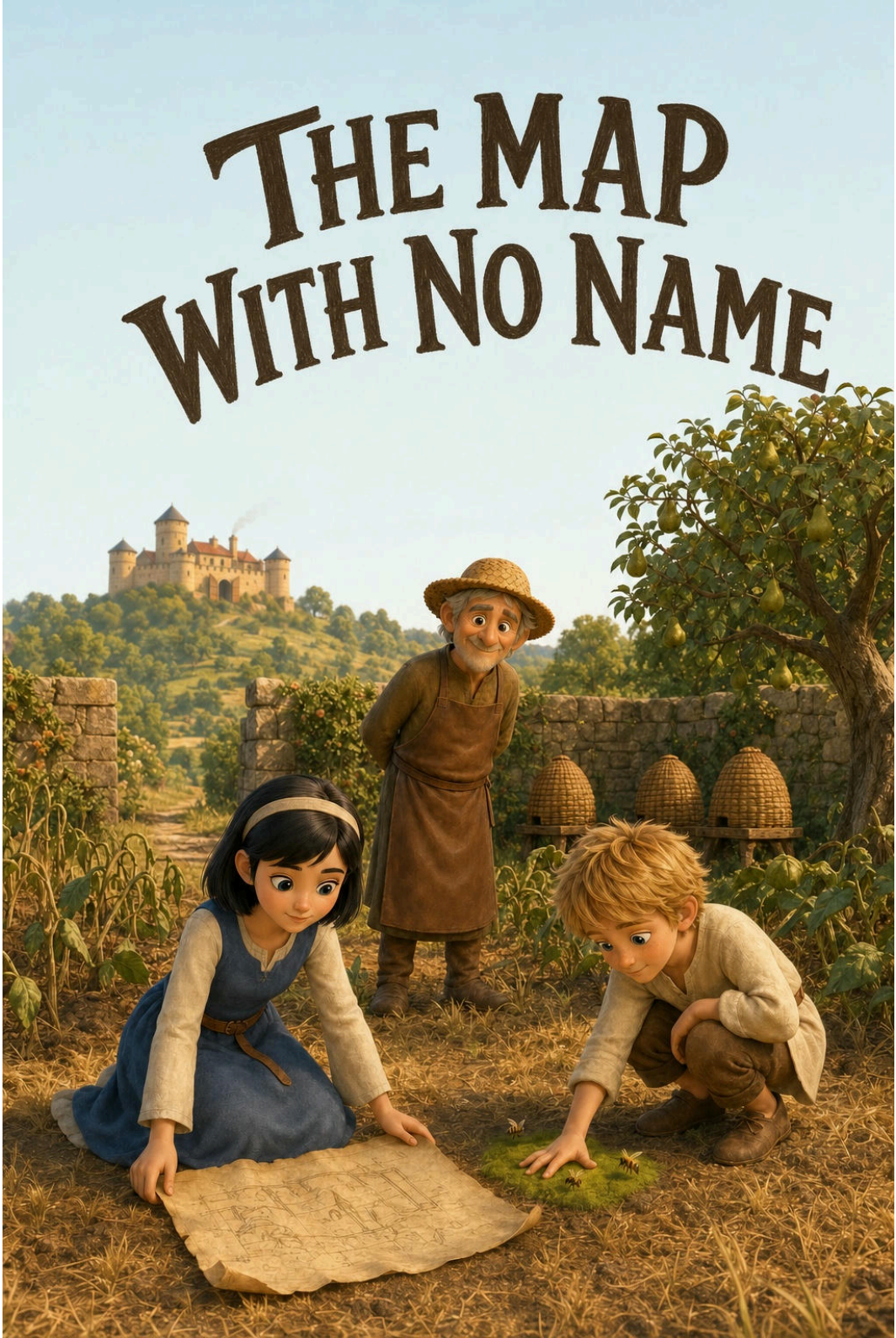

THE MAP
WITH NO NAME

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About This Book

At a Glance

- **Reading level:** English level A2- (CEFR) · British English
- **Age:** 8+
- **Length:** 12 chapters · ±16,500 words

Edition

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Version	Date	Notes
1.0	August 2026	First edition.
1.1	August 2026	Language corrections
1.2	September 2026	Cover corrected.

About the Story

The Series

Castle Brightstone is a friendly, lived-in castle on a green hill above the village of Appleton — no soldiers, no swords, just a busy household, a great Chronicle two hundred years old, and four young pages learning everything a castle can teach: Miles, Anne, Mabel and Hugh. Sir Edmund's old rule guides them all: be honest in small things, be kind before you are clever, serve first, sit last — and never be ashamed to say "I was wrong."

This Book

Five weeks without rain. The hill has gone the colour of old straw, the stores are empty, and there is nothing to buy in the shire until harvest. So this year the walled garden is the castle's dinner — and the garden is dying of thirst.

Then Gib lets the bucket down the courtyard well, and the rope goes further than it has ever gone.

There is one strange thing in the library: an old map with no name on it, no year and no maker. It draws the oak, the well and the chapel exactly as they stand. It does not draw the garden wall at all. And in the middle of the garden, where nobody has ever turned up so much as mud, it marks a spring.

Miles, Anne, Mabel and Hugh have leave to look, and one rule: no spade goes into a food-bed. So they look with their feet, and their hands, and their eyes. The answer is hidden in a patch of moss that stays green in any summer, in a line of bees going over a wall, and in one line in the Chronicle that nobody has ever understood.

And in a gardener that nobody ever thought to ask.

Chapter One: The Dry Garden

The storm brought the guests. Then it went away over the hills. It was the last rain of the summer.

That was five weeks ago.

Since then the sky had been blue. Blue in the morning. Blue at noon. Blue all the long hot evening.

Not one drop had fallen.

A drop is the smallest piece of water. One drop. Then another. Then a thousand. That is how rain starts. This year it never started.

The hill went pale. Pale means the colour has gone out of a thing. In June that hill was green. Now it was the colour of old straw. The sheep stood in the shade of the wall. They did not eat much.

Even the great oak was letting go. Small hard leaves came down all day. They lay thick on the stones of the yard. Bramble lay under the tree. He would not move for anyone.

Nobody at Castle Brightstone could name a drier year.

Mabel and Hugh had carried water since six.

Two buckets each. Up from the well. Along the yard. Out of the little gate. Into the walled garden.

A bucket is a round pot. It has a handle in the top. You carry water in it. You carry it with your arm straight and your teeth shut. Half of it still goes down your leg.

“Nineteen,” said Hugh. He set his down.

“Twenty,” said Mabel. “Mine were fuller.”

“Yours are always fuller.”

“Mine are.” She pushed her hair off her face. It stuck again at once. “Wilf. Where do you want them?”

Wilf did not answer.

Wilf was the gardener. He had kept that walled garden for thirty years. He was about sixty-five. He was bent from the work. His hair was thin and grey under a straw hat. His tunic was earth-brown. Over it he wore a leather apron with two pockets.

He said very little. Most days he said nothing at all.

Just now he was walking the beds. His hands were behind his back.

A bed is a long strip of dug ground. You grow one thing in it. Beans in this one. Onions in the next. Then peas. Then cabbage. Then the herbs along the south wall. The garden had fourteen beds. Flat stones made a path between them.

Wilf walked slowly. He looked down. Now and then he stopped.

"He is counting," said Hugh.

"Counting what?"

"I do not know."

Wilf came back up the path. He took the two buckets, one in each hand. He tipped them along the bean bed. Not on the leaves. On the ground, at the roots. Slow. Then the water went in. It did not run off.

"Counting what lives," he said.

He gave them the buckets back. He went on down the path.

Hugh looked at Mabel. Mabel looked at Hugh.

They went for more water.

The walled garden was the hottest place in the castle. Four stone walls. No wind. Sun on it from morning till night. In a good year that is why it grew such beans. This year it was an oven.

You could see the summer in the beds. The peas had given up. The cabbage sat low and grey. The onions were small and hard. Only the beans still stood. At noon their leaves hung straight down.

Mabel loved that garden. She had names for six of the beds.

She looked at the peas. She did not say a word. For Mabel that was a great deal.

At the low end Miles had been taking a wall down.

That sounds odd. It was not.

The storm had taken twenty paces of the garden wall down for him. Its stones were three miles off now, in the dam road. What was left stood in a rough heap. Half up and half down. Loose stones on top of sound ones.

You cannot build on that.

So Miles had pulled the loose ones off. One at a time. He had laid them out on the grass in rows.

He had worked down to the footing.

The footing is the bottom of a wall. It is the widest part. It sits in the ground and you cannot see it. The whole wall stands on it. If the footing is good, the wall is good. If the footing is bad, you may build the finest wall in the shire. It will still come down on you.

He had cleaned it with a brush. Then with his hands. Twenty paces of old flat stone, grey and gritty. He had swept the earth back off it.

He had found nothing on it. There was nothing to find. It was a footing.

That was five days ago. This morning he began to build.

He would think about that week for a long time after.

The library was cool. It was the only cool room in the castle. By ten in the morning there were three people in it with no business there.

Anne was making a copy of the map.

A copy is a second one. You look at the first thing. You draw it again on new paper, line by line. Then you have two. You can carry one about. The old one lies safe.

Master Cole would not have the map unrolled twice a day.

"It is a hundred years old at the least," he said. "Skin cracks. You open it, you use it up. Copy it, child. Then let it lie."

So Anne copied it.

She had been at it four days. She had the hill. She had the castle with its four small towers. She had the mill pond, drawn full of water. She had the Combe. She had the village. She had the yard with its well and its one oak.

She had the walled garden in its little squares.

And in the middle of the garden, a small round pool. Three wavy lines came out of it. One word stood beside it. The hand was a hand nobody knew.

