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Opening extract from

Escape from Silver Street Farm

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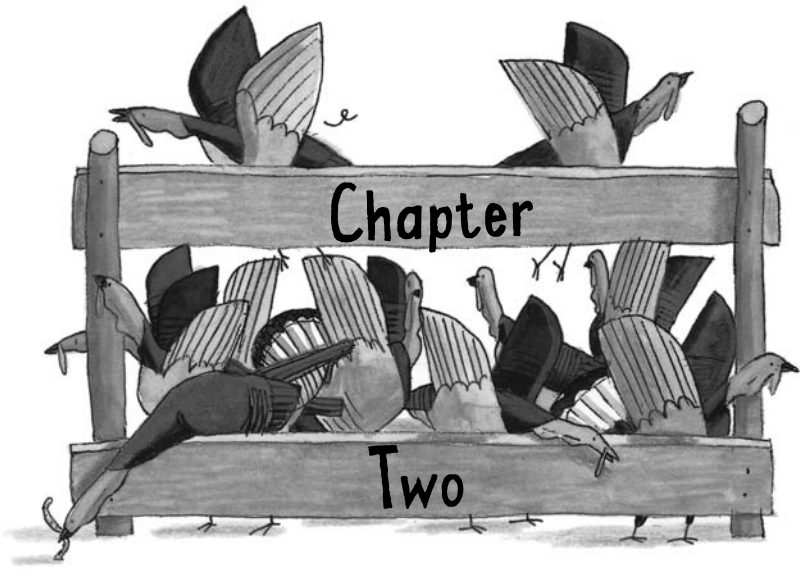


Silver Street turkeys had nothing to fear at Christmas. Their purpose in life was to show Silver Street visitors what live turkeys looked like, not to provide humans with yummy Christmas dinners. But, in spite of being some of the luckiest turkeys in the world, the Silver Street turkeys were nervous and flighty creatures. They paced up and down by the fence of their enclosure, as if looking for a way out. They gobbled in alarm every time anyone

– the children, Flora or either of the two dogs (Buster, the Silver Street guard dog and Flinty, Flora's chicken-herding sheepdog) – passed their pen, and ran about with their wattles wiggling like strings of red jelly.

The turkeys' nervousness was starting to rub off on Bobo and Bitzi, the Silver Street sheep, in the next-door enclosure. Or rather, it was rubbing off on Bobo. (Nothing much at all rubbed off on Bitzi, who only really noticed two things: food, and what Bobo was doing.)

Every time the turkeys gobbled or paced anxiously, Bobo headed for the far end of her pen. And, because Bobo did, so did Bitzi. Pretty soon, they'd grazed almost all the grass and stray brambles that had covered the fence at that end. Which was how, on the day the children were merrily pitch-forking chicken

poo, Bobo and Bitzi nibbled through the last few bramble leaves covering the corner of their pen and found … nothing at all. No wire, no fence posts, just a gap.

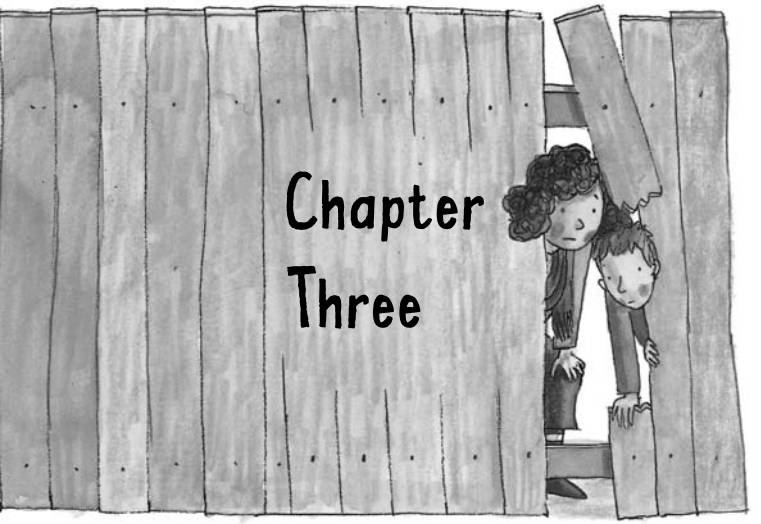
Bobo stood and stared at the gap. It was scary and tempting at the same time. She turned her back and walked away, but the hole seemed to call to her. She soon found herself back beside it, staring through to the other side.

