

A Reindeer Called Joy



HELEN PETERS

illustrated by
ELLIE SNOWDON

**nosy
crow**

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For Dorothea H. P.



For my mum x E. S.

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Chapter One

Reindeer Are Amazing

“I can’t believe you’re forcing me to waste a whole Saturday going shopping,” Jasmine grumbled to her mum as they drove away from Oak Tree Farm.

“It’s only the morning,” said Nadia. “And it’s not shopping, it’s a Christmas market.”

“Which is basically shopping.” Jasmine gazed longingly out of the car window at the frosty fields glittering in the sunshine. “I was going to take Sky for a walk in the woods.”

“You can do that this afternoon,” Mum said.



“Cheer up, Jasmine. You might actually enjoy it.”

“I won’t.”

Nadia sighed. “Well, it was Tom’s mum’s idea, and I’d have felt rude saying no. I’m sure you and Tom will have a nice time.”

Tom was Jasmine’s best friend. He and Jasmine were planning to have an animal rescue centre when they grew up. They had rescued lots of animals already. Some had been released back into the wild and some had gone to new homes, but Jasmine had been allowed to keep several of the rescued animals on the farm. She also had two cats, Toffee and Marmite.

“Will there at least be food there?” Jasmine asked. “I’m starving.”

Mum laughed. “You’ve literally just had breakfast. But I’ll get you a hot chocolate and something to eat, OK?”

“Thank you,” said Jasmine, immediately feeling more cheerful.

The market did look very festive. The little



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wooden cabins were decorated with holly and ivy, fairy lights and garlands. Tom and his mum, Mel, were standing by a cabin selling hot chocolate and gingerbread. Tom spotted Jasmine and ran towards her, beaming.

“Look!” he said, pointing.

Jasmine squealed in delight as she saw a large pen in the corner of the square.

“Reindeer!”

She stared in wonder at the two magnificent reindeer looking over the white picket fence.

“They’re so beautiful! I’ve never seen one in real life.”

They hurried towards the pen. Several people stood by the fence, feeding raisins to the deer. A curly-haired woman in a reindeer jumper and a furry antler headband was handing out the raisins. Inside the pen stood a younger woman wearing a red fleece and a name badge saying ‘Charlotte’. She was talking to a family who were feeding the reindeer.



Peeping through the crowds, Jasmine and Tom gazed admiringly at the animals. They were even lovelier in real life than Jasmine could have imagined.

“They’ve got such kind eyes,” said Tom. “And their antlers are incredible.”

“Their faces are more like cows’ than other deer, aren’t they?” Jasmine said. “And they’re so much bigger than Dotty.”

Dotty was an orphaned roe deer that Jasmine had hand-reared. She only had three legs, so she couldn’t be released into the wild. She lived in the farm orchard with Jasmine’s pet pig, Truffle, and her donkey, Mistletoe.

The family moved away, and Jasmine pulled Tom closer to the reindeer. Then she spotted something that made her gasp with excitement.

“Look!” she exclaimed. “There’s a baby!”

“Oh, it’s gorgeous!” said Tom.

The little reindeer had bright-blue eyes fringed with dark lashes, and a pale-brown





coat, with darker patches around its eyes and its furry nose. Its wide hooves were covered in dark-brown fur, and on its back was a strip of almost black fur. There were little furry antler buds on its head.

Charlotte smiled at the children, and Jasmine asked, “What are their names?”

“These two are Reuben and Rosebud,” said Charlotte, pointing to the tall reindeer with pale, smooth antlers and the smaller one with dark, velvety antlers. “And the calf is called Joy.”

“Are they all one family?” Tom asked.

“No, Joy’s mum sadly died just after she was born, so we’re hand-rearing her. She was born in the autumn, which is very unusual. Most reindeer calves are born in May and June, when the weather’s good and there’s plenty of grass and leaves for them to eat. But Joy was a surprise late baby. We were hand-rearing an orphaned fallow deer fawn at the same time, so she’s had a companion. And she likes human



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company, don't you, Joy?"