Spring.

Anne looked at that word about forty times a day.

"There is no spring in the garden," said Master Cole. He did not look up. He said it every morning. He said it the way you say a thing you wish were not true.

"No, Grandfather."

"There is no water in that garden. There never has been."

"No, Grandfather."

"Then draw it as it is drawn. Add nothing. Leave nothing out."

Anne drew the little pool again, in her best hand.

At noon Lady Margaret came to the garden door.

She stood there a while with her hands folded. She looked at the beds. Mabel and Hugh came up the path with four more buckets. They stopped when they saw her.



“Wilf. The truth, please.”

“Beans will do,” said Wilf. “If they drink. Onions may. Peas are gone.”

Lady Margaret nodded slowly.

Then she said the plain thing. She said it in front of all of them. That was her way.

“You four had better hear this properly. Our stores are empty. Not low. Empty. We spent them on the guests. I would spend them again. And there is nothing to buy in this shire till harvest. Nobody has a thing to sell. It is a dry year for every house on this hill.”

She looked round the fourteen beds.

“So this garden is our dinner. Not part of it. All of it. From now till the corn comes in.”

Nobody said a word.

“Carry water,” said Lady Margaret. “Thank you. Carry more.”

She went back in.

Mabel let out a long breath.

“Right,” she said. “More water.”

They went down to the yard for the eleventh time. That was when they found Gib at the well.

Gib was the stableman. He had a bucket on the well rope. He was letting it down, hand over hand. His elbow rested on the well-head.

The rope is what you let a bucket down on. The whole castle knew that rope. There was a black mark on it. Fifty years of hands had worn it in. The mark sat at the place where the bucket met the water.

The mark went down over the edge.

Gib let out more rope.

The mark went down. And down.

Miles came across the yard. The brush was still in his hand. Anne came out of the library door. Nobody had called them. Gib had simply gone very still. Gib going still was a thing you noticed.

Then the rope went slack.

Gib pulled it up. It came up slowly. It came up light.

He swung the bucket in over the stones. He set it on the well-head. They all looked into it.

There was water in the bottom. About a handspan of it. It was brown. It moved thickly. There were small stones in it.

They were looking at the bottom of the well.

Chapter Two: A Handspan of Water

Lady Margaret rang the yard bell at seven the next morning.

She rang it herself. That did not happen often. The whole castle came out into the sun. Bess came with flour up to her elbows. Gib came from the stable. Master Cole came last of all. He still had a quill in his hand.

"You will all hear this at once," said Lady Margaret. "Then nobody has to guess."

She put her hand flat on the well-head.

"From today this well is rationed."

To ration is to share a thing out in small fixed parts. You do it when there is not enough to go round. Everybody gets some. Nobody gets as much as they want. It is not a kind word. It is an honest one.

"The well is for two things," said Lady Margaret. "Drinking. Cooking. That is all."

Bess folded her arms. "My pots?"

"Not the pots."

"The beasts?" said Gib.

"Not the beasts."

Mabel opened her mouth and shut it again.

"And not the garden," said Lady Margaret. "I am sorry. I know."

"Then where does the rest come from?" said Miles.

"The stream. Below the village."

Hugh worked it out first. He was small. He was quick at sums.

"That is half an hour down," he said. "And an hour back up. With buckets."

"Yes," said Lady Margaret. "It is."

Nobody groaned. That was the odd part of it. Anne thought about it afterwards and could not say why. Perhaps it was the way they had been told.

Straight out, in the sun, to all of them at the same time. There was nothing left to argue with.

“We shall take turns,” said Lady Margaret.

A turn is your own part of a job. It comes round to you. You do it. Then it goes on to the next person. Everybody has one. Nobody has all of them.

Anne wrote the turns on her tablet before breakfast. Two people, every hour, from six in the morning till dark. Her list looked very tidy. The hill did not care how tidy it looked.

The walk down was easy. The walk down was always easy.

You went out at the low gate and down the track. Past the pale field. Past the green, where the grass had gone to dust. Round behind the mill. And there was the stream.

It was low too. In June it ran over the stones with a noise. Now it ran thin and quiet. It kept to one side of its own bed. But it ran. You could still fill a bucket in it. You had to be patient. You had to keep the sand down.

Then you turned round and looked up.

The hill did not seem so kind on the way back.

Miles carried four buckets. Two in each hand. He would not put them down. Bess carried two and sang. She sang the same six lines over and over. By the third day the whole castle knew them.

Master Cole came down once. He carried one bucket a hundred paces. Then he set it on a stone. Then he sat down next to it.

“I shall write about this,” he said, “instead.”

Nobody minded. Master Cole was seventy.



Kit would have loved this, thought Hugh, going up with his arms full. Kit was coming back at harvest to see the falcons. Hugh hoped there would still be a garden to show him.

Supper that evening was thin.

Thin was Bess's own word for it. She did not soften things. There was bread. There was broth with barley in it. There were beans from the garden. Wilf had picked them small. Then the plants would give again. There was no meat at all.

Sir Edmund waited till the last bowl was down. Then he said grace, and it was one line long.

"For this food we thank You. And for every pair of arms on that hill today. Help us to share it well."

"Amen," said the hall.

Then everybody ate, and the noise came back.

Anne waited till the bowls went out. Then she asked Sir Edmund. He said yes. She went and fetched her copy of the map.

She laid it on the long table. She put a cup on each corner.

"I have been drawing this four days," she said. "There is a thing about it I cannot get right."

Master Cole came round the table. Lady Margaret came round the other side. Miles held a candle over it. Wilf stood at the end of the hall, by the door. He always stood there. He did not come nearer.

"Tell me what is on it," said Master Cole.

Anne began at the top. She went round with her finger.

"The hill. The castle, with four towers. Ours is the tall one. That is right. The mill pond, full of water. The Combe. The village. The chapel."

"The chapel is there," said Sir Edmund.

"The oak is there," said Anne. "Look. In the middle of the yard. And the well. He drew the well twice as big as it really is. And he put a ring of stones round it —"

"He did that to tell you it was a well," said Master Cole. "That is a mapmaker's trick. Go on."

"The mews. The stable. The lane down to the village."

She stopped with her finger on the garden.

"And that is our garden. There are the beds. Fourteen of them. There is the path down the middle. There is the pear tree in the corner. He even drew the pear tree."

"Well," said Lady Margaret. "He knew the place."

"He knew it better than I do," said Anne. "That is what I keep thinking. Every line on here is a true line. Except one."

"Which one?" said Miles.

"None of them," said Anne. "That is the trouble. It is the one that is not here."

She looked up.

"There is no wall round the garden."

There was a small silence at the long table.

Then they all leaned in at once. The candle went over. Miles caught it.

Anne was right. The beds were there. The path was there. The pear tree was there. But no wall. Four thick lines ought to run round the whole thing. They were not drawn at all. The garden sat on the open hill. The sheep field ran right up to it.

Master Cole put both hands on the table. He said nothing for a long moment.

Then he spoke. He said it very slowly. One word at a time.

"Then the map is older than the wall."

"How old is the wall?" said Hugh.

"Older than me, boy. Older than my master, and he taught me at that table. Nobody living has seen that garden without it." He tapped the wood. "But the Chronicle will have it. Two hundred years of stone are in that book. Every wall. Every step. Every gate. If I can find the year."

"Grandfather," said Anne. "Look at the middle."

He looked at the middle.

In the middle of the beds sat the small round pool. Three wavy lines came out of it. They ran down between the beds and away. Beside it stood the one word, in that unknown hand.

Spring.

A spring is a place. Water comes up there out of the ground. Nobody digs it. Nobody carries it there. It rises out of the earth, cold and clean. And it keeps on rising.

Mabel had not said one word all evening. Now she said the thing in every head at that table. She said it much too loudly.

"Then there is water ten paces from my beans."

They all looked at her.

"Well, there is," she said. "The oak is right. The well is right. The chapel is right. The pear tree is right. Why is the pool wrong? It is the same hand. It is the same day's work. He drew it. So he saw it."

"Mabel," said Lady Margaret quietly.

"I know. I know. But it is ten paces."

Then a voice came from the door at the end of the hall. They all turned round. It was Wilf.

"I have dug that ground for thirty years," said Wilf.

He was not arguing. He never argued. He was only saying what he knew.

"Every bed. Every spring of the year. Two spades deep in the onion bed. That was when we took the old plum out. I have turned that whole garden over with my own hands."

He looked at the map on the table. He did not come nearer to it.

"I never turned up so much as mud."

Mud is wet earth. That is all it is. Thirty years in that ground, and not one spade had ever come up dirty with it.

Chapter Three: What Wilf Knows

The four of them sat on the well-head after breakfast. They talked about one thing only.

"Ten paces from the beans," said Mabel.

"Ten paces from the *middle* of the beans," said Anne. "The pool is drawn in the middle."

"That is the best bed we have."

"I know."

Hugh had his chin on his knees. He said the next part to his own boots.

"We could take a spade down there tonight," he said. "After dark. One hole. We could put the earth back."

Nobody shouted at him. That is worth saying. Miles only looked at him a moment.

"Bess would see us," said Mabel. "Bess sees through walls."

"That is not the reason," said Anne.

"No," said Miles. "It is not."

Hugh went red. He had known it before he said it. Sometimes a thing has to come out of your mouth. Then you hear how it sounds.

"We ask," he said.

"We ask," said Miles.

So they went down to the mews. Sir Edmund was there with Duchess on his glove. They asked him.

It took a while. Anne told it in order. That is her way. Mabel told it all at once. That is hers. Hugh said nothing till the end. Sir Edmund fed the old hawk. He listened to all of it.

Then he took them to Lady Margaret. They told it again.

"You have my leave to look," said Sir Edmund at last.

