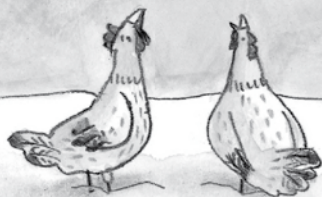
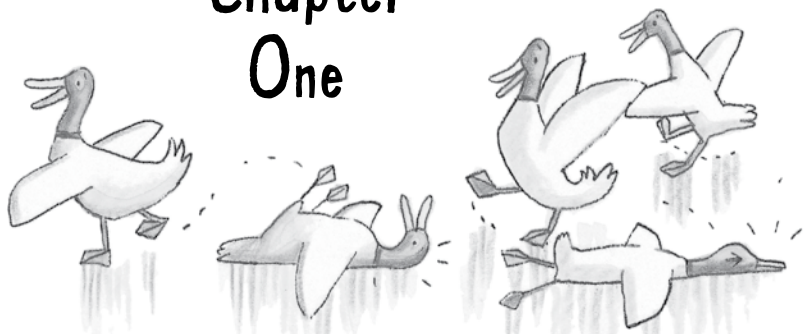


Frozen Solid at SILVER STREET FARM



Chapter One



The Silver Street ducks couldn't understand it. Overnight the water in the canal had gone hard. So instead of jumping off their little jetty and paddling about, they slid and slipped, their webbed feet skidding from under them, sending them sprawling on their tummies or head first onto their beaks.

Meera, Karl and Gemma, the three children who had started Silver Street City Farm, couldn't help giggling as they watched



the ducks skating and tobogganing on the frozen surface.

“I know I shouldn’t really laugh at them,” said Gemma, throwing another scoop of food onto the ice for the ducks, “but they look so funny...”

Chinook the Canada goose and her little flock of friends noticed it was feeding time. They skidded over to where the ducks were gobbling up the grain, and landed in a tangle of long necks and wings.

When the children had recovered from another fit of the giggles, Karl poked the ice with a stick. “Do you think it’s thick enough to stand on?” he wondered.

“Only if you’re a duck!” teased Meera.

“This is Lonchester, Karl,” Gemma laughed. “Not the Arctic!”

The girls walked off to do other chores, but Karl hung back, looking dreamily at the frozen canal. He longed to go skating outdoors, the way his Auntie Nat had when she was a little girl in Russia. But Lonchester winters were never cold enough.

“It’ll probably melt by the afternoon,” Karl said gloomily to himself, and stomped off to join the girls.

But the ice didn’t melt. In fact it got colder and colder. By the third day of what the local papers had begun to call “The Big Freeze”, weather forecasters were saying it was the coldest snap that Lonchester had ever known. The Christmas holidays were extended as many schools had frozen pipes. Children all over the city celebrated and looked up into the clear skies



hoping for snow to follow the ice. Grown-ups all over the city looked down, so as not to slip on the ice slides that the children had made.

By the tenth day of the freeze, slowly but surely Lonchester began to shut down. The roads were too icy for driving and the pavements too slippery for walking. Lorries could not deliver to shops and the supermarket shelves started to empty. The big power station that made all of Lonchester's electricity stuttered like a failing light bulb, so that there were power cuts at all hours of the day and night.

Flora, the Silver Street farm manager, bought a digital thermometer to measure just how cold it was getting on the farm. Every day it showed a lower temperature.

"Minus fifteen degrees last night!" Flora

announced one morning when the children arrived at the farm to help. Karl found himself thinking surely *that* must have made the ice thick enough to skate on. But there was no time to find out. It had become so cold that simply getting clean water to all the Silver Street animals was a struggle, because it turned to ice in minutes. Warm water had to be delivered to all the pens twice or even three times a day so the animals had a chance to drink before it froze, and they all seemed to be eating twice as much, just to stay warm! Karl, Meera and Gemma, together with their friends Bish Bosh and his little brother Squirt (home from Hollywood where he had been starring in a film), were kept very, very busy. And very, very happy, as spending extra time at Silver Street was all they ever wanted to do.

The Big Freeze felt like a Big Adventure to the children. Silver Street Farm looked like a magical kingdom, sparkling with frost and decorated with icicles, and it seemed that the cold was making magical things happen too. Late one afternoon Flora called everyone to the farmyard, where hundreds of small, wild birds were hopping about, collecting bits of fallen animal food. The birds took no notice of humans walking among them. They even pecked food from the children's hands.

"They're as tame as budgies!" Bish Bosh exclaimed as a robin sat on his palm.

"They're so cold and hungry they can't be bothered to be scared any more," said Meera.

The children couldn't help smiling as birds fluttered around, perching fearlessly on their heads and shoulders.

But Auntie Nat wasn't smiling. "Hmmm," she said. "I see wild birds tame in winter like this before. Long ago in Russia. It is not a good sign." She shook her head inside her big furry hat, and wagged her woolly gloved fingers in warning, but no one took any notice.