

First published 2024 by FREMANTLE PRESS

Fremantle Press Inc. trading as Fremantle Press  
PO Box 158, North Fremantle, Western Australia, 6159  
fremantlepress.com.au

Copyright text © Deb Fitzpatrick, 2024

The moral rights of the creator have been asserted.

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the *Copyright Act*, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without prior written permission. Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

Cover illustration and design by Rebecca Mills.  
Printed and bound in Australia by Griffin Press.



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN: 9781760993856 (paperback)

ISBN: 9781760993863 (ebook)



Department of  
Local Government, Sport  
and Cultural Industries



Publication of this title was assisted by the State Government through the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.

Fremantle Press respectfully acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land where we work in Walyalup.



# **Kelpie Chaos**

**Deb Fitzpatrick**



**FREMANTLE PRESS**

*For Louie, and all the love that he brings.*



## Home is where the dog is

When Max ran up the street to our place one night just before dinner, I knew from the sound of his voice that something was up.

‘Eli!’ he called out, even before his feet hit the porch.

I swung the front door wide open.

‘Eli,’ Max puffed, ‘There’s a puppy —’

‘Where?’ I asked, looking over his shoulder.

‘No, no,’ he said, ‘Not here. Not here.’ He sucked in a breath.

‘Come in, Max,’ Dad said. ‘Grab a seat.’

Max sat down at the counter.

I hopped up on the stool next to him. ‘What’s happened?’

Max took a second, then the story came out in a big gush.

Max's parents' friend's uncle's second cousin — or something like that — owned a farm and kept working dogs. One of the dogs had just had pups and the family had more animals than they could manage. They were keeping one, and giving away the others. But there was one puppy left that they couldn't find a home for.

'And —' said Max.

'And?' I said.

'*And*, they're going to take him to the pound if they haven't found a home for him by the end of the week.'

'The pound ... that's okay, isn't it? Isn't that where people looking for dogs go? It's like a rescue shelter, right?'

'Yeah, but ... Mum says not all of the animals find new owners.'

'What happens then?' I asked.

Max looked at Dad. Dad looked down at his Ugg boots.

'Dad?' I said. 'What happens then?'

Max gnawed on a fingernail.

Dad finally said, 'If they're not adopted after a while, Eli, well, they have to be put down.'

I felt my face fall. 'You mean ... put to sleep?'

Dad nodded.

'Oh. That's horrible.'

‘Mum said they — the farmer people — have tried really hard to find homes for the puppies,’ Max explained. ‘They’ve asked all around town and put ads up and everything, but they just can’t find anyone to take the last one.

‘And Dad said we can’t take on any more pets. The rabbit had babies last week; eight bunnies. We weren’t expecting that. Dad said he was *sure* it was a boy.

‘So,’ Max finished up, ‘you don’t know anyone who’s looking for a puppy, do you?’



The farm was a long drive from the city. We turned off the main road at a sign that said Sheedon Lot 417. Our car bumped and jiggled along the dirt track into the farm.

We came to a gate with a sign on it.

PLEASE CLOSE THE GATE

‘I’ll get it!’ I scrambled out of the car. There was a fat chain securing the gate, and it latched onto a big bolt

on the other side. I carefully unhooked the chain, drew it through the hand slot and swung the gate wide open so Dad could drive through. Then I closed it, just like the sign said, and hopped back in the car.

‘Good job, mate,’ said Dad.

Lexie made a face at me. But I didn’t care. Nothing could ruin today.

Our old dog, Schnoozle, died a year ago. Mum and Dad got him before I was even born. The house seemed weird and empty without him. At night it was super quiet without the sound of him padding around on the floorboards.

Dad, me and Lexie all wanted to get another dog fairly quickly but Mum said she needed more time.

‘I don’t want to forget Schnoozle,’ she said.

I hugged her. I knew what she meant.

Finally, a few months ago, Mum announced she was ready for another pooch. ‘A home is no place without a dog,’ she said.

Then Max ran up the street to our place, and now we were finally getting our puppy!



We kept driving until we saw a big shed with a green tractor parked next to it. They had a quad bike and a trail bike as well.

‘Phwoar.’ Mum turned around and grinned at us.  
‘*They* look fun.’

‘I’d love to have a go on that quad bike,’ Lexie said.

‘And *I’d* love to have a go on the motorbike,’ Dad said.

‘That leaves us with the tractor, Eli,