Leave is permission. It is a small word for a big thing. Leave means someone over you has said yes. Out loud. Then you are not sneaking.

"With one condition," said Lady Margaret. "And you will hear it from me. Not from him."

She held up one finger.

"No spade goes into a food-bed. Not one. Not a corner of one. Not this summer."

"No, my lady," said Miles.

"I am not being hard with you. Look at me. You dig a hole in the bean bed. The roots dry out. We do not lose a bean plant. We lose the beans. In February we eat what stands in that garden now."

"Yes, my lady," said Anne.

"Grass you may lift. Paths you may lift. The rough corner by the pear you may lift. Wilf must be there. Not one spade in a bed. Ask me first. I shall very likely say yes. Then we both know where we are."

"Yes, my lady," said all four.

"Good," said Lady Margaret. "Then go and look."

So they went and looked. It took all morning. They did it with their feet.

A spade is a flat iron blade on a long handle. You put your boot on it. You push it into the ground. It is a fine tool. It can also ruin a year of food in one morning. None of them touched one all day.

Anne went round the outside with a piece of string. Miles walked the wall. Mabel walked the beds with a bucket. She watered as she went. She grumbled.

Hugh walked with Wilf.

That was not a plan. It happened. Hugh started at the top corner. Wilf was there. Hugh asked him a question. Then he asked another one.

By the end of that hour Hugh knew things. Nobody in the castle knew them. Nobody but Wilf.

He learned that the second bed drains. The fourth bed does not.

To drain is to let water run away. Down through the ground. Some ground drains fast. You pour a bucket on it. The bucket is gone. Some ground holds the water and turns to soup. The fourth bed was soup in March. In August it was hard as a road.

He learned where the frost sits in April. In the low end. It never comes near the top corner.

He learned about the wind. It comes over the west wall in one place only. Wilf had put the beans out of its way. Thirty years ago. He had not moved them since.



He learned where the slugs come from. He learned what the pear tree does in a wet year. He learned why you never plant onions where the cabbage stood.

Wilf talked for an hour. Hugh thought about it after. He had never heard the man say twenty words at once.

"Nobody ever asks," said Wilf, when Hugh said so.

Then Hugh asked the question that changed the summer. He did not know it. Nor did Wilf.

"Is there anywhere in here that stays wet?"

"No," said Wilf.

"Nowhere at all?"

Wilf stopped. He looked down the garden. He put his hand on the wall.

"The corner behind the pear stays green," he said.

Hugh waited.

"The moss, I mean. Behind the old pear, in the rough grass. It stays green."

Moss is that soft flat green stuff. It grows on wet stone. It grows on damp ground. It likes dark places and the corners of things. In a hot summer moss goes brown and crisp. You can crush it in your hand.

"In this summer?" said Hugh.

"In any summer," said Wilf.

"Green now?"

"It was green yesterday. It is green every year." He said it the way you say your own name. "It is the shade. I always thought so. The pear stands over it."

Shade is the cool dark place under a tree or a wall. The sun cannot get in. The whole castle had sat in shade for five weeks. Shade is a very good answer.

It is not a good answer for green moss. Not in the driest year anyone can name.

Hugh went very quiet. Wilf did not notice. He had moved on to the pear tree itself. It was a hundred years old. It gave hard little pears. He would not have cut it down for the king.

Sir Edmund was on the path behind them.

He had come out to see them. He had been there some time. His hands were behind his back. He had heard the whole thing.

"Wilf," he said.

Wilf turned round.

"I have walked past you for twenty years," said Sir Edmund. "Every day, most weeks. Good morning, Wilf. Good evening, Wilf. And I have never once asked you what you knew."

Wilf looked at his boots. He did not like being talked to so.

"It is only a garden, sir."

"It is not," said Sir Edmund. "It is our dinner till harvest. And every handful of it has been through your hands."

Then he spoke to Hugh. His voice had changed.

"Say that again about the moss."

Hugh said it again.

Sir Edmund looked down the garden. He looked at the pear tree a long moment.

"Fetch Anne," he said.

Anne came at a run. Her copy of the map was under her arm. She had grass in her shoes. She did not ask what for.

"Lay it out," said Sir Edmund.

"Here? On the ground?"

"On the ground. Master Cole says read a page on the ground. This is the ground."

So Anne knelt down in the rough grass. She spread the map out flat. She put a stone on each corner. Then she looked at it.

Then she looked up at the garden.

Then she turned the map.

That is the whole trick. She found it in about a minute. A map is not a picture. It means nothing on its own. It has to lie the same way round as the world.

She turned it. The drawn castle came round to the real castle. The drawn path lay along the real path.

She turned it again. The drawn pear tree sat under the real one.

Then she stopped.

The four little squares lay over the four top beds. The path lay on the path. The gate lay on the gate.

And the small round pool lay in the rough grass. Three wavy lines came out of it. It sat behind the pear tree.

It lay on the moss.

Chapter Four: What the Bees Know

They pulled grass in the rough corner. They kept at it till dark.

Wilf stood over them the whole time. Lady Margaret had said so. They did it with their hands. They lifted the long grass in handfuls. They rolled back the nettles. They took out three flat stones. They took out a great deal of dead leaf.

They found earth. Then they found more earth.

The rough corner is not a small place. It runs from the pear tree to the north wall. Fifteen paces one way. Eight the other. In the dark it felt like fifteen miles.

"It is somewhere in here," said Mabel.

"Somewhere in here is not a place," said Miles.

They went in to bed. Nobody said much.

In the morning it all went back to ordinary. That is how it is with a great idea. The next day still wants its buckets carried.

Mabel went down the hill for water. Miles went back to his wall. Anne went into the library. She hunted for the year the wall was built. Master Cole gave her a shelf of old ledgers. By noon her hands were grey with dust.

Hugh went to the bees.

The hives stood outside the garden, in the sun. They ran along the south face of the wall. There were five of them. They sat in a row. The shelf under them was stone.

A hive is the house bees make their home in. These were straw ones. Round, fat and yellow. A little door at the bottom. Put your ear to one. You can hear it. It sounded like a pot on a slow fire.

Nobody at Brightstone ever hurried the bees. You do not smoke them. You do not open them in a dry summer. You leave them alone. They leave you alone. In the autumn they give you honey. What they can spare.

Hugh liked them better than the falcons. He had never said so out loud.

Today the bees were busy.

Busy means a great deal is being done. Not fast. Not wild. Just on and on and on, with no stopping. The hive doors were thick with them. They went out. They came back. They went out again.

Wilf came past with a hoe on his shoulder.

"They are busier than last week," said Hugh.

"Water," said Wilf.

"Water?"

"Bees fetch water in the heat. It cools the hive."

That was nine words. For Wilf it was a speech.

He put the hoe down. He pointed with one brown finger.

"They carry it in. They spread it about inside. Then they stand at the door. They fan with their wings. All night, some of them. The air comes through. The water dries off. The hive stays cool."

To cool a thing is to make it colder. A hive can get too hot. Then the comb goes soft. The young bees die. So in a summer such as this, many of them fetch water. All day long.

"Where do they get it?" said Hugh.

Wilf picked his hoe up again.

"Never asked them," he said. He went off down the path.

Hugh stood there a while.

Then he found an empty bucket. He turned it upside down. He set it in front of the hives. He sat on it. He stayed there.

Sitting still is a thing Hugh can do.

It sounds like nothing. It is not nothing. Try it. Sit in one place. Hands on your knees. Watch one small thing for an hour. Do not scratch. Do not stand up. Do not go and see what the noise was.

Most people cannot. Hugh could. He had once sat an hour in the mews. A falcon turned her head. That was all he got. He had sat two hours in a wet ditch. For an otter. It never came.

So he sat and watched. After twenty minutes he began to see it.

The bees did not all fly the same way.

Some came off the hives low. They went left, out over the herbs. Some went right, up along the hot wall. Those ones came home dusty yellow on the legs.

But there were others.

They came out heavy and slow. They flew a straight line. Straight up. Over the top of the garden wall. Gone.

They came back over the same wall. In the same place. One after another. All morning.

Hugh watched that line for a long time.



The stream was down the hill. Half an hour's walk. He thought about that. It is far for a thing the size of your fingernail. And the bees did not go down the hill at all.

They were going up. Over the wall. Into the garden.

Into a garden with no water in it.

Hugh got off his bucket.

He went round through the gate. He did not run. That took some doing.

Inside, he stood on the path and looked up. There they were, high over his head. They came across the wall in ones and twos. He turned round slowly. He followed the line with his eyes.

To follow is to go the way another thing goes. You keep it in front of you.

The line went over the beds. It went past the cabbage. It went over the flat stones of the path. It went on. It went down.

It ended at the rough corner. Behind the old pear tree.

Hugh went along the path very slowly. He came under the pear. He crouched down.

And then he saw them.

Three bees sat on a patch of moss. The patch was the size of a cloak.

A patch is a small piece of one thing. It sits in the middle of another. A patch of moss in the rough grass. A patch of sun on a floor.

This patch was green. Not grey-green. Not dry. Deep, soft, wet green. In the first week of August. In the driest summer anyone could name.

The three bees sat with their feet in it. They were drinking.

There was no water there. You could not have filled a spoon. There was only moss. It was cold. It was wet. The bees knew it.

Hugh put his hand flat on the patch. He pressed.

It gave a little. Then it stopped giving.

He moved his hand along. It stopped in the same way, along a line. He went back and did it again. He shut his eyes to feel it better.

Under the moss lay two fingers of black earth. Under that was a straight thing.

Nothing in that corner was straight. Grass is not straight. Roots are not straight. Stones in the ground lie any way they fall.

This was straight. It ran under his palm, hard and even. It ran as far as he could reach.

