



The Farm Beneath the Water

Books Reviewed:

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~~Editors Choice:~~

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

[The Secret Hen House Theatre](#) [4], Helen Stephen's debut, is one of my favourite books of recent years: though set on a beautifully described traditional farm, it's actually a proper theatre story (central character Hannah loves acting and puts on shows in an impromptu theatre made out of her mother's old hen house) and brought to mind Noel Streatfeild's books, and **The Swish of the Curtain** too.

If anything I enjoyed the sequel even more. In this book the farm is threatened by a water company who want to flood its valley to make a reservoir. Hannah's dad isn't getting anywhere in the fight against them, can she turn the tide? At first her friends seem keener on the prospect of jet-skiing than saving the farm, but as Hannah shows them ? and the readers ? the beauty and wonder of the wildlife that an apparently scruffy outbuilding or old yew tree can house, opinions change.

The final showdown with the slimy representative of ?Acqua? is a suitably dramatic climax to the story. It takes place during the school's production of **Romeo and Juliet** ? **Hamlet** would have been appropriate, as he is well and truly hoist by his own petard. Not only are the pleasures both of the countryside and of acting delightfully described, but it's good to see a book in which children care so much about the environment and in which they manage to use the democratic process to effect important change. There's also sibling rivalry, friendships put to the test, and a hints of a possible romance too ? a great deal for readers to savour.

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