

Ours

Sitting beside the calf pen in the warm May sunshine with Djaq, my Kelpie cross German Coolie cattle dog sitting in my lap, makes me feel content and safe. There aren't many warm sunny days in May so I figure I might as well enjoy this one.

Djaq starts squirming and licking my hands. I smile at her as she looks up at me with her weird amber eyes. She is a truly beautiful dog, her coat always gives me a mental picture of someone stirring a big pot of caramel sauce and randomly dropping chocolate chips into it. It is coming up a year that we have had her now. I sometimes wonder what we ever did without her, she can be a pain a lot of the time but over all she is a good dog. I remember the morning we were given her, it was a cold, wet, foggy morning....

There were shouts of "Josh is here!!" from my younger brother Daniel. The caravan door slams, probably Dan in a big hurry.

I take a sip of my packet mocha coffee as I peer out the fogged up windows of the caboose.

Josh is a twelve year old boy whom my oldest sister, Ayala, tutors. He is also a friend of my brother. And seeing as though we don't get many, any visitors are very welcome.

I step out of the caboose, and onto the crate we use instead of a step. "Hey Josh." I call as I lead the way between the three caravans that we now call home.

There is a mumbled "Hi" in return.

The 'kids caravan' door opens with a loud creak; that sounds like the door is about to break off, it never does so I just ignore it. Ayala is waiting, school work already laid out on the table. I find a place to sit and be a good example by reading a thick book.

A little while later, Mum puts her head in the door "Kath can you go and feed the calves please? And don't forget to give the youngest one colostrum, ok?"

"Yup I'll be there in a minute." I say putting the book down and following her outside.

The caravans are parked in a shed at the end of the dairy yard, so there isn't far to go.

I shove my feet into a pair of too-big gumboots and head out of our shed.

In the dairy pit, I grab two green calf feeders and pull the lid off a test bucket. The colostrum is thick and a dark yellow colour, for some reason I have to fight to keep my stomach in the right place for a split second before lifting the bucket to pour some of the gross stuff into the feeder. I am thankful that only one calf is young enough to have to drink that! I fill the other feeder with normal white milk.

As I carry the two feeders out to the cattle-yards-turned-calf-pen, I try to keep my hands clear of the colostrum, it never works; I always seem to splash myself.

I let myself into the pen and hook the two feeders on the fence. The older calf is right there trying to suck my elbow, but I stick my fingers in his mouth and guide him to the teat. The younger calf on the other hand has retreated to the end of the pen, most likely

he will give me a run around before I can catch him, I take a closer look then correct myself, its' a heifer. Great, a heifer with an attitude!

I close in slowly, trying to corner her so I have a better chance of grabbing her. She sees me and tries to bolt out into the open, but its' too late, I grab her ear and swing my leg over her neck to stop any further escapes. With her head firmly between my knees, I put my milky fingers in her mouth and hope that she knows how to suck and I won't have to teach her. Her mouth moves around my fingers for a second before I feel a feeble suction, then it gets stronger. I say a prayer of thanks before half dragging her and half leading her to the other side of the pen and to her feeder.

She sucks pretty strongly but the older calf is still finished first. I am still standing over her with her head between my knees, the other calf butts the back of my thighs and tries to suck my knees, and I swat at him and laugh.

I unhook the feeders but the heifer refuses to let go of her teat, she is sucking air but she doesn't really care. I twist it away from her and make a dash for the gate.

Back inside the dairy again I give the feeders a hose out and my hands a rinse under the hot tap. My Mum, Dad and sister are just washing up as I walk through.

I wash my hands again at the back of the caboose with soap and warm water, the calf slobber leaves a slimy film over my hands and you need soap to get rid of it. There isn't much I can do about my jeans and jacket; I am going to be just getting dirtier later on, so I might as well leave them on.

The caravan door creaks again. It is wonderful and warm inside. My brother and Josh are still working on their times tables. I sit back with my book again. It isn't long before my brother goes outside, it isn't really his lesson so he is allowed.

A car pulls up at the front of the dairy, I glance up and say "Probably your Dad." He nods and keeps working.

A minute or so later, my sister steps into the caravan and hands Josh something then cuddles a very small cute puppy to her chest, there were a few cries of "Its' so cute!" from around the table. From what I can see of it, it is dappled brown all over, and even though its nose is buried in its paws its amber eyes were peering around the small cramped space.

I glance at Josh to find he is also cuddling a puppy, but it is more black, red and brown; and, unlike the puppy Sarah is holding, Josh's pup is squirming to get down, to explore.

"What kind of dog is it?" is the first question asked.

"She is a Kelpie German Coolie cross. She is a she. And she is ours."

"Ours?" I ask raising my eye brows. Mum and Dad had never let us have a pup before; we already had a dog and they always said no to another.

"Ours." Sarah answers with a grin "Dad says we are going to train her to be a cattle dog."

"Yeah," Josh pipes up "That's why we got this one. Dad says we are gonna make a real good cow dog out of him."

The next question "Does she have a name?"

Sarah grins again "Nope, that's our job."

Josh pipes up again "We're gonna call this one Bundy."

"Like as in the beer?"

"Yup, see 'is colour?"

I have to admit he does look like a bottle of beer. But we have to find a name for ours. How could we do that? She looks almost un-name able! How could you name a dog that was so cute anything?

"I think we should call her Plaster." My brother says, referring to her one white leg.

I shake my head "No way! She is too nice to be called Plaster! We have to find something better."

After a while of cuddling we take the puppies outside for a run around in the now clean dairy yard.

We call her Pup for a while but she needs a real name. My brother is still adamant about calling her Plaster. And it is getting rather annoying when he tries to make her come to that name.

"Come on Plaster, come!" But she wasn't listening. Bundy was much more interesting.

"Well Plaster sure isn't going to be her name!" Sarah, who is sitting beside me, comments "What other names can we think of?"

I shrug "I don't know, but we need to think of something soon."

"Hmm." Sarah thinks out loud "What about... Honey?"

"No... I don't think it really suits her."

"Yeah I guess... well what about..." there is a pause "Djaq, you know like as in Robin Hood?"

"Yeah that suits her. I wonder if she will come to it." So we try it. To our utter amazement she turns and looks at us.

"Well!" I turn and look at Sarah "She has a name!"

I finally bring my thoughts back to the present. I glance at my watch, lunch time. Djaq is asleep in my lap. I push her off and stand up.

"Come on dog, time to go home."