Hugh's heart went very fast.

He got both hands into the moss. He got his fingers under the edge of it. It was loose. It would come up in one sheet. Ten minutes, and he would have it open. Maybe five.

Nobody was there.

Wilf was at the bottom bed with his hoe. Mabel was on the hill with the buckets. Miles was on the far side of the wall. Anne was in the library. There was nobody in the garden at all.

He could have it open before dinner. He would be the one who found it. Not the map. Not the Chronicle. Him.

Hugh knelt there a long moment. His hands were in the moss.

Then he sat back on his heels.

Your heels are the backs of your feet. You kneel. Then you stop kneeling. You sit back on your heels.

He took his hands out of the moss. He brushed the earth back over the lifted place. He put a stone on the spot. To mark it.

"No," said Hugh, out loud, to nobody.

Then he got up and ran for the gate.

Chapter Five: A Straight Edge

By four o'clock the walled garden held fourteen people.

They were all looking at a patch of moss.

It was very nearly funny. Anne thought so at the time. Sir Edmund had come straight from the mews. His glove was still on. Bess had come up with flour on her arms. Gib had come. Master Cole had come, in his indoor shoes. Two stable lads had come. Nobody was doing any work at all.

"It is moss," said one of the stable lads.

"It is," said Hugh.

"We came up the hill for moss."

"Yes," said Hugh.

Lady Margaret arrived last. She looked at the corner. She looked at Hugh. Then she said the useful thing.

"Rough grass," she said. "Not a bed. You may lift it. And I shall stand here and watch you do it."

"Yes, my lady," said Miles.

"No spade."

"No spade," said Miles. "We shall want a brush."

A brush is a bundle of stiff hairs on a handle. You brush a floor. You brush a horse. You can also brush earth off a thing very slowly. Nothing gets broken. There is no other way with an old stone.

They fetched two brushes. Miles took the soft one.

Then Wilf did a thing nobody had thought of.

He knelt at the edge of the moss. He slid his fingers under it. He lifted it in one whole sheet. A mat comes off a floor so. He rolled it up. He carried it into the shade of the pear tree. He laid it out flat there.

"It is alive," he said, to nobody. "It can stay alive."

Then he came back and knelt down with the others.

Under the moss was black earth. Not dust. Not the pale stuff of the beds. Black, cool, crumbling earth. A hundred years of dead leaf had made it.

Earth is the ground under your feet. It sounds like a small word. Two fingers of it had hidden this. From the whole castle. For four lifetimes.

They took it off with their hands. Then Miles went over it with the brush.

And there it was.

Stone.

Flat cut stone. Grey and close. It ran along under the corner. As far as they had cleared.

"Blocks," said Miles. His voice had gone odd.

A block is a piece of stone cut square on purpose. Rocks are any shape at all. Blocks are the shape a man makes them. You lay blocks in a line. They sit together with no gap.

There were two lines of them. They ran along side by side, three hands apart. And between the two lines there was a gap.

"Brush the middle," said Sir Edmund quietly.

Miles brushed the middle.

The gap was cut square as well. It had a floor of flat stone. It had a wall of stone on each side. It ran on under the grass. Straight. One long line.

"That is a channel," said Master Cole.

A channel is a long narrow way for water. Not a pipe. Not a ditch dug in mud. A channel is made. A floor and two sides, laid in stone. Water runs along it and does not soak away.

It was a handspan wide. You could lay your hand flat across it.

It was full.

Not with water. With root. A hundred years of grass root and pear root. Thin white ones. Thick brown ones. All packed in tight. Black earth was packed in round them. It was hard as a road.

To pack a thing is to press it in. Then no room is left.

"That stone did not fall there," said Master Cole. He had gone quite pink. "Look at it. Look at the *care*. Someone cut those blocks. Someone laid them level. This is a made thing!"

"Yes, Grandfather."

"A made thing! In my garden! I have walked over it every day for fifty years!"

"You are kneeling on it," said Anne.

He was, too. He was on the very part they wanted to brush. Anne moved him with both hands. You move a friendly dog so. He went on talking happily from four paces off. He got in nobody's way after that.

Gib had said nothing at all.

He came round the corner of the pear tree. He crouched. He put one thick finger in the channel. He ran it along the cut edge. Then he stood up.

"That was a mason," said Gib.

Four words. Coming from Gib, that was a speech and a half.

Bess arrived with a jug.

They all knew what it had cost her. It was well water. The well was rationed. Bess had been counting cups since Tuesday. She said nothing about that. She poured a mouthful for every person there. She made Master Cole drink his sitting down. Then she took the jug away empty.

They cleared for two hours.

It was slow. It was hot. It was the best day of that whole summer. Miles brushed. Hugh lifted out the root by hand. Mabel had a wooden spoon. She picked the earth out of the corners with it. Anne wrote down what came out, and where.



Pace by pace, the channel came up.

At six paces it was still going.

At ten paces Anne stopped writing.

She had her copy of the map in her lap. She had been looking from the drawing to the ground. Then back again. And again.

“Sir Edmund,” she said. “Look at the way it runs.”

They all looked up.

Anne got to her feet. She held the map out flat. She turned it the right way round. She had learned how.

“On the map the water comes out of the pool. Look. Three lines. They go *down*. Down the middle of the garden. Past the beds. Out at the bottom gate.”

She pointed at the ground.

“This does not go down the middle of the garden.”

They all looked along the line of stone.

She was right. The channel came out of the mossy corner. Then it went the other way. It ran away from the beds. It ran away from the path. It ran down the short slope. It ran along under the rough grass. Straight at the north wall.

"It is going out," said Mabel slowly. "It is not watering a thing. It is taking the water out of the garden."

"Where to?" said Hugh.

Nobody answered that.

Miles had not said a word for some time.

He was on his feet now. He stood at the end of the cleared line. The brush hung in his hand. He shut one eye and sighted along the channel. His father sights along a bar of iron the same way.

The line ran on under the grass. It ran under the last two paces of the rough corner. It ran to the wall.

And it did not stop at the wall.

Miles knew exactly where it went. He had stood on that spot for eight days. He had lifted every loose stone off it. He had brushed it. He had swept the earth off the footing. With his own hands. He had seen nothing at all worth a second look.

The colour went out of his face.

"Miles?" said Sir Edmund.

"It goes under my wall," said Miles.

Chapter Six: Under the Wall

They went round to the gap. The light would hold another hour.

A gap is a hole in a line of things. A gap in your teeth. A gap in a hedge. The storm had left a gap in the north wall. Twenty paces long. All summer you could walk straight through it. Out into the sheep field.

Miles had been building it up again for three days.

He had three courses laid. A course is one row of stone, right along. Three courses is not much to look at. It is slow work. He had done it the slow way. He learned that way at the dam. Stone laid in, not tipped. Each one turned till it sat. Small stones packed into every space.

It was good work. They could all see it was good work.

Miles stood in front of it. He looked at his own three courses. Then he looked along the line the channel came from.

The channel came out of the grass. It ran at the wall. It went under his three courses. In about the middle.

"Well," said Miles.

He put his hand on the top course. He said nothing for a moment.

Then he said it. "Sir Edmund. I shall have to take these down."

"Yes," said Sir Edmund.

"I laid the top one this morning."

"You did."

"They are good." It came out before he could stop it. He went red. "I mean — they are laid right. I did not tip them."

"I know you did not," said Sir Edmund. "I watched you do it. Take them down."

So Miles took them down.

It took an hour. He did it well, and that is harder than it sounds. A thing you built has to come apart. There are two ways. You can pull it over and

be angry. Or you can take each stone off. Turn it the way it was laid. Set it on the grass in the same order.

Miles did it the second way. Mabel handed. Hugh carried. Anne wrote down the courses. Then they could go back exactly.

The sun came down onto the hill top. By then the wall was at the footing again. The stones lay in three tidy rows on the grass.

Then they cleared the footing.

The footing is the bottom of a wall, under the ground. This one was old. Very old. It was much wider than the wall above it. It was made of great flat stones. Between them ran a grey line of hard stuff.

That grey line is mortar. Mortar is what you stick stone to stone with. It goes on soft. It is grey. It dries hard. After that the wall is one thing. Not a heap.

"That mortar is older than the wall above it," said Master Cole. He had a lantern now. He held it over his own head. Anne took it off him. She held it low.

Miles swept the footing with the brush.

He swept the line where the channel came in. He swept a hand's width at a time. He worked in from the grass. Towards the wall. On his knees.

And then the brush went over a curve.

Everything in a wall is straight. That is what a wall is. Straight along, flat on top. Nothing curves. A curve under your brush is like a word in an empty room.

"Bring the lantern," said Miles.

They brought the lantern.

Set into the old footing, low down, was an arch.

An arch is a curved opening. You have seen one over a church door. Or over a bridge. A stream goes under there. The stones are cut to lean on one

another. They hold each other up. A well-made arch will carry a wall on its back for a thousand years.

This one was small. You could not have got your shoulders through it. It was round on top. It had a floor of flat stone. That floor was the same stone. It sat at the same level as the channel out in the grass.

It was not a hole. It was a made thing. Someone had built it into the foundation on purpose. It was there to let water through.

A foundation is the whole made bottom of a building. The part that goes down into the earth. Nobody sees it. Everything stands on it.

"So the wall builders knew," said Anne. "They knew the channel was here. They did not simply build over it. They made a door for it."

"They did," said Sir Edmund.

"Then the water should still be running."

"It should," said Sir Edmund. "Look at the arch, Anne."

She looked.

The arch was blocked.

It was filled right up to the top. Tight from side to side. Not with one big stone. With dozens of small broken ones. Every shape. All pushed in close. And in every space between them, grey mortar.

