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Opening extract from

All Aboard at Silver Street Farm

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Chapter One

It was the hottest summer anyone in Lonchester could remember. The grass in the parks turned brown and police went on patrol in short-sleeved shirts. Hosepipes were banned. Strangers greeted one another in the street, looking up at the clear blue sky and saying, "Phew! Another scorcher!"

At Silver Street City Farm, the pigs – Mrs Fattybot, Mojo and their piglets – were getting

sunburned, and it was decided that they should have a mud bath to keep them cool.

So that was why, on the first afternoon of the summer holidays, Meera, Karl and Gemma, the three children who had started Silver Street, were struggling across the farmyard with big buckets, brimful of water.

"These last three should do it," panted Karl.

"Good job. My arms are almost dropping off," complained Gemma.

"I hope the pigs appreciate all this work!" said Meera.

The pigs lived in solid brick and concrete sties, but they could also be let out into a big fenced pen to root around amongst the weeds and scrubby bushes. The children emptied their buckets into the hollow scrape that Karl had made in the middle of this pen with a



shovel and Karl tested the spot with his boot; it disappeared up to the ankle in liquid mud.

"Perfect!" he said. "Now, let's see if they like it."

"Well, if *they* don't," Meera laughed, "Gemma and me are getting in there to cool off!"

Karl opened the gates to the two sties and a gang of half-grown piglets, ginger with big black spots, shot out of each one. They ran around, chasing each other and splashing in the wallow, snorting and blowing, sending mud in all directions.

"Aw!" said Meera. "They're getting so covered in mud you can't see their black spots."

"That's the idea, Meera," Karl replied. "The mud is like suntan lotion, it stops them getting burned."

"Maybe I'll try putting some mud on the



end of my nose," grinned Gemma. "It might stop me getting any more freckles!"

Deep snorts and grunts came from inside the sties. The mummy pigs were getting up.

Mojo was out first, her huge, round body balanced over her neat little trotters, like an overstuffed sofa on antique legs. She took a deep breath, sniffing the mud, and then rushed into the mudbath.

The second sow, Mrs Fattybot, was never an early riser. But Mojo's sigh must have told her that she was missing out on something good. She emerged from the sty, ears flapping, as if to say "What's going on?", then barged Mojo to one side and plonked herself down in the lovely, sloppy centre of the bath, as if it was the *least* that a pig of her quality could expect. The children smiled at each other.



"She looks like she's expecting us to bring her cocktails!" said Meera.

"I know!" said Karl, shaking his head and laughing.

"C'mon guys," said Gemma. "No slacking! All the *other* animals need water now!"

The three friends lugged full buckets about the farm, laughing and joking and splashing each other to keep cool. The whole of the summer holidays stretched out in front of them, full of days like this. Although Flora, the farm manager, did most of the work on the farm, helping out was still what they all loved doing best in all the world.

In spite of their high spirits, the children couldn't ignore the fact that some of the Silver Street animals were not quite so happy. The chickens had given up scratching for worms



and just hung about in the shade under their pen, looking bored. The turkeys spent all day panting and dust-bathing, and although the ducks still swam in the canal, the water was green and icky. There wasn't a scrap of grass growing in any of the pens; the heat had shrivelled it up weeks ago. So the goats and sheep had no fresh greens to eat, only hay and the muesli-like food that came in sacks. The goats didn't seem to mind this too much, but the sheep were truly fed up.

When the children arrived at the ewes' pen, Bobo and Bitzi and their four lambs were crammed together in the shade of a small bush, the only patch of shelter from the sun.

"Oh, dear!" said Gemma. "They look way too hot!"

Reluctantly, the sheep left the shade to get

