



Gemma says that it started with eating jelly beans on the merry-go-round in the park. Karl says no, it started with Auntie Nat's poodles. But Meera knows that the *real* beginning of Silver Street Farm was their very first day of kindergarten in Mrs. Monty's class.

On that first day of school, the only children who weren't screaming, crying, or having a nosebleed were a tall girl with red braids, a quiet, skinny boy with dark hair, and Meera.



Mrs. Monty led them to the play area in the corner of the classroom.

“Could you three play nicely with the toy town,” she said, “while I sort everything else out? There are some farm animals, too, in that red box.”

Meera was lifting the lid off the red box almost before Mrs. Monty had finished speaking; but she wasn't alone. The two other children were right beside her. Just like her, they weren't in the least bit interested in the fancy toy town laid out all around them. It was the farm animals they wanted to play with.

“I'm Meera,” said Meera, smiling shyly.

“I'm Gemma,” said the tall girl with red braids.

“I'm Karl,” said the skinny boy very quietly.

“Do you want to play farm?”

For the rest of the day, while Mrs. Monty wrestled with classroom chaos, the three new best friends built their first farm together. They got out all the animals, even the two cows with legs missing, the headless sheep, and the chickens that had been painted pink. They made stables, stalls, and sties from old cereal boxes and new fences from lollipop sticks and yellow yarn. Very soon, fields and farm buildings, flocks of sheep, and herds of cows and pigs had sprung up among the buildings and roads of the toy town.

The three children worked well together. Gemma liked the sheep and the chickens best; Karl didn't say much, but you could tell he liked the cows and the horses. Meera was always having ideas about what to do next, but Gemma and Karl didn't mind because

she wasn't *really* bossy and she had found the missing piglets at the bottom of the LEGO box.

When Mrs. Monty asked them to put the farm away because it was time to go home, the children were horrified.

"But I have to milk the cows in the morning," said Karl.

"And the sheep can't graze if they're in a *box*," said Gemma.

"But tomorrow the other children will want to play with the toy town," said Mrs. Monty gently.

"They can play with the town *and* the farm together!" said Gemma.

"You see," Meera explained kindly, "it's a *city* farm. It fits in the city, just like the farm *we're* all going to have when we're older."

From that moment on, Meera, Gemma,

and Karl planned their real city farm. They read books about farm animals, and they went on every school trip and family outing they could to real farms to see and learn about real animals. All through kindergarten and right through to the last year of elementary school, the three friends planned—but still their city farm was just a dream. Until, that is, the day of the green jelly beans and Auntie Nat's poodles.