Broken stone of that sort has a name. It is called rubble. You get rubble when you break a big stone up. Or when an old building comes down. It is cheap. It is useful. You put it inside a wall, where nobody looks.

Miles put his hand on it and pressed. Then he took his hammer and tapped it, all along. His father taps iron the same way.

"Hard," he said. "It is set hard. That is not a thing that fell in."

He looked up at them.

"Someone filled this in. Rubble and mortar, packed in tight. It is careful work. Whoever did this meant to close it. And meant it to stay closed."

To fill a thing in is to stop up a hole. To do a thing on purpose is to mean it. Not by accident. Not by luck. You looked at it. You thought about it. Then you did it.



Nobody spoke for a moment. The last light was going off the top of the hill. Somewhere in the field a sheep coughed.

Then Miles said the other thing.

“I cleaned this footing eight days ago.”

“Miles —” said Mabel.

“No. I want it said.” His ears had gone red. His voice did not move at all. “I swept this whole twenty paces. With that brush. On my knees. I had my hands on this stone. And I never saw it.”

“Did you look for it?” said Sir Edmund.

“No.”

“Why not?”

"There was nothing to look for." Miles thought about it. "It is a footing. You look at a footing to see if it is sound. It was sound. So I saw a sound footing. Then I stopped looking. Then I built on it."

"Yes," said Sir Edmund. "That is what looking is. You find what you go out to find." He put his hand flat on the old stone. "There is no shame in that. The shame would be in saying you had seen it all along."

Miles let his breath out.

"Now," said Sir Edmund. He sat down on the wall stones in the grass. In his good coat. He did not care. "Someone made a channel to carry water. Someone else built a wall over it. And made an arch to let the water keep coming. Fair enough. Then someone filled that arch up. Rubble. Set hard."

He looked round at them all.

"So here is my question. Who stops the water to a garden? And why?"

Nobody had an answer.

Bess said perhaps it flooded the beds. Gib said nothing. He said it in a way that meant no. Wilf said a spring makes trouble in a wet March. This one never had. He had never had a wet corner in his life.

Master Cole said it was very interesting. He could not think of one reason.

And then Anne stood up.

She stood up so fast. The map roll went off the wall stone. It rolled away down the grass. Hugh went after it.

"I have read about this wall," she said.

They all looked at her.

"One line. I read it two years ago." Her voice was odd. "I did not understand it. Grandfather could not tell me what it meant. And I have never once been able to forget it."

Chapter Seven: Adam Would Not Have It So

They went up to the library in the dark.

Master Cole would not have an open flame near the Chronicle. So they took the horn lantern. Its sides are thin horn, not glass. It throws a soft yellow light. It cannot set a page alight. He carried it himself. He walked in front. He was the only one not out of breath.

The library was hot. Rooms hold the day's heat. They give it back at night. It was very still up there. The great book lay on its table.

"Now," said Master Cole. "What year?"

"I do not know the year," said Anne.

"You said you had read it."

"I read it two years ago. I was looking for something else." She was already turning pages. "I was looking for the mews. I read three years by mistake. It was in one of those."

She turned the pages slowly. She turned them from the top corner. That is how you turn an old page. Never from the middle. Never fast.

Nobody spoke. The lantern hissed.

Then she stopped.

"Here," she said.

They all leaned in. The lantern went over. Miles caught it. That was the second time in three days.

The page was brown at the edges. The hand was small and even. Brown ink. There was a long tail on every letter *s*.

"A hundred and twelve years ago," said Master Cole. His voice had gone flat and careful. "Read it out, Anne."

Anne read it out.

"In this year the garden wall was built. The stone came out of the Combe. Nine hundred and forty stones were set.

The masons were paid at harvest. They were paid well. They had their meat in the hall.

Adam the gardener would not have it so."

She stopped.

"Go on," said Mabel.

"That is all. The next line is about a horse."

There was a long silence in the library.

Then Master Cole sat down.

He sat down rather suddenly. On the low stool by the shelf. He does not do that sort of thing. He put both hands on his knees.

"I have read that line every ten years of my life."

"What did you think it meant?" said Sir Edmund.

"A great many things." Master Cole shook his head slowly. "My master thought the old man hated change. Old men do, he said. I thought it was the cost. Nine hundred and forty stones is a great deal of money. All for a wall round some cabbage. Later I thought it was the shade. That wall is four times the height of a man. It throws a long shadow. A gardener might mind that very much."

He looked up.

"It never once entered my head that he was *right*."

Hugh said, "So he knew."

"Of course he knew," said Master Cole. "He was the gardener. He was in that garden every day of his life. He knew where the water came up. He knew where it ran away. And he knew what nine hundred and forty stones would do to it. Set straight across the top."

"And he said so," said Anne.

"He said so. And they wrote it down." Master Cole gave a short laugh. There was no happiness in it. "They wrote it down. Then they built the wall anyway. One line. No reason. Not even his second name."

Mabel said, "Why did he not write it in himself? Properly. In the book."

And Master Cole said, "He could not."

"Could not write?"

"Perhaps not. Many could not." Master Cole tapped the table. "That is not what I mean. He could not write *here*. This book is the castellan's book. The chronicler keeps it. It was my master's. And his master's before him. A gardener does not put his hand in the Chronicle. Nobody would have let him near it. That is how it was."

"That is a stupid way for it to be," said Mabel.

Nobody argued with her.

"So he had a thing worth keeping," said Sir Edmund slowly. "And no place to keep it."

Anne stood up.

She went to the end of the table. She came back with the roll. She unrolled it next to the Chronicle. The map and the book lay side by side. It was the first time.

"There is no name on it," she said. "We have looked. All of us. No name, no year, no maker. Grandfather, hold the light down."

Master Cole held the light down.

They went over the map inch by inch. The hill. The castle. The pond. The four towers. Anne had been over it a hundred times. With a pen in her hand. She knew every line on it. Better than her own face.

So she knew where to look last.

"There," she said.

In the bottom corner there was a small brown mark. Right out on the edge of the skin.

A mark is a spot left on a thing. Ink, mud, a scratch, a burn. Old skin is full of marks. Anne had copied this one four days ago. She had not thought about it once. She had copied it the way you copy a stain. Roughly. A blot.

Under the lantern, close, it was not a blot.

It was a leaf.

It had a stem. It had five veins in it, drawn one by one. It was about the size of a fingernail. Someone had put real work into it. More than into the whole mill pond.



Nobody said anything.

Then Master Cole said, very quietly, “Well.”

“It is a leaf,” said Hugh.

"It is a signature," said Master Cole. "A man who may not write draws one instead. Every mapmaker on that shelf has put his name in a corner. This one put a leaf."

"He was the gardener," said Anne.

"He was the gardener."

Sir Edmund had not moved for some time. He was looking at the map. Not at any of them.

"He drew it," he said. "He could not write in the book. So he drew what he knew. And then he hid it."

"In the library," said Anne.

"In the *library*." Sir Edmund put one finger on the table. "Think about that. He did not hide it in his shed. He did not hide it in the garden wall. He put it in the one room in this castle with readers in it. A hundred years after he was dust. He hid it where the writing is kept."

"Behind a shelf," said Miles.

"Behind a shelf that has not been moved since," said Master Cole. "It took a wedding party and a broken bed to shift it."

The lantern hissed again. Far off outside, a jackdaw said something rude.

Anne looked at the leaf for a long moment.

"He waited a hundred and twelve years," she said.

"He did."

"That is a long time. A long time to wait to be believed."

Master Cole did not answer that. He got up slowly. He stood with his hand on the back of the Chronicle. He looked down at the two brown pages.

Then Hugh spoke. He had said nothing for some time. His nose was a hand from the map. His eyes were very round.

"I have seen that leaf," he said.

They all turned.

"Not this one," said Hugh. "Not on paper."

He put his finger next to the little drawn stem. He did not touch the skin. Anne would have taken his hand off.

"It is cut into a stone. In the garden. On the big flat slab in the rough grass. Three paces from the pear tree." He looked up. "We have all walked over it since I was born."

Chapter Eight: The Stone with the Leaf

They were out at the pear tree at first light.

Hugh took them straight to it. He did not have to look. He had known that stone all his life.

It was a slab.

A slab is a big flat piece of stone. Wider than a man. Thick as your hand. You see slabs in a church floor. You see them over a doorway. This one lay flat in the rough grass. Three paces from the pear tree. The grass had grown over its edges. Its face was grey and clean. Feet do that to a stone.

Every soul in that castle had crossed it. That was the point of it.

“I lay my tools on that stone,” said Wilf. “Every day. Thirty years. Hoe there. Basket there.”

“Did you never wonder what it was?” said Mabel.

Wilf thought about it.

“It is a stone,” he said.

They cut the grass back with shears. They did it slowly. Then they brushed the face of it. One end to the other.

The leaf was near the top edge.

It was almost gone. A hundred years of boots had worn it flat. You could walk over it a thousand times. You would see nothing. But the early sun came in low and sideways. The little cut lines threw shadows. And there it was.

A stem. Five veins.

Anne knelt down. She laid her copy of the map on the grass beside it. She looked from one to the other.

The same hand. The same leaf. One drawn in ink, one cut into stone.

To cut is not only a kitchen word. A mason cuts stone. He does it with a chisel and a hammer. A tap at a time. It is slow. And you cannot put back what you take away.

"He made his mark twice," said Anne.

"He wanted it found," said Miles.

By seven o'clock twenty people stood round that slab. No breakfast had been eaten in the castle at all.

Lady Margaret came out at half past.

She stood at the edge of the grass with her hands folded. She looked at it a long moment. Then she said, "No."

Everybody stopped talking.

