

## The Farm Mystery Series

# Chapter One

“Come on, Jason! You can make it!” Andy shouted encouragingly to his older brother. He wasn’t sure his words ever reached Jason’s ears. The sound of their horses’ hooves pounding on the soft earth almost drowned out Andy’s words in his own ears. He could feel his heart pounding faster and faster in excitement.

Andy looked over at Jason, who although riding pretty well, did seem to be slumped slightly in his saddle. *I’ve got to get him to a doctor quickly, Andy thought. He’s lost a lot of blood already.*

Andy looked ahead and quickly turned his horse to the left to miss a stand of sweet gum trees directly in his path. His trusty horse, Major, made the swerve expertly, never missing a stride. “Good horse,” Andy breathed into the horse’s ear, patting his mane.

“How much further?” Jason asked weakly, barely loud enough for Andy to hear. “I can’t go on much longer, partner!”

Andy looked back quickly to see if they were still being followed. Nothing was in sight, but that didn’t mean anything in this part of the country. They could be anywhere. “Let’s try to make it around this bend,” Andy shouted back to Jason. “We’ll see if there is a good place to rest.”

Jason didn’t answer, but he did turn his head to look behind them. Then he shook his head sadly as though he saw something pursuing them.

## Trapped

“Hey, we’ll pull up there!” Andy pointed to a grove of trees just ahead. Perhaps in the shelter of the trees, they would be safe, at least long enough for Andy to check on Jason’s condition.

The boys slowed up as they approached the trees. The horses turned and stamped a bit as they came to a sudden stop, trying to release some leftover energy after being ridden so hard.

Andy jumped off his horse and tied it to a low limb on one of the trees deep inside the small grove. He went to help his brother down, but Jason was already off his horse, tying it to a tree.

The boys scanned the area carefully while crouching behind two of the largest hickory trees. “See anything?” Jason asked quietly, breathing heavily.

“Nothing,” Andy answered in an even quieter voice. “Maybe we’ve lost them after all.”

“How many were there?” Jason asked, wiping sweat from his brow with the back of his arm.

“I counted three,” Andy replied. “But the one that took a swipe at you was the biggest grizzly bear I think I’ve ever seen. Say, are you doing okay?”

“I’m fine,” Jason said, looking at his arm where the ‘wound’ was located. “The bleeding has finally stopped and I’m actually getting a little bit hungry.”

With that, Jason reached in his pocket and pulled out a couple of oatmeal cookies.

That looked like a good idea, so Andy did the same thing. In a matter of seconds, it appeared that the boys had completely forgotten about their possible pursuers. The boys enjoyed their cookies, and then

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started rubbing down their horses with some grass that they pulled from the nearby field.

“That was sure a neat ride,” Jason said, reaching into his pocket to see if there were any more cookies. Crumbs were all he could find, so he popped them into his mouth. They tasted strangely like a horse smells. “That horse of yours, Major, is pretty fast,” Jason praised.

“Yours isn’t too bad either,” Andy said. “I saw that Belle stayed right up with Major pretty much all the way. I think she’s finally getting her strength back after having such a hard time with her foal earlier this summer. She seems to be fine now.”

Jason, 13 years old, and Andy, who was 11, lived on a small farm in Tennessee, and loved to take their horses out for a run whenever they could. Dad had just recently given the boys permission to ride by themselves now that they were older. This was an especially warm November afternoon. Mom had given them a free hour after lunch today, to enjoy the beautiful weather. As they often did, the boys had enjoyed pretending while they rode.

Jason looked over at Andy, and wistfully watched Andy pull another cookie out of his pocket. “Are you going to be able to finish all of yours, Andy?”

Andy just grinned and kept chewing. After a swallow, he answered, “I think so, Jason, but I really do appreciate that you’d be willing to help me out if I wasn’t able to finish it. That’s real brotherly love.”

Jason laughed, picking up a rock and tossing it to the edge of the field. “Just looking out for my younger brother,” he replied, smiling.

## Trapped

“Well, if you’d like to help your younger brother,” Andy said, rising to his feet as he began the delicate job of licking his fingers, “I’ve got some math problems that were stumping me pretty badly this morning in school. I’ll have to tackle them again as soon as I get back.”

The Nelsons home schooled their children, and it was common for the older children to help the younger ones with anything they were having trouble with. As Dad often said, the best way to really, really learn something was to teach it to someone else.

“What are you working on?” Jason asked, picking up another rock from the field. This was a new field to the Nelson farm, Dad having purchased it only about six months earlier. The boys were doing what they could to rid it of any rocks. Besides, throwing rocks is a job most every boy enjoys.

“Reducing fractions,” Andy replied, also picking up a few smaller rocks and trying to hit an old fence post about twenty feet away. But try as he might, no rocks connected with his target.

Andy described one of his problems and Jason tried to work it on the ground, using a stick in the dirt. “See,” he concluded, “you need to take this number and put it there.” As Jason drew a dividing line between two numbers, the stick he was using got caught on a buried rock. Jason pushed harder, until finally the stick broke and made a mess of the writing on the ground.

“That’s sort of what my math work looked like this morning,” Andy laughed.

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“Well, anyway, you get the idea,” Jason replied with a grin. “I can go over it again when we get home.”

Andy had enjoyed watching Jason writing with the stick on the ground and looked around for a good one to use himself. All he could find was a spindly oak limb. Andy, looking up around him, shielded his eyes from the sun, but couldn't find any oak trees from which the limb could have fallen. *That's strange,* he thought to himself. *I wonder where this limb came from.*

Rather than give it any more thought, however, he started playing with the stick. There were some leaves on the ground, and Andy tried to see if he could pick up a leaf using the end of the stick. This was much harder than he would have thought, but he finally stabbed the leaf.

This was fun, so Andy tried it again. Jason went for a tulip poplar leaf that was blowing across the ground. He tried again and again, but the swirling leaf was hard to get. Jason stabbed at the leaf quickly, hoping to catch it before it blew away again.

Just as Jason pinned his leaf to the ground, there was a sudden, loud SNAP and Jason's stick was grabbed by the earth and held in place by powerful jaws.

“Andy! What's that?” Jason exclaimed, cautiously getting closer to the object that was holding his stick securely. Andy raced over to see what was going on.

The boys got down on their hands and knees and examined the situation. Jason's stick was indeed trapped in the rubber-padded jaws of something.

## Trapped

Carefully, Jason pulled the stick toward him, and the jaws, along with a long chain, came out of the ground. “It’s a trap!” Jason exclaimed, taking a close look at the object now dangling in the air on the end of his stick.

“Yeah, and there’s a chain attached to it,” Andy noted. He used his stick to dig around the hole, in case there was another snap trap still in the hole, but nothing else snapped shut. Finally, he pulled on the chain, but found that it was securely attached to something in the loose dirt.

“Won’t it come out?” Jason asked, grabbing a portion of the chain in his hand and pulling. It didn’t budge.

“Here, let me help you,” Andy said, taking part of the chain in his hand. Both boys tugged and pulled. Suddenly, the chain came flying out of the hole, attached to a large stake that had been pounded deep into the ground. This happened so unexpectedly that the boys went flying backward. It would have been funny, if the boys hadn’t been so serious and a little scared.

Jason was the first to speak after the boys stood up. “Hey, Andy. Are you thinking what I’m thinking? Why is there a trap on our land? Dad doesn’t trap.”

“That’s right,” Andy said seriously. “And if we aren’t the ones who are trapping, then who is?”