



With special thanks to Natalie Doherty

To Mum and Craig, Dad and Jackie x

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The Puzzled
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Chapter One

Summer at the Rescue Zoo!

Zoe Parker grinned as she ran out of the school gates, swinging her bag beside her. Her mom was waiting for her. “It’s summer vacation!” Zoe yelled, giving her mom a big hug.

Her mom smiled and ruffled her daughter’s wavy brown hair. “How was the last day of school?” she asked.



Zoe began to skip excitedly along the sidewalk. “It was fun, but I just couldn’t wait for vacation to start.” She smiled at her mom. “And I get to spend every single day at my favorite place.”

As they got closer to home Zoe heard noises ahead: roars, bellows, screeches, and squeaks. Animal noises!

Finally they turned a corner, and there in front of them stood a pair of tall, beautiful gates with a line of lush oak trees on either side. The gates were made of golden wood and covered with delicate carvings of every sort of animal you could think of. There were majestic tigers, soaring eagles, snapping crocodiles, and elegant gazelles. About halfway up, two words were carved across the gates in swirling letters: RESCUE ZOO. Right at the

top, a golden hot-air balloon twinkled in the sunlight.

A line of excited visitors was streaming through the gates, but Zoe and her mom walked right past them. As she stepped inside the zoo, a familiar warm, happy feeling spread through Zoe's stomach. "Home sweet home," she whispered.

Zoe and her mom weren't visiting the zoo — they *lived* there! Zoe's Great-Uncle Horace was a famous explorer and animal expert, and on his travels around the world he had met lots of animals in need of help. That was why he'd decided to build the zoo, so it could be a safe place for any creature who was lost, injured, or in trouble. Now it was home to hundreds of amazing animals!



Zoe's mom was Horace's niece and the zoo vet. She and Zoe lived in a little cottage on the edge of the zoo, so Zoe's mom could be there whenever the animals needed her. Zoe couldn't imagine a better place to live!

Beyond the gates, a redbrick path wound its way through the zoo. On a warm summer's day like this, there were hundreds of visitors, chattering as they



The Puzzled Penguin

wandered past each enclosure. Now that school had finished, lots of families were starting to arrive. Zoe spotted Jack and Nicola from her class, still in their green-and-white school uniforms. She smiled and waved at them, and they waved back.

“That’s Zoe, the girl I told you about,” she heard Jack telling his dad. “She lives here. It’s so cool!”





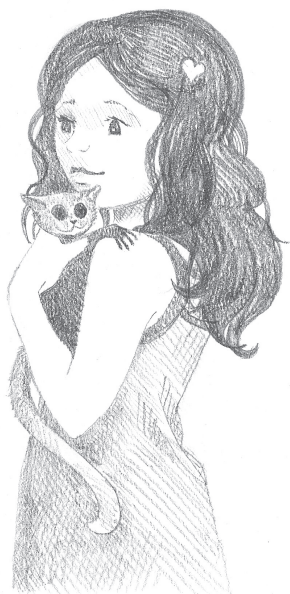
As Zoe and her mom made their way through the crowds to their cottage, Zoe heard an excited chattering noise above her. She looked up, shading her eyes from the bright sunlight. From the top of a sycamore tree, a furry face peeked down at her.

“Meep!” called Zoe, smiling. “Come down from there, you silly thing!”

With a swift leap, the little creature bounded down and landed nimbly on Zoe’s shoulder.

Zoe gathered the soft, warm bundle into her arms for a hug.

Meep was a tiny gray mouse lemur with enormous golden eyes and a long, velvety



tail. Great-Uncle Horace had rescued him when he was just a baby and had brought him to the Rescue Zoo. Now Meep lived in the cottage with Zoe and was her very best friend.

“Meep has been especially mischievous today,” Zoe’s mom told her as they continued along the path. “Mr. Pinch brought in a very tasty-looking blueberry muffin this morning for his breakfast. Then this week’s fruit delivery arrived, and he went to supervise it. When he came back, his muffin was gone. Mr. Pinch was *very* upset.” Zoe’s mom shook her head at the little lemur. “He didn’t know what had happened to it, but *I* noticed that Meep’s paws were covered in crumbs!”

Zoe couldn’t help laughing and hugged Meep closer. Mr. Pinch was the zoo



manager, and was *always* grumpy. Meep loved teasing him!

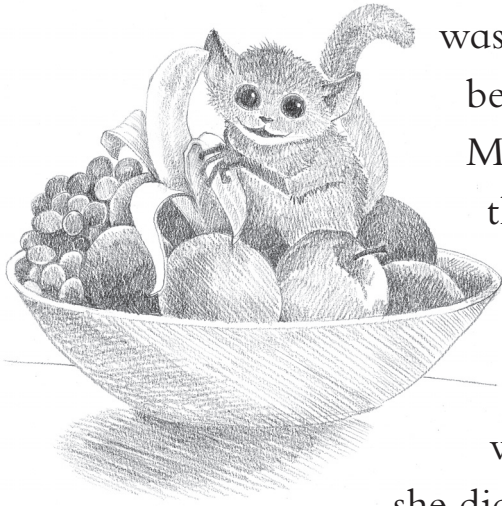
As they arrived at the cottage, Zoe's mom handed Zoe her school bag. "I have to go and check on a leopard now, so I'll leave you two to have fun. Be home in time for dinner." She planted a quick kiss on Zoe's head and tickled Meep's soft little belly.

"OK, Mom!" Zoe smiled as she watched her dash away toward the zoo hospital.

Once Zoe's mom was out of sight, Zoe stepped inside the cottage and grinned at Meep. The mischievous little lemur leaped from her shoulder and scampered over to the bowl of fruit on the kitchen table.

"Yummy!" he chirped, peeling a banana with his nimble fingers. "Blueberry muffins are nice, but I like bananas best."

The Puzzled Penguin



Zoe giggled. It was always fun to be alone with Meep or any of the animals at the Rescue Zoo. When other people weren't around, she didn't have to

hide their amazing secret.

Zoe knew that animals could talk to people, and that just a few special people could talk back to them. And she was one of them!