"I am not saying no for ever," she said. "I am saying no to *that*." She pointed at Miles's crowbar. "You are all about to heave up a stone the size of a door. A boy has found a leaf on it. That is a guess. It is a good guess. It is still a guess."

A guess is what you say when you do not know. Sometimes it is nearly right. Sometimes it is nothing at all. From the inside a guess looks exactly the same either way. That is the trouble with them.

"Then what do you want, my lady?" said Miles.

"I want to know what happens next," said Lady Margaret. "Tell me. Out loud. From the start to the end. What are you going to do? Who stands where? What breaks if it goes wrong?"

Miles went rather pale. Then he did it.

He was better at it than he thought. He did not talk about being brave. Or quick. He talked about wood and stone and rope. He knows those. Once he started he did not stop.

"We do not lift it up on its end," he said. "Not with a pear tree three paces off. If it goes over, it takes the tree."

"Go on."

"We slide it. We lever one end a finger off the ground. A lever is a long pole. You put a stone under it, near one end. You lean on the far end. The near end lifts. The stone does the work. Not you."

"And?"

"It stands up a finger. Then Hugh pushes rollers under. Round poles, three of them. Then it is standing on rollers, not on the ground. Then four of us pull it sideways with a rope. It rolls off its bed. We set it flat on the grass."

"Who puts a hand under it?"

"Nobody does."

"Say that properly."

Miles said it properly. "No hand goes under the slab at any time. Not for a moment. A roller wants moving? We move it with a stick. If the rope goes, the slab drops a finger onto grass. Nobody is touched."

Lady Margaret nodded slowly. Then she asked her second question.

"What happens if it breaks?"

They all went quiet. Miles did not answer at once. That was the right thing to do.

"It might break," he said. "It is old. We do not know what is under the middle of it. Lever it in the middle and it breaks for certain. So we go in at the corners. We take it slow. We let it come. And if it breaks anyway —" He stopped.

"Yes?"

"Then it is broken," said Miles. "And I cannot mend it. You cannot mend a slab. You would have to cut a new one. There is no stone like it nearer than the Combe."

"Thank you," said Lady Margaret.

She looked at the slab for a moment longer.

"Gib takes the rope," she said. "Wilf stands at the pear tree and watches the roots. If he says stop, everyone stops. I do not care who is halfway through what. The small ones stand behind the beds. Bess, we shall want water. Miles —"

"My lady."

"It is your lift. Someone may tell you to hurry. Even me. You will say no."

"Yes, my lady."

"Then you have my word for it. Go on."

It took the whole afternoon.

Half the castle worked on it. The other half came out to watch. Bramble sat on the wall the whole time. He had the air of a cat who had ordered it all.

They cleared the grass right back. They cut three young poles for rollers. They peeled them smooth. Gib went round the slab twice with the rope. He made one knot to hold and one to let go.

Then they levered the top corner.

It came up a finger. It came up sweetly. Miles had chosen his spot well.

"Roller," he said.

Hugh slid the first roller in with a stick.

"Second corner."

They did that four times. Then the great grey stone stood on three round poles. It was not touching the earth at all.



"Now the rope," said Miles. "Slow. Slow. Slow is the whole thing."

Six of them took the rope. The slab moved a hand's width. Then another. The rollers turned under it. They made a low grinding noise. Wilf called out once about a root. They all stopped for four minutes without a word said. Then they went on.

By six o'clock the slab lay flat on the grass. Whole. Three paces from its own bed. Its leaf up to the sky.

Nobody cheered yet. They all came and looked.

Where the slab had lain there was a hole.

Not a rough hole. A round one. It was made of cut blocks. Curved, set close. It went down and down into the dark, past the light of the lantern. The stones were laid in rings. Every ring was a little smaller than the one above. You could see the mason's marks on them.

"That is a shaft," said Master Cole.

A shaft is a straight round hole. It goes down into the ground. Not a well dug in mud. A shaft is built. It is lined with stone from top to bottom. Then it can never fall in.

It was beautiful. That is the only word. Anne said it out loud. Nobody laughed at her.

Hugh got down on his front. He put his head over the edge.

Then he sat up again.

The shaft was full.

Full to the brim. The brim is the very top edge of a thing. It is where a thing spills over. This one was full of black earth, and dead leaf, and root. All of it packed down hard. A hundred and twelve years had fallen in. Into a hole nobody knew was there.

There was not one drop of water in it.

Chapter Nine: Full of Years

Nobody said much that evening. It is a hard thing to look down a hole. Down at a hundred and twelve years of dead leaf.

Then Wilf said the only useful thing in the garden.

"Then we take it out."

So the next morning they took it out.

To dig a thing out is to get it up and away. A bit at a time. You stop when the hole is empty. It is not clever work. It is long work. A garden is full of it. Wilf had done more of it than all of them put together.

Miles set up a beam over the shaft first. Two forked posts. A small bucket on a rope. Gib made the knot. Then the earth could come up in a bucket. Nobody had to carry it up a ladder.

Then Master Cole made them stop. Nobody was going down yet.

"A light goes down first," he said. "Always. Down to the bottom, and back up, on a string. If the flame stays alive, the air is good. If it goes out, nothing living goes in after it."

"Does that happen?" said Hugh.

"In old shafts, yes. Bad air lies at the bottom of holes. You cannot see it and you cannot smell it." He tied the horn lantern on. "That is why we look."

The lantern went down. It burned bright all the way to the earth. It burned bright all the way back up. Master Cole nodded once.

"Good air," he said. "Old, and it smells of leaves. But good."

Even then, Lady Margaret set the rules. Nothing sharp went down that shaft. No spade, no fork, no hook. Hands only. A wooden scoop. And nobody went in without a rope round his chest. Gib held the other end.

They worked in turns. The first arm's length came out easily. It was dry leaf, grey and light. It came up in armfuls. It weighed nothing at all.

Under that it went brown and heavy.

Under that it went black.

By ten the heap on the grass stood as high as Hugh. Wilf walked round it twice. He put his hand into it. He looked very pleased indeed.

“A hundred years of leaf mould,” he said. “That goes on my beds.”

“It is rubbish,” said one of the stable lads.

“It is the best earth on this hill.”



And all that day the buckets still walked up from the stream.

That was the other thing about that week. The great find did not stop one ordinary job. The beasts still drank. The pots still had to be washed. And the garden was still dying. One bed a day.

Mabel came up with Wilf at noon. They did the round. There was not enough water. There had not been enough water for eleven days.

She had two buckets. The beds wanted six.

“Right,” said Mabel.

She stood on the path in the middle of the garden. A bucket in each hand. Every soul there was watching her. She knew it.

To choose is to pick one thing and let the other go. You always lose something. That is why it is hard. That is why people put it off. Most of us would rather someone else did it.

"Beans," said Mabel. "Beans get water. They are food and they are nearly ready. Onions get half a bucket each row. Onions keep. Lift them and dry them. They will still be there in February. And in February we shall want them."

"And the rest?" said Wilf.

Mabel looked down at the gate bed.

The gate bed was hers. She had made it in her first spring at the castle. It was not food at all. It was marigolds. It was stocks. It was a great untidy heap of blue cornflowers. It was the first thing you saw at the gate. Bess cut from it every Sunday for the hall table.

It had been dying since Tuesday.

"The gate bed gets nothing," said Mabel.

Nobody said anything.

"I want to say why," said Mabel. Her voice was not quite steady. "Then nobody thinks I did not notice. Flowers do matter. They do. I planted every one of those. But you cannot eat a marigold in February." She rubbed her nose on her wrist. "So the beans get it. And I mind. I mind a lot. That is all."

Then she went and watered the beans.

Bess came out an hour later. She stood by the gate bed. Her arms were folded. Then she went back in. She said nothing at all. From Bess that is a whole speech.

At three the shaft went cool.

Hugh was the one who noticed, of course. His hands were in the last bucket up. He was sorting the root out of it.

"This is cold," he said.

Cool is the little bit of cold that feels good on a hot day. Stone in a cellar is cool. A church floor is cool. All morning that shaft had given up warm dust. The same as the rest of the garden. Now it was cool.

Two buckets later it was dark. Not black-with-leaf dark. Dark the way watered earth is dark.

Then Miles came up out of the shaft. He held his hands out flat in front of him.

"Damp," he said.

Damp is a little bit wet. Not running. Not dripping. Just wet enough to feel. Just wet enough to see.

They put another lantern down. Everybody crowded round the brim.

The next scoop came up. It was not damp.

It was wet.

Wet, black, heavy, running-off-your-fingers wet. In the sixth week without rain. Out of a garden with no water in it.

And then the whole castle cheered.

To cheer is to shout together for gladness. It is a good noise. Bess came out of the kitchen at a run. Her spoon was still in her hand. Someone banged a bucket. The stable lads made a noise. You could hear it in the village. Bramble left at high speed. Up in the north tower a jackdaw shouted back at them all. Out of pure bad manners.

Anne wrote the time down. Ten minutes past three.

Then they waited.

They took the last two scoops out. The floor of the shaft came clean. Cut stone, laid flat. In the middle of it was a little round dip.

Water came into that dip. They could see it come. It welled up between two stones. Slow. Clear. Cold. It filled the dip in about twenty counts.

And then it stopped.

"It will take time," said Master Cole. "It has a long way to come."

They waited an hour.

Anne wrote down the level every ten minutes. She marked it in fingers. She used a stick against the wall of the shaft.

Four o'clock: two fingers.

Ten past: two fingers.

Twenty past: two fingers.

Half past: two fingers.

By five nobody was cheering. Hugh lay on the grass. His head was over the brim. The lantern hung down on its string. He did not move.

"Hugh," said Sir Edmund. "What do you see?"

"Water coming in," said Hugh.

"Then why does it not rise?"

