

MEREVALE CREEK FARM

an imprint of Merevale Publishing



THE ROAD TO MEREVALE CREEK FARM

A bonus Zoe story

Book 1 of the Merevale Creek Farm series
Zoe and the Great Summer Jubilee

"True strength is gentle."

MEREVALE PUBLISHING · SOLIHULL

THE ROAD TO MEREVALE CREEK FARM

A bonus Zoe story



Every dog needs a place to belong.

This is the story of how Zoe found hers... before the Great Summer Jubilee, before Mable and Margot and George, before Merevale Creek Farm was home.

Zoe was a big dog. Bigger than most. She had a broad chest, strong paws, and a face that some people crossed the street to avoid. But inside, Zoe had the gentlest heart of any dog for miles around.

The trouble was, nobody ever seemed to notice the gentle heart. They only noticed the size.

She had wandered for a long time, sleeping under hedgerows and beside quiet barns, never quite welcome anywhere for long. At night, she would lie with her chin on her paws and wonder if there was a single place in the whole wide world where a dog like her might truly belong, not just be tolerated, but belong.

"Perhaps I'm simply too big for anyone's liking," she whispered to the darkening sky. "Perhaps that's just how it is."



One grey morning, Zoe found herself near a small country market, drawn by the smell of hay and warm bread. She kept to the edges, the way she always did, not wanting to frighten anyone.

That was where she met Mo.

He was an old goat with a long grey beard and the kind of unhurried patience that comes only with age. He was helping a stallholder untangle a length of rope that had knotted itself hopelessly around a crate, and he was making rather a slow job of it.

"You there," he called to Zoe, without even lifting his head. "Big paws, are they? Good. Hold this end steady for me, would you?"

Zoe blinked. Nobody had ever asked her to help with anything before. Carefully, gently, she pressed her paw down on the rope exactly where Mo pointed, and together they worked the knot loose.

"There," said Mo, sitting back with satisfaction. "Nicely done." Then he looked at her properly for the first time; not at her size, but at her eyes. "You've got a patient way about you, for such a large dog."

"Most people don't stay long enough to notice," Zoe said quietly.

Mo considered this for a moment, chewing thoughtfully the way goats do. "Then most people," he said, "haven't been paying attention."



They talked for a while longer, and Zoe found herself telling Mo things she hadn't told anyone, about the hedgerows, and the crossing-the-street people, and the wondering.

"I know a place," Mo said at last, "where kindness matters rather more than appearances. It's called Merevale Creek Farm."

"Would they want a dog like me?"

"They'll want a dog exactly like you," said Mo. "Come along. I'll walk you there myself."

So they set off together down the lane, and as they walked, Mo told Zoe about the farm and everyone in it.

"There's Mable," he said, "our cow, who chews everything over, hay and problems both, before she says a word. Sensible sort. And

Margot the Hen runs the whole place from a clipboard she carries everywhere, bless her. Terribly organised. Then there's George Rabbit, who startles at his own shadow, so do try to knock gently when you arrive."

Zoe listened to every word, turning each name over like a small treasure. Mable. Margot. George. She wondered what they'd make of her, whether her size would frighten George before he even had the chance to see her heart.

"What if they're afraid of me?" she asked, as the farm gate came into view at last.

Mo stopped and looked up at her kindly. "Then you'll simply have to be patient," he said, "the way you were with that rope. Kindness has a way of being noticed, Zoe, even by the nervous ones. Especially by the nervous ones."



The farmyard was quiet when they arrived, the last of the daylight settling gold over the barn roofs. Zoe hung back at the gate, suddenly unsure, watching a small brown rabbit dart behind a water trough at the sight of her.

She didn't push forward. She didn't even bark. She simply lay down at a respectful distance, rested her big head on her paws, and waited.

It was George, in the end, who noticed first, not because Zoe came closer, but because she didn't. He peeked out from behind the trough and saw a dog three times his size making herself as small and as patient as she possibly could, just so he wouldn't be afraid.

Slowly, George crept a little closer. Then a little closer still. And when the trough beside him wobbled, about to spill, it was Zoe who reached out, gently, so gently, and steadied it with one careful paw, before George even had to ask.

"Oh," said George, blinking. "Oh, thank you."

Mo, watching from the gate, said nothing at all. He didn't need to. He simply smiled the smile of someone who had known all along.



By the time the sun dipped fully behind the hills, word of the new dog with the gentle paws had travelled the length of the farmyard.

Mable ambled over to look Zoe up and down, chewing slowly, and pronounced her "sensible enough." Margot Hen bustled past twice with her clipboard, muttering something about updating the farm register, which everyone agreed was as warm a welcome as Margot ever gave anyone.



Mo settled himself beside Zoe as the first stars came out over Merevale Creek.

"You'll fit in here, Zoe," he said. "I think you'll help us all more than you know."

For the first time in a very long while, Zoe let herself believe it.

The next morning, Merevale Creek Farm awoke to excitement. The Great Summer Jubilee was only days away...

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