It was at that very moment that a large rat crossed the turkey pen, just as Buster was walking past on his way to look for biscuit crumbs in Flora's van. Buster was big and fierce-looking, but, in spite of his appearance and his previous job as a guard dog, he was a big softie. Except, that was, when it came to rats. *Especially* rats that swaggered as if they owned the place.

Grrrrrr! Buster flung himself at the fence, barking as loudly as he could. Rats, of course have a deep understanding of fences and know exactly when they are on the safe side of them. So the rat took no notice of Buster's woofs and snarls. The turkeys, however, already nervous for mysterious reasons of their own, had hysterics.

The nasty noise and commotion was all Bobo needed to overcome her fear of the unknown. She pushed her nose through the gap in the fence and pulled her fat, woolly bottom after it. Bitzi followed along dreamily with a bit of leaf sticking out of her mouth. They tip-tapped over the little metal footbridge to the other side of the canal and disappeared through a storm of old newspapers and carrier bags, which were suddenly caught up in the

wind like confetti. Behind them, the barking and gobbling suddenly stopped. With a lot of panicky flapping and a big gust of wind, the turkeys made it up, up, up and over the fence at the bottom of their pen and immediately down, down, down on the other side, and straight into the canal. The rat, no doubt pleased with the chaos it had caused, went back down its hole and Buster trotted off, suddenly remembering the importance of biscuit crumbs.



Chapter Three

It was easy to see how the sheep had got out – Karl and Flora found the gap in the fence at once. But when they searched along the canal bank, there was no sign of them.

"Could Flinty sniff them out?" Karl asked. "I mean, she *is* a sheepdog."

"She's *supposed* to be a sheepdog," Flora explained patiently, "but she's terrified of sheep. She's probably delighted that they're gone."

Hearing her name mentioned, Flinty

wagged her tail and sniffed at the gap approvingly, as if to say "Nasty sheeps, good riddance!"

"They could be miles away by now," Flora sighed and shook her head. "If they get onto a road, I dread to think what might happen."

Karl had never seen Flora so worried. He couldn't think what to say. Then he had an idea. "Could *Kenny* sniff them out?"

"That," said Flora, "is the craziest idea I've heard in long while… And it might just work. Although, he is a wee bit on the feisty side…"

Kenny glared at Karl and Flora from the far end of his stall. He stamped his hooves and lowered his head, so that his beautiful, curving horns were ready to charge. Karl decided that the only way the ram could look more impressive

and scary was if he actually had fire coming out of his nostrils.

"The good thing about horns," said Flora quietly, "is that that they make good handles." Then she shook a bucket and the sheep food pellets rattled in the bottom.

Kenny raised his head and sniffed the air. He stopped stamping and walked daintily across the stall to bury his big head in the bucket and munch noisily.

"That's a good lad," said Flora. "OK, Karl. Now!" Gently but very firmly, they each took hold of one of Kenny's horns. The ram struggled furiously, making Karl's arm muscles scream for mercy. Then, after a few seconds, Kenny stood quite still and let Flora slip the halter over his head and secure it around his nose.

"There you go!" Flora said. "He's been in

that many farm shows, he knows the routine of being on a halter and led about. He'll give us no more trouble now."

Kenny seemed pleased to be outside. He sniffed the wind and immediately set off down the ramp that led from the station platform to the sheep pen on the old railway tracks. Karl and Flora didn't even have to guide the ram to the gap in the fence – he went straight to it, sniffed it carefully, then pushed through. He set off down the towpath and over the footbridge so fast that Karl and Flora had trouble keeping up.

"We'll find them in no time!" panted Karl.

"I just hope they're not in any trouble," said Flora grimly. "We could do without bad publicity for the Grand Opening."