Hugh did not answer for a moment. He turned the lantern on its string. The light went round the wall of the shaft. Low down. At the water.

Then he said, "It is going out again."

There was a hole in the side of the shaft. Low. Square. Cut on purpose. The water came up through the floor. It crossed the stone. Then out it went. As fast as it came in.

To seep is to move through very slowly. In small amounts. Water seeps through sand. It seeps through a cracked pot. And it seeps through packed rubble. A drop at a time. Day and night. For a hundred and twelve years.

Miles sat back on the grass.

"That is my channel," he said. "It goes out of here. Under the corner. Under my wall."

Nobody spoke.

That spring had been giving away all it had. For a hundred and twelve years.

Chapter Ten: The Green Stripe

"So where has it all gone?" said Sir Edmund at breakfast.

Nobody knew. They all knew it went under the wall. Nobody knew where it went after that.

"Then someone had better go and look," said Sir Edmund. "Gib. Take Hugh."

They went out at the low gate before seven.

The sheep field lies north of the garden wall. It is a long slope. It goes down to the hedge. A slope is ground that is not flat. You walk up a slope, or down one. You never quite forget it is there.

That slope was the colour of dust. So was the whole hill, by then.

They walked along the foot of the garden wall first. Then they turned. Then they went down.

They did not find it. It found them.

"There," said Gib, at the fourth step.

Down the slope ran a stripe. From the wall to the hedge.

A stripe is a long narrow band of one colour. It lies across another. You see stripes on a cat. You see them on cloth. This one was grass. And it was green.

Not the grey-green of the rest of the field. Green. Thick, dark, standing-up green. About four paces wide. It ran straight down the hill. It started at the middle of Miles's twenty paces of wall.

Hugh stood. He looked at it a long time.

"That has been there all summer," he said.

"Fifty years," said Gib.

They walked down it.

Halfway down, the stripe went soft. There were rushes there. Rushes are tall round green stems. They have no proper leaf. They grow in wet ground and nowhere else. Find rushes and you have found water. Even in August. Even when the top of the ground is dust.

Below the rushes was a bare wet patch. It was the size of the great hall floor.

Six sheep were standing on it.

Sheep stand so in the one good place in the world. Their feet were in cool mud. They looked at Hugh and Gib with no interest at all.

Hugh crouched at the edge of the rushes. He pushed his hand into the green.

It came out wet and cold.



"Gib," he said. "This is ours."

"Aye," said Gib.

"This is our water. All of it. Every day. It comes out under the wall. It runs down here. And the sheep stand in it."

"Aye."

Hugh looked up at him.

"Did you never wonder why the sheep stand there?"

Gib thought about it.

"It is a wet patch," he said.

They took the news back up the hill. It took them longer going up. Everything does.

Miles was at the wall with Sir Edmund. They both had masons' hammers. He had been at the arch since first light.

"Say it again," he said. "The stripe starts where?"

"At your wall. In the middle of the twenty paces."

Miles nodded slowly.

Then he said the thing that ended the whole business. It was a very small thing.

"Then we do not have to build anything."

They all looked at him.

"I thought we should have to cut a new channel," said Miles. "Down the middle of the garden. Set stone the whole way. Weeks of it. We do not. The channel is there. The shaft is there. The water is there. There is one hole in the wrong place. It is the size of my head. We stop it up."

"Stop it up with what?" said Anne.

"Clay," said Miles. "And stone."

Clay is heavy sticky earth. You can roll it in your hands. A potter makes a bowl of it. And clay is the old answer to water. Water will not go through it. Rubble lets water through. Every space between every broken stone is a road. Clay has no spaces in it at all.

"Whoever filled that arch used rubble and mortar," said Miles. "That will hold a wall up. It will not hold water back. It has leaked for a hundred years. It would leak for a hundred more."

"So you take the old filling out," said Sir Edmund.

"Out. All of it. Then we pack the arch again. Clay first, then stone, then clay. Packed hard. A handful at a time. You fill a hole in a dam the same way."

He stopped. “Someone did this same job before. In this same place. We are doing it right this time. And on purpose.”

That thing is called a plug. A plug is what you stop a hole with. You plug a barrel. You plug your ears when Bess sings. A plug is not a clever thing. It never looks like much. And it is the whole difference between a full pot and an empty one.

Lady Margaret had been listening from the gap.

“One question,” she said.

“My lady.”

“Suppose you stop that hole. Suppose the water rises. Where else can it go?”

That is the sensible question. Nobody had asked it.

“It could come up in the beds,” said Lady Margaret. “It could come up under my wall and take the footing out. It has had a hundred years to make itself a road under this hill. None of us knows where that road runs. You may cure a dry garden and get a wet one. A wet one is worse. What then?”

There was a silence.

Then Wilf spoke, from the pear tree, without looking up.

“Then we take the plug out again.”

They all turned round.

“It is clay,” said Wilf. “It is not a wall. We put it in with our hands. We can take it out with our hands. Half a day.”

Lady Margaret looked at him for a moment.

“Yes,” she said. “Thank you, Wilf. Go on, Miles.”

Getting the old filling out took till noon. It was a horrible job. The mortar had set for a hundred and twelve years. It did not want to come. They chipped it out a piece at a time. They lay on their fronts, with the sun on their backs.

The clay came from the stream bank below the village. Gib knew a place. It is blue-grey there. It comes off in slabs. It weighs about as much as the world.

So the four of them went down the hill for clay. That is the same walk as the water. Mabel said so twice.

They packed the arch after dinner.

Miles did the packing himself. Nobody argued about that. He went at it with a short stick and his fists. A handful at a time. He worked it in. He squeezed the air out of it. The clay went smooth and began to shine. Then a course of good stone, laid tight. Then more clay over that.

He finished at half past six. He came out backwards, filthy. He sat down on the grass.

"Done," he said.

Then they all went to look at the shaft.

The whole castle came. Bess came out with the supper still on the fire behind her. That has never happened before or since. Master Cole brought a stool. He sat on it. Wilf stood at the pear tree. The stable lads sat on the wall.

They stood round the brim in the last of the light. They looked down at two fingers of water.

To rise is to go up. Bread rises. The sun rises. Water rises in a shaft. More comes in than goes out. That is all rising is.

They waited.

To wait is to stay where you are. You stay till a thing happens. It is easy for the first five minutes. It gets harder every minute after that.

Anne marked the wall with her stick.

The light went off the top of the hill. The swifts came out over the yard. Down in the village someone was calling a dog. Over and over. In that flat evening voice that carries for miles.

At half past seven Anne put her stick down.

The water had not moved.

Not up. Not down. The same two fingers. Cold, clear and perfectly still.

Nothing was happening at all.

Chapter Eleven: The Waiting Day

Anne was out at the shaft at six. She had her stick.

Two fingers.

She wrote it down anyway. *Six o'clock: two fingers.* Then she went in to breakfast. She did not say a word. Nobody asked her either. They had seen her face at the door.

So began the longest day of that summer.

A castle does not stop. It cannot. A castle is fifty people. It is forty beasts. It is three meals a day. None of that waits for a hole in the ground.

So they all went to work.

Miles went to the wall with Rafe the mason.

Rafe had come up from the village at seven. His tools were on his shoulder. A mason is a man who works in stone. He cuts it. He lays it. He looks at a wall and knows. It will stand a hundred years. Or it will not.

He walked the twenty paces first. All the way along. He looked at the footing. He looked at the three courses. They lay in their rows on the grass. Then he looked at the clay in the arch. He pressed it with his thumb.

"Who packed this?"

"I did," said Miles.

Rafe said nothing for a moment.

"Well," he said. "You will do."

Miles worked all day on that wall. He thought about the shaft four times an hour. No more than that. He counted it very good going.

The buckets still walked up from the stream. Of course they did. The well still held a handspan of brown. There was still a kitchen. The beasts still drank. Twice a day.

Mabel did four turns. She never said one word about it.

Bess made dinner out of almost nothing. She complained the whole time.

To complain is to say out loud that a thing is bad. Some people complain at you. They want you sad too. Bess complained the other way. She banged the pot. This was no way to feed a household. What was she meant to do with three onions? And a pail of barley? Then she fed forty people. It was good. She took the plates back looking pleased.

Wilf watered by the cupful.

That is not a way of speaking. He had a cup. It was small and brown. It had a chip out of the rim. He went along the bean bed on his knees. Plant by plant. Each one got a cupful at the root.

A cupful is as much as a cup holds. It is not very much. But it is the right amount. It has to go in the right place. Wilf had done that for thirteen days.

Nobody said a word about the shaft all morning.

At noon somebody did.

It was Rafe. He was not being unkind. He was eating his bread on the wall stones. His boots were in the grass. Sir Edmund had asked what he thought.

“Honest?”

“Honest,” said Sir Edmund.

“I think it is gone,” said Rafe.

He said it plainly. He had looked at a great deal of old work.

“A hundred and twelve years is a long time, sir. Hills move. Water goes where it likes. It has had all that time to find another road. It may have found one. Then it will not come back. Not for you. Not for me. Not for a boy with a bucket of clay.”

Nobody argued with him.

That was the hard part. A stupid man they could have argued with. Rafe was not stupid. He was a good man. He said the sensible thing. And the sensible thing was sad.

Sad is what you feel when a good thing is over. Or when a hoped-for thing does not come. It is not the same as angry. You can do nothing with it. You only carry it about.

They carried it about with them all day.

At four Mabel's gate bed finished dying.

There was nothing to be done. She had known it was coming since Tuesday. She went down. She pulled the dead stems out. She shook the cornflower seed into her hand. She folded it up in a bit of cloth. She put it in her apron.

"Next year," she said.

The light went orange. Then it went grey.

Dusk is the last part of the evening. The colour goes out of the world. The dark is not in yet. Things look further away at dusk.

