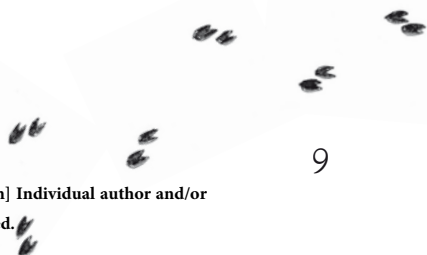


*"Crash!"*

*"Scrunch!"*

*"Bash!"*

Kenelottle Mossworthy Merridale of Morrayside, Kenny for short, was *not* a happy ram. In fact, he'd been in a bad mood ever since he'd arrived at Silver Street Farm earlier



in the day. Now the sheep was headbutting the door of his stall. In spite of the roar of the winter gale, the sound travelled all the way to the signal-box-turned-chicken-house, where Meera, Karl and Gemma – the three friends who had founded the city farm – were shovelling chicken poo. Meera, who was strong and round, and Gemma, who was a bendy beanpole of a person, did the shovelling, while Karl, who was small and skinny, held a big sack open to catch the mixture of straw and poo. It was hard work – not to mention a bit smelly – and the children were glad to stop for a minute to listen to Kenny’s temper tantrum.

“Now I know what a ‘headbanger’ really is!” said Meera.

“Won’t he hurt himself?” asked Karl.

“No,” said Gemma, the sheep expert

amongst them. “Their heads are like crash helmets. He’ll settle down when he meets his wives later today.”

Kenelottle Mossworthy Merridale of Morrayside’s “wives” were Bobo and Bitzi, the Silver Street sheep. They had been sold to Karl’s Auntie Nat as poodle puppies when they were lambs and had turned out to be pedigree Shetland sheep, who deserved a pedigree Shetland sheep husband: Kenny.

Meera plonked another dollop of poo-soaked straw into the sack. “Come on, guys,” she said. “We’d better get this finished. There’s a lot to do before tomorrow.”

Meera was right. The next day was Christmas Eve and Silver Street had to be ready for its Grand Opening. For the first time, the citizens of Lonchester would be able to visit

their very own city farm. There were sheds to paint and repair, and paths to clear, as well as all the day-to-day work like goat-milking, sheep-feeding, egg-collecting and poo-clearing. But the children weren't daunted. They loved every minute of it (even the poo-clearing). Silver Street Farm was their dream come true.

"Sometimes," said Gemma, heaving another smelly spadeful. "I have to pinch myself so that I know I'm not dreaming."

"I know just what you mean," said Meera. "We spent so long *imagining* a farm like this, and now it's *real*."

"And when you think how it all started..." Karl laughed.

"Poodles that were sheep..." said Meera.

"Rotten eggs that hatched into ducklings..." said Gemma.

“The nicest policeman in the world...”  
said Karl.

“...and Flora!” they all said together.

Of all the lucky and amazing things that had helped them make their dreams of a farm in the city come true, the *most* lucky and amazing was Flora MacDonald. Flora, a young farmer from Scotland, had arrived out of the blue and offered to run Silver Street Farm. Flora’s experience and hard work had turned a handful of animals and a ruined railway station into a farm. She *was* a bit bossy sometimes, but she never forgot that Silver Street Farm was the *children’s* idea – *their* dream.

“We’ve only got till tomorrow to get her a Christmas present.” said Karl.

“Yeah,” said Gemma. “But what? Can’t see her going for scented soap and talc!”

Meera smiled a knowing smile at her two friends.

“I’ve got an idea for Flora’s present already,” she said. “And it’s a very, *very* good one. All we need to do is—”

But Meera didn’t get the chance to say more, because Flora herself bounded up the wooden stairs to the chicken house, curly hair blowing in the wind and blue eyes blazing brightly.

“Action stations, you three!” she called, in her broad Scots accent. “Bitzi and Bobo are missing and the turkeys have disappeared too!”