

The Time That Tarni Ran Away.

Tarni is an Australian kelpie sheepdog with large ears and no brain. She also has boundless energy, which didn't help in the context of this story. She had only been at home for three days when she escaped. Slipping her collar in the middle of the night to bound off into the darkness as happy as Larry, for us to wake up in the morning to find our new 400 hundred pound puppy gone. We searched for two days continuously up and down with no success. We sent out fliers and put up posters without any luck. It seemed that Tarni had altogether disappeared. After a week of hard work we gave up hope of ever finding the budding sheepdog ever again.

However, after two weeks on the run, the slippery puppy was finally spotted slinking around someone's garden. The caller had seen a poster and had recognised the large eared, brown and tan coloured fiend and called the farmhouse. Taking immediate action the whole family scrambled from the dinner table and to the pickup truck, anxious to bring the dog home after so long. We pulled up at the crime scene and were directed to the whereabouts of our elusive pet. She was curled up in a bed of flowers, watching us happily as we cautiously made our approach. Gently, we all made calls out to her to come to us and tempted her with chicken soaked treats and large bones. After five minutes of Tarni staring at us like idiots, she turned and bounded over the garden wall and shot off down the field next to us.

Soon sightings were coming in almost daily of silhouettes matching the description of our talented puppy. The farm office was turned into an operations center with a pin board hung up, jam packed with strings linking sightings and evidence, while a map marked with the trails of chases given after Tarni. Stake outs were carried out in vain attempt to intercept her usual escape or travelling routes. This ended however when a concerned neighbour called police because he had spotted "suspicious figures prowling about near his property". Another technique used was trapping. Every night a bowl of food was left out in a strategic location. Every night the bowl of food would be eaten. This process was repeated numerous times until it was guaranteed that the rapidly fattening Tarni would turn up, so we laid in wait with a cargo net about 10m from the brimming bowl. We didn't have to wait long until our prey came along, unsuspecting of her fate. She was poised to eat and we pounced! My brother and I covered 10m in what felt like a single stride and dived upon the elusive animal. Suddenly a great hissing, screeching, and clawing came from under the net. As quickly as we had dived on we jumped back off, pulling the net away from the unfortunate creature. Next door's tabby cat was revealed, not looking pleased with us.

After several fiascos and RSPCA visits, Tarni was surprisingly easy to capture. The time came when the sheep needed to come in and so we used our trusty other sheepdog, Pai. Tarni, who had been lying up in a nearby hedge, jumped out and joined in as her instincts told her, bringing the sheep all the way into the barn, where she was easily caught after three weeks on the run.