At dusk Anne went out. She sat by the shaft. On her own.

She sat there some time. The stone was still warm from the day. Down in the village a door shut. Up in the tower the jackdaws were settling. They were arguing about it.



Anne did not know a proper prayer for a garden.

So she said a plain one. Out loud. Quietly. You speak so to someone beside you.

“Please send us water for the garden. And if not, please help us to manage.”

That was all of it. She promised nothing. Nothing was promised back. She sat a little longer. Two fingers of black water at the bottom of a hole. Then she got up. She brushed the grass off her skirt. She went in to bed.

Hugh came out last. The first stars were up.

He brought the lantern. He lay down on his front at the brim. He had lain so the day before. He let the light down on its string. He looked.

Two fingers. Perhaps two and a bit. If you were being kind about it.

The dip in the floor was full. The water came in between the two stones. Quiet. Steady. Just as it had come in all along.

And Hugh wanted to help it.

That is a strange thing to want. He sat up on his heels. He thought about it. He wanted the scoop. He wanted to clear round the dip. He wanted to pull at the stones. He wanted to *do* something to it. Doing something feels better. He had done nothing for two whole days.

He knew quite well it would not help. You cannot make a spring hurry. You would stir the mud up. You would cloud the water. You might loosen a stone. A stone that had sat still for a hundred and twelve years.

He put his hand flat on the warm stone rim instead.

The rim is the top edge of a thing. All the way round. A cup has a rim. A bucket has a rim. This one was cut stone. It was worn smooth. Someone had smoothed it on purpose. Then it would not cut your arms.

"Good night," said Hugh, to a hole in the ground.

Then he took his lantern and went to bed.

He was awake before the light.

He did not know why at first. He lay in the dark. He listened. The castle was quiet. Then he got up. He pulled his clothes on. He went down.

Wilf was in the yard. Wilf was always in the yard first. His hat was on. His hoe was in his hand. He was looking at the sky. Gardeners do that.

"Coming?" said Hugh.

"Aye," said Wilf.

They went through the little gate. First light was in the east. It is a thin grey light. There is no colour in it. The beans stood black and still. Their shoes went dark with dew.

Hugh got to the corner first.

He stopped dead. Wilf walked into the back of him.

The shaft was full.

Not two fingers. Full. Up and up and up. All the way to a handspan below the brim. You could lean down. You could put your hand in it.

It was clear. That means you can see straight through it. Hugh could count the cut stones. Down and down they went, under the water. He could see the last stars in it. He could see his own face looking up at him.

It was cold. He could feel the cold coming off it.

And all along the wet stone rim sat the bees. In a neat line. From one side round to the other.

Chapter Twelve: The Spring in the Garden

Hugh did not shout.

He thought about it after. He could not say why. He simply turned round. He went back through the little gate. Across the yard. Up the stair. He knocked on Sir Edmund's door. It was ten past four in the morning.

"It is up," he said.

Then the whole castle came.

They came in their night things, with cloaks over them. They came half asleep. Bess came with her hair in a plait. Master Cole came in one shoe and one boot. He never noticed it all day.

They stood round the brim in the grey light. They looked down at cold clear water.

Nobody touched it for a moment. It felt like a thing to ask about first.

"Well," said Lady Margaret. "Somebody had better taste it."

To taste a thing is to put a little in your mouth. Then you know what it is. You taste soup. You taste an apple off a strange tree.

Bess went down on one knee at the rim. She filled her hand. She drank.

They all watched her.

"Sweet," said Bess.

One word. From Bess, about water, that is a great deal.

Gib went next. He drank out of his cupped hand, slowly. He stood up. He looked at the sky. He gave his own verdict.

"That will do," said Gib.

Three words. Four words between the two of them. The whole castle knew exactly what that meant. Then the cheering started properly.

Then Anne fetched the map. They finished the job.

"He drew three lines," she said. "Out of the pool. Down the middle of the garden. Past the beds. Out at the bottom gate. That is where the water is meant to go."

"The middle of the garden is the path," said Mabel. "Flat stones. We walk on it."

"Yes," said Anne.

They all looked at Wilf.

Wilf was looking at the path. He had gone a bit still.

"That path sinks," he said.

"Sinks?"

"Every few years. In the middle. I have taken those stones up twice. I packed under them." He rubbed his chin. "I always thought it was the frost."

They lifted the path stones after breakfast.

Under the third one, a hand down in the earth, was cut stone. Two lines of blocks. A floor between them. A channel a handspan wide. It ran away down the middle of the garden. Exactly where the map said. It was packed solid with earth and root.

Master Cole sat down on a bucket. He laughed till they had to give him water.

That channel is an overflow. To overflow is to run over the top. The shaft fills up. Then the water has to go somewhere. Adam had told it where. Along the channel. Down between the beds. Past every single thing that grows there.

They cleared it by hand. It took two days. Every soul in the castle did some of it. Nobody had to be asked twice.

Miles set a trough at the bottom end.

A trough is a long open box. It holds water. You see them in stables. Beasts drink out of them. This one was stone. Rafe cut it in the village. Miles set it in the ground himself.

He set it level. Level means flat. No end is higher than the other. You test it with water. Does it sit even all the way round? Then it is level. Does it run to one end? Then it is not. Out it comes, and you start again.

Miles took it out twice.

They opened the last stone of the channel on a Thursday. At noon. The whole household stood along the path.

The water came out of the shaft in a curl. It ran along the stone floor. Very fast at first. Then slow. It found the dust. It soaked in. It came on. It went past the beans. Past the onions. Past the cabbage and the herbs. It reached the trough at the bottom. It went over the lip and filled it. Wilf stood there with his hat in his hand. He did not say one word.



The garden drank for the first time since the storm.

The well stayed low. It stayed low all that autumn. Lady Margaret kept it rationed. Nobody minded.

But the walking to the stream stopped. That was the great thing. No more buckets down the hill and up again. No more six in the morning till dark.

Bess had her pots back. The beasts drank. Mabel took a bucket ten paces to the trough. She filled it. Then she cried for a minute. Then she got on with it.

She planted the gate bed again in the last week of August.

To plant is to put a seed in the ground and let it grow. It is a hopeful sort of job. You do it for a spring you cannot see yet.

She had her cloth of cornflower seed. Wilf gave her a root of stock. It came out of his own corner. It was not much of a bed yet. It would be, next year.

Master Cole gave them his guess about the arch. He called it a guess himself.

"We shall never know," he said. "But here is what I think. Some mason was set to mend that footing. Sixty years ago. Eighty. He found a hole in it. A hole in a footing is a bad thing. So he did what any good workman does. He filled it up. He filled it well. He went home." He shrugged. "He never knew what it was for. Nobody had told him. And he never asked."

"He never asked the gardener," said Anne.

"There was none to ask by then," said Master Cole. "Adam was a hundred years dead."

The Chronicle came out on the first of September.

Master Cole wrote the summer down. The dry weeks. The empty stores. The well at a handspan. The map behind the shelf. The moss behind the pear. The bees going over the wall. The arch, the clay, the waiting day.

Then he put the quill down.

"There is one more thing to write," he said. "And I shall not write it."

He held the quill out to Anne.

"Your hand is better than mine now. And it should be a young one. This has waited long enough."

So Anne wrote it under the entry. In her best hand.

This garden is watered by the work of Adam. He was gardener of this house. He could not write in this book. So he drew a map, and hid it here. He was right.

Nobody said anything for a bit.

"What do we call the map?" said Hugh.

They thought about that.

"Adam's map," said Mabel.

So that is its name.

The old one went back into the library. Flat this time, between two boards. The fair copy went into a frame of plain wood. They hung it inside the garden door. At the height of a man's eye. Whoever works in that garden can see it every day.

Wilf looked at it a long time. He said it was a very good drawing.

On the Sunday, Sir Edmund made Wilf sit at the high table.

The high table is the long one at the top of the hall. The household sits there. Sir Edmund. Lady Margaret. Master Cole. Wilf had eaten at the far end of that hall for thirty years. He liked it there.

He hated every minute of it. He sat very straight. He held his cup with great care. Twice he tried to get up and clear the plates. Twice Bess put him back in his chair.

He never forgot it either. Not for the rest of his life.

Sir Edmund stood up at the end.

"I shall say one thing. Then we shall all stop looking at Wilf. He would like that," he said.

They laughed. Wilf went red. It got easier after that.

"We looked for that water in a book," said Sir Edmund. "We looked for it on a map. Both were right. I am glad of both. But the man who knew had stood in that garden for thirty years. And not one of us ever asked him a thing."

He looked down the hall.

"Ask the people who are there every day. They know. Nobody ever asks them."

Then he said the other thing. Quietly. It was short.

"And thank God for a spring. It waited a hundred and twelve years for us."

The rain still did not come.

It did not come in September either. The harvest was small. It was hard work. Every hand in the shire was out in it. Brightstone brought its own in on garden water. The whole village knew where that water came from. People came up the hill to look at the shaft. People do.

On the last dry evening of the month, a rider came up the hill.

He had a letter for Sir Edmund. It came from the shire. It was sealed. He waited for it to be read.

Sir Edmund read it in the yard by the oak. Then he read it out loud. Then he read it out loud again. The first time nobody had believed him.

The shire's riding games were coming to Brightstone in the autumn.

He had wanted that for eleven years. Ring-tilting on the top field. The obstacle riding. Every house in the shire coming up that hill. All of them with horses.

The yard went up in a roar. Mabel shouted. Miles shouted. Master Cole said "Good heavens" four times.

Then Gib spoke from the stable door. He said it in the middle of all that noise. They all heard him.

"Games want horses," said Gib.

He looked round the yard.

"We have Puck."

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