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Opening extract from

Welcome to Silver Street Farm

Written by

Nicola Davies

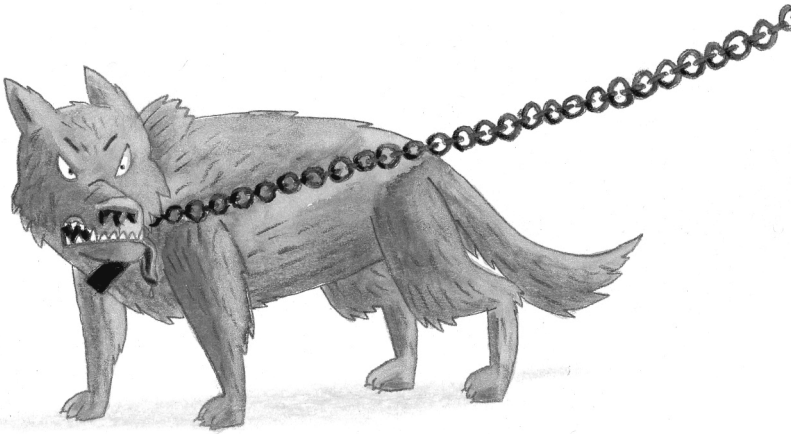
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Chapter Four

The old station was most definitely *not* open to visitors: the huge wrought-iron gates were closed with a giant chain and padlock and covered in signs that shouted fiercely, "No Entry!" and "Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted!" and, most worrying of all, "Danger! Guard Dogs Patrolling at All Times".

"We can't go in there!" said Karl.

"Yes, we can!" said Meera.



"What about the guard dogs?" asked Gemma.

"Oh, that's just for show," said Meera, waving her hands dismissively.

Karl, who was still small for his age, looked up at the gate.

"How will we get in?"

"Climb, of course. Durr!" said Meera.

Gemma laughed. "But you're rubbish at climbing, Meera!"

"That's where you come in, Daddy-Long-Legs. Get up there, Gemma!"

Gemma *was* the best climber of the three of them and she could never resist a challenge.

"OK. I'll get on top of the gate, then I'll help you guys up," she said, "and if we get put in jail, at least I won't have to spend all the holidays with my brother."

Once they were on top of the gates, it was easy to slide down the other side and start to explore. There were several old brick buildings, some with faded signs still hanging above them: "Ticket Office", "Waiting Room" and "Station Master's Office". The windows were broken and there was ivy growing up the walls, but the roofs still looked solid and weatherproof. The space around the buildings was big, about half the size of the school footy pitch, Karl guessed. It was completely overgrown, but where brambles and nettles would grow, so would grass for animals to graze. As the children wandered about, the dreams they'd had since the first day of Infant School finally seemed within their reach.

They pushed through the jungle of plants and at last reached the side of the canal, where



they sat down with their legs dangling over the wall.

"It's brilliant!" said Gemma. "I think there could be enough grazing in summer for a couple of sheep."

"The ticket office would make a great cowshed," said Karl.

"We could have ducks on the canal," said Gemma, "once we've got the shopping trolley out, of course."

That was when they heard the growl and turned round to see a huge black dog with a row of very big teeth showing in an extremely fierce snarl.

"Just for show, eh?" said Gemma.

"Nice doggy, nice, nice, *nice* doggy," breathed Meera.

The "doggy" wasn't impressed; he snarled

and growled some more and began to close in.

"We'll have to jump in the canal if he gets any closer," said Gemma.

"We'll be stabbed by a rusty shopping trolley!" squealed Meera.

"Meera, quick!" said Karl. "Give me the jelly babies!"

Two minutes later, the "fierce" guard dog was wagging his tail and begging for another sweet. Karl scratched him behind the ears.

"There's a good boy," said Karl.

The dog whined and offered his paw.

"I think he's lonely," said Gemma.

"He won't be lonely when he's the Silver Street Farm Dog!" said Meera as she patted the dog's huge head.

"The *what* farm dog?" Gemma and Karl said together.



"Oh, I forgot to tell you! I found this nailed to the back of an old bench. It's the station name." Meera reached into her backpack and pulled out an enamel sign that said "Silver Street" in black letters. "It's perfect for our farm."

"Silver Street Farm," said Karl. "Yeah, I like it."

"Silver Street sounds a bit like a shopping centre to me," Gemma grinned. "But it's OK."

They fought their way back through the bramble jungle and climbed out over the gate. The dog stuck his nose through the bars and they fed him one last green jelly baby. He wagged his tail at them as they walked away.

"I think he knows we're coming back!" said Gemma.



Chapter Five

As soon as Karl opened the door to the flat, he knew something was wrong. There was a horrible smell for a start and he could hear his auntie talking crossly in Russian in the sitting room. Then he noticed the newspapers spread all over the floor, decorated with little brown currants and round damp patches. He didn't have to wonder what had been pooing and weeing all over his home for long though, because just as he closed the front door behind him, two fluffy little lambs ran into the hall.

"Baaa!" said the lambs. "*Baaaaaaaaaaa!*"

Auntie Nat was following close behind, bending over the lambs and offering them food from a bowl with "DOG" written on the side.

"Ah, Karl!" Auntie Nat looked at him with a big smile. "At last, I have poodles. Puppies. Bargain from Internet."

"Baaaaaa!" said the "puppies" together, more loudly than ever.

"This one," said Auntie Nat pointing to the larger lamb, "is Bitzi and the other one, little one, is Bobo."

Karl nodded. He didn't know what to say. Auntie Nat waved the dog bowl around.

"I get puppy food," she said, "but they don't like." Auntie Nat's beaming smile faded. "If they don't eat, they die," she said. Suddenly she looked almost as forlorn as the lambs.

"Don't worry, auntie," said Karl, finding his voice at last, "I'll sort them out."

The baby bottles were the easy part. Mr Khan's corner shop had them hanging up behind the counter, next to the aspirins and plasters. Karl bought two. But what to put *in* the bottles was much more tricky.

He spent ages looking at the cartons of milk in the cooler. There was "skimmed", "semi-skimmed", "organic" – but none of them were "sheep's". He peered into the deep-freeze, but saw nothing that seemed to have anything to do with sheep, apart from a packet of frozen lamb chops.

When he got to the checkout, one of Mr Khan's nephews was on the till.

"Excuse me," said Karl. "Do you have any other sorts of milk?"



"What?" said the young man, scowling.

"Milk from – um – other animals."

"What d'you mean, *other animals*?" the boy said, scowling even more. "You taking the mickey?"

Just as Karl was wishing that the floor would swallow him up, Mr Khan himself appeared.

"Ah!" he said kindly, sweeping his grumpy nephew to one side. "Karl! How is your aunt?"

"She's well, thanks, Mr Khan."

"And you were looking for?"

Karl was aware that now everyone in the queue was listening to him.

"Sheep's milk, Mr Khan," Karl said in a very small voice, expecting the shopkeeper to burst into laughter or throw him out for cheek.

"Sheep's milk. Yes," said Mr Khan, as if it

