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Opening extract from

Spring Fever at Silver Street Farm

Written by

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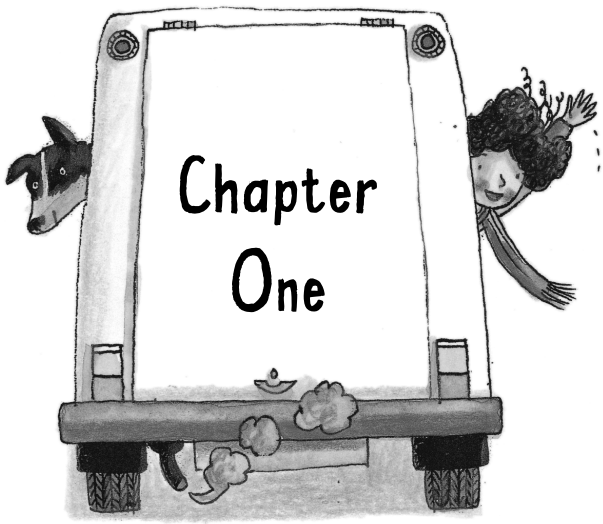
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Flora, the manager of Silver Street Farm, knew she had to leave; her father had broken his leg and needed her help back on their family farm. But actually leaving the city farm was *very* hard. She had been sitting half in and half out of her van for ten minutes now.

"Och, dear!" she exclaimed, her Scots accent even stronger than usual. "Are you *sure* you'll be OK?"

Meera, Karl and Gemma, the three children who had started Silver Street Farm, tried to reassure her.

"We'll be fine!" said Meera, doing her best to sound as convincing as possible.

"We've got Squirt and Bish Bosh to help," said Gemma.

"I will be here, also," added Karl's Auntie Nat in her strong Russian accent. She had rushed to Silver Street to be the "supervising adult" so Flora could leave.

"It's only for a few days, isn't it?" said Gemma, managing to keep the worry out of her voice.

"Oh, yes!" said Flora. "Just until my brother gets home at the weekend. But it's such bad timing…"

"No, it's *good* timing…" said Karl, doing

the best job of all of them at sounding calm. "It's half-term this week, so we can *all* be here, *all* of the time."

"But I'll miss the Lonchester Cheese Show tomorrow!" Flora complained.

"Don't worry about that, Flora. You've left me instructions about what to do," said Meera, hoping she sounded confident.

Flora was still looking worried.

"But all the animals!" she said anxiously. "They're about to give birth any day now and I haven't finished making new homes for them all!"

"But you're always saying how you can never be absolutely sure when babies will be born," Karl reassured her.

"And they all might be late!" Meera chipped in.



"*We* can finish making new pens for the mums and babies," said Gemma, as brightly as possible.

Flora smiled back at last. "You'll be fine, won't you?" she said.

The children nodded and exchanged a quick phew-we've-convinced-her look.

"Right, then," said Flora, putting both feet in the van for the first time. "The sooner I go, the sooner I'll be back. Where's that dog of mine? Flinty! *Flinty!*"

Flinty the sheepdog came waddling across the yard and clambered over Flora's lap to take her place in the passenger seat.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Flora. "She's getting heavy! Diet for you when we get back, my girl!"

Flora slammed the van door shut and started the engine.

"I don't know why I'm worrying," she said through the window. "This is your farm, after all. See you at the weekend!"

Shading their eyes against the bright spring sunshine, Auntie Nat and the children smiled and waved as Flora pulled away and disappeared into the traffic at the end of the road.

Then Auntie Nat turned to the children with her hands on her hips. "Now you tell me truths," she said. "You *really* think we'll be fine?"

"Well…" said Gemma, "Bish Bosh has been grounded and Squirt's got such a crush on Meera that he can't do anything but wander around after her like a shadow."

"Yeah," said Meera, shaking her head in disapproval. "And the only grown-up who's free this week is you, Auntie Nat."



"But the *really* bad news is that I don't think the piglets are going to be at all late," said Karl. "In fact, I'm pretty sure that at least one litter will be born today."

There was a short pause when no one said a thing. Then Auntie Nat spoke. "OK," she said. "You go look at pigs. I make tea. Also biscuits."



Chapter Two

Mrs Fattybot, one of Silver Street's two Gloucester Old Spot sows, was feeling most peculiar. All morning, she'd been gathering mouthfuls of straw into a big pile, while her tummy was jumping about in a very uncomfortable way. It was all most upsetting. In fact, it was *so* upsetting that, at the exact moment the children opened the gate of her little yard, Mrs Fattybot suddenly felt that she couldn't tolerate her sty for another moment. She shot through the open gate like a fat, spotted missile, knocking the children to one side.

Leaving her sty behind made Mrs Fattybot feel much calmer. She stopped and looked around her. On one side were the old station waiting rooms, where the goats and sheep lived and the hay was stored. On the other was the building that had once been the ticket office and was now the Silver Street Farm office. In between was the yard, which was paved with bricks and dotted with bantam hens. The little turquoise caravan that was Flora's home stood at the far end.

It was a familiar scene that Mrs Fattybot had seen through the bars of the pigsty gate every day since coming to live at Silver Street Farm. But standing in the middle of it suddenly made her feel very nervous. There was so much space all around her and so much sky above her. She turned a little, thinking that

perhaps her sty wasn't so bad after all, and saw the three children walking towards her in a rather unfriendly way. If Mrs Fattybot had been human, she would have burst into tears, but, as she was a pig, she ran. Her ears flapped like pink napkins and her tummy wobbled like a giant strawberry blancmange. She sped to the caravan and scrambled in through the open door.

It was cool and shady inside and, once she had pushed through the cramped kitchen and into the living room, there was plenty of floor space. Mrs Fattybot turned around a few times, snuffling approvingly at the rug under her feet. Suddenly, she felt quite at home. There were plenty of things to make a bed with, all much nicer than prickly straw. Mrs Fattybot took several big mouthfuls of clothes and



cushions, pushed them into a comfy mound on the floor and lay down with a contented sigh.

The children watched with a mixture of horror and fascination through the gaps in the caravan's curtains as Mrs Fattybot set about wrecking Flora's caravan.

"We have to get her out of there!" said Meera.

"We can't," said Karl. "She could farrow at any moment…"

"She could *what*?" said Meera.

"Farrow – that means have her babies," Karl explained. "When sows start acting like this – wanting to be on their own and making a nest – it means that they are about to give birth to their piglets."

"But we can't let her have babies in Flora's lounge!" Meera almost squealed.