As if in response, the little deer lifted her head and made a funny honking sound, somewhere between a grunt and a quack. Jasmine and Tom laughed in surprise.

Charlotte smiled at them. "Isn't that the sweetest sound?"

Joy laid her head against Charlotte's coat. "She's quite mischievous," Charlotte said, stroking her flank. "She spends most of the day with the herd, but she used to come into the house for feeds when she was tiny, and she sneaks back in sometimes and grunts until we feed her. I found her curled up in the dog's bed the other day."

"That's so cute!" said Jasmine. "How old is she?"

"Two months," said Charlotte. "This is her first outing."

"She's amazing," said Jasmine, stroking the calf's soft fur and admiring her lovely eyes.



“Would you like to feed them?” asked the woman in the reindeer jumper, holding out a plastic tub of raisins. She wore a name badge that said ‘Amy’.

“Thank you,” they said, and took a handful each. Jasmine put a few on her open palm and offered them to the calf, while Tom gave his to Reuben and Rosebud. Joy nuzzled Jasmine’s hand, hoping for more.

Jasmine gave her some, and then she stroked her back softly while the calf sniffed at her coat.

“Do they mind being in a busy place with people all around them?” Tom asked.

“No, they’re always excited to get in the trailer and go somewhere new,” Amy said. “But they get a bit bored after a while, once they’ve



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eaten all the treats. So we only take them out for a couple of hours.”

Jasmine said, “I’ve heard that some reindeer in this country aren’t well looked after.”

“Yes, there have been cases of people not looking after them properly,” Charlotte replied. “The problem is that in the UK they’re classed as kept animals, not farm animals. Farms are inspected regularly to make sure farmers are keeping to the animal welfare rules, but because reindeer aren’t classed as farm animals, they’re not subject to the same rules.”

A woman nearby said, “Isn’t it cruel to keep them in captivity? Wouldn’t they be happier in the wild?”

“Actually, no reindeer are really wild,” said Charlotte. “Even at the North Pole, where they have thousands of acres to roam in, someone always owns them. Some scientists think reindeer were one of the first animals to be domesticated. They’re comfortable around



people because they've been kept by humans for nearly two thousand years."

"Wow," said Jasmine, stroking Joy and tipping more raisins into her palm. "I didn't know that."

"Also, the average lifespan of a male reindeer in its natural habitat in Scandinavia is four and a half years," Charlotte said. "But our oldest reindeer is over twenty."

"How come there's such a difference?" a man asked.

"Well, our reindeer get five-star treatment. Fresh straw every day, regular vet checks, a big shelter, and access to the field whenever they want it, as long as it's not too muddy. Half of all calves born in the Arctic may be killed by wolves, bears and lynx. And all those predators are protected species, but reindeer aren't protected."

Jasmine and Tom stayed at the pen all morning. When Nadia came to ask if they wanted hot chocolate, Jasmine said, "Can we



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get one later? I want to find out more about reindeer.”

“You must be an expert by now,” Nadia said. “You’ve been here for two hours.”

Jasmine was astonished. “Really? It feels like five minutes.”

Charlotte smiled at her. “We’re actually about to start packing up,” she said, indicating the livestock trailer next to the pen. Amy was lowering the ramp for the deer to walk into the trailer.

“It’s been lovely to meet you both,” Charlotte said. “I can tell you really care about animals.”

The children thanked her and followed Nadia to the hot-chocolate cabin.

“So you’re pleased you came now?” Nadia asked.

“It’s been the best day ever,” said Jasmine. “Reindeer are amazing. Did you know—”

But her words were drowned out by the deafening blast of a siren. Jasmine clamped



her hands over her ears as a police car, lights flashing, swept around the corner and down the road. As the noise faded and she uncovered her ears, she heard shouting and screaming from the other side of the square.

She turned round, just in time to see all three reindeer careering through the market square, leaping over a table and galloping up the crowded high street.

