



CHAPTER 1

RARE BREEDS

Robyn clasped her hands over her mouth, wanting to be sick. It was vile – and so very wrong.

‘Leave it Fudge!’ she cried, as her dog went in for a closer look.

Clipping the lead back on to Fudge’s collar, she backed away.

It had been a sheep, one of her Uncle Joe’s. But only its blood-covered fleece was left. The flesh had been torn from its bones. And the bones crushed and broken.

Robyn's mind raced. What had done this? Not a fox, not a dog. Not even a pack of dogs. They couldn't snap bones into splinters.

Her grey eyes darted left and right. Afraid in case whatever had done this was still around. She swept Fudge up into her arms.

Far across the field, the rest of the flock stood huddled together. Watching.

'We need to tell Uncle Joe!'

Setting her dog down, they raced towards the farmhouse.

Breathless, she found her uncle raking hay in a barn. Even with his back to her, he looked angry. He was always angry at something. Perhaps he already knew about his sheep.

'Uncle Joe?'

'Robyn?' he snapped. 'What are you doing here?'

She took a deep breath. ‘One of your sheep has been killed....’

He swore then slammed the rake down, making Robyn and Fudge jump.

‘Not another one!’ he raged, his face turning red. ‘Third time in a month!’

‘Oh no!’ She dodged aside as he stormed past her. ‘What’s doing it?’

He marched across the yard and into the farmhouse. She followed.

‘Bloomin’ new people,’ he ranted, unlocking a cupboard. He took out his shotgun and cartridges. ‘Rare breeds! I’ll give them rare breeds....’

Robyn gaped, horrified, ‘What are you doing?’

‘They’re keeping something vicious,’ he snarled. ‘And it’s getting out and eating my sheep.’

‘You don’t know that,’ Robyn cried, jumping aside again as he grabbed his truck keys.

‘I know my sheep weren’t being butchered before they came.’

‘Uncle Joe!’ She raced outside after him. ‘Uncle Joe, wait!’

He started the truck’s engine. Robyn scrambled in too, Fudge on her lap.

He turned and glared at her. ‘You get off home.’

‘No way! I’m coming with you. In the mood you’re in, you might end up killing someone.’

He stamped on the accelerator. ‘You’re not wrong there!’

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As they bounced along the country lane, Robyn knew where they were heading. A mile away some new people had bought a house and land – then put up high fences all around it. All the locals were talking about them. They were

foreign. They kept animals, rare breeds. That was as much as anyone knew.

‘Uncle Joe, you’re going to look silly if they only keep goats and pigs.’

‘Goats and pigs, my backside!’ he growled. ‘I’m telling you, it’s something vicious.’

‘Well even if it is, you can’t go shooting it,’ Robyn argued.

Muttering to himself, Joe turned sharply up a lane marked ‘Private’.

Robyn spotted the big old house. The high wooden fences all around it looked new, as did the barbed wire along the top.

‘Looks like they don’t want people breaking in,’ said Robyn.

‘Or breaking out,’ said Joe, turning the engine off. With his shotgun open and hooked over his arm, he marched up to the front door.

With Fudge on her lead, Robyn ran after him.
‘Uncle, you shouldn’t bring your gun!’

Ignoring her, he rapped on the door loudly. It was ages until it opened.

An elderly man and woman stood there. He was small and coffee coloured. She was thin and looked so tired. Robyn thought that once she must have been very beautiful. But now she looked like she had all the worries of the world on her shoulders. Finding a gun-toting angry farmer on the doorstep wouldn’t help.

Her fearful eyes locked on to the shotgun. She grasped the man’s arm.

He stepped forward. ‘What do you want?’

‘Something is killing my sheep!’ Joe snapped.
‘One of your animals is getting out and ripping them to pieces.’

‘Not possible!’ said the man.

But Joe wasn't giving up. 'I want to know what you're keeping. You'd better show me or I'm calling the police.'

The couple flashed warning looks at each other. Then the woman spoke. Her accent was East-Asian. 'Come and see. All of the animals are safe in their cages. All locked up.'

Uncle Joe marched into their house like he owned it.

'Sorry,' Robyn said to them, feeling awful.

The man nipped ahead, barring the way. 'Please leave your gun here!'

Robyn saw the look in his eye. A look of steel. And even though he was old and small, he stood his ground. Finally, Uncle Joe took out the cartridges, and stood the gun in a corner.

The man led the way to the rear of the house. Outside it was all concreted, with cages and wooden buildings, like a small zoo.

‘OK, so what do you keep?’ Joe demanded.

The woman waved her arms. ‘Go have a look. You will see it is all safe.’

Joe didn’t need telling twice. But as Robyn went to follow, Fudge dug in her paws, not wanting to go anywhere but out of here.

Robyn picked her up. She was trembling.

‘Hold on to your dog tightly,’ the woman said.

‘Aren’t you coming, too?’

They both shook their heads.

‘Our daughter, Sheena, is the keeper,’ said the man. ‘She will see to you.’

‘OK,’ Robyn said, settling Fudge down first. With a lot of fuss, she was walking on her lead again. ‘Silly girl, the animals are locked up. Nothing can hurt you.’

As she wandered around, Robyn saw how true that was. There were rabbits, goats and chickens. They didn't look like special rare breeds, but then what did she know?

The pathway curved into a horseshoe shape. At the bend was a large cage of monkeys. There was nothing to say what breed they were, but they were cute and funny.

She felt lucky to have a mini zoo all to herself. She stood there watching, enjoying their antics. Until, suddenly, she felt something – sensed something close. Fudge barked – a warning bark as Robyn felt a warm breath on her neck.