



It was one of those days – the sort of day when everything seems to go wrong. The sort of day when cups tip over, string tangles and you can only find one sock.

At Silver Street City Farm, Sputnik, the stupidest of Bobo's lambs, had pushed his way out of his pen five times in an hour; the pigs had escaped and knocked over the churn of goats'

milk and the chickens had got into the office again, and pooped all over the computer.

Meera, Karl and Gemma, the three children who had started Silver Street Farm were racing about, trying to sort out the mishaps, while Flora MacDonald the farm manager rounded up the chickens with the help of her dog Flinty. Just when everyone thought they were getting on top of the chaos, somebody (they never saw who) had left a pet carrier full of guinea pigs in the turkey pen, giving the jittery birds hysterics.

Of course, the Sunday visitors had no idea anything was wrong. They wandered about in the autumn sunshine, watching the goats jumping on the hay bales and the ducks paddling about on the canal; they scratched the backs of the pigs and petted the farm dogs –

Flinty, Buster and Misty. They sat around licking Silver Street ice creams, cakes and biscuits served by Karl's Auntie Nat. And at the end of the afternoon, they all went home with big smiles on their faces, leaving Flora, the children and Auntie Nat to collapse, exhausted, on the old sofas in the farm office, with the dogs at their feet.

For a while, the only sound was the sipping of tea and the crunch of biscuits, but at last Flora gave a big sigh. "The thing is," she said in her broad Scots accent, "we're bursting at the seams."

The children knew that Flora wasn't talking about the effects of Auntie Nat's baking. Silver Street Farm had had a *very* good year. Rather *too* good: so many babies had been born that all the pens and enclosures were

quite overcrowded. To add to the problem, visitors had taken to leaving unwanted rabbits and guinea pigs behind; the new arrivals in the turkey pen were not the first.

“It’s bad enough finding space for our own animals,” Flora grumbled, “without all of Lonchester dumping their unwanted pets on us.” She shooed two white rabbits away from her feet and they loped off behind the sofa.

“Not to worry, Flora,” said Auntie Nat, shrugging in a particularly Russian sort of way. “Solution is easy. We sell all dumped pets, and some farm animals.”

The children exchanged horrified looks. They had worked so hard to get Silver Street started that they couldn’t bear the thought of getting rid of *any* animals, even ones that had arrived by mistake!

Right on cue, one of the “dumped pets”, a handsomely patterned tortoise, stumped its way across the wooden floor, its feet making little scrapes and thumps as if to protest against Auntie Nat’s suggestion.

“You don’t want to be sold, do you Rocky?” said Meera to the tortoise.

But Rocky wasn’t interested in Meera. He had eyes only for Auntie Nat, and stared at her adoringly.

“Phhh!” said Auntie Nat. “Stupid reptile. What for you look at me?” And she flapped her hand dismissively in Rocky’s direction.

The children weren’t fooled. They had all seen Auntie Nat scratching Rocky under his wrinkly chin when she thought no one was looking.

“If we sold the rabbits and guinea pigs,”

said Karl innocently, “we’d have to sell Rocky too, Auntie. It’s only fair.”

“Foolish boy!” Auntie Nat snapped. “Who would want worn out old turtle?”

“I think Rocky is the least of our problems,” said Flora. “Auntie Nat’s right. Without more space, a lot of animals will have to go.”

Karl and Gemma groaned, but Meera had a gleam in her eye that told everyone she’d had “one of her ideas”.

“There *is* another solution,” Meera said. “We could take over the scrapyards next door. No one ever uses it any more.”

Meera’s ideas were sometimes a bit mad, but this seemed pretty sensible to the other children.

“Yes,” said Karl, catching Meera’s enthusiasm, “if we moved all the old cars and stuff, there’d be plenty of room.”

“We could have a pets’ corner!” exclaimed Gemma delightedly.

But Flora wasn’t smiling. “We can’t just take it over!” she said, shaking her curls in agitation. “It doesn’t belong to us.”

“But Silver Street Station didn’t belong to us either,” said Meera, “and we kind of took it over to make the farm.”

“Do you *know* who owns the scrapyard?” Flora asked. “It’s Mike Steely, only the richest businessman in Lonchester. He’s so secretive, no one even knows where he *lives*. There’s no way he’d let us have the scrapyard, even if we could find him to ask. It’s just an impossible dream—”

Flora was interrupted by squeals and grunts coming from outside the office door.

“Oh no! The pigs have got out again...” said Karl wearily.

As they all ran out to round up the Gloucester Old Spot sow, Mrs Fattybot, and her piglets, Flora noticed that the gleam in Meera's eyes was brighter still. Words like "no" and "impossible" only made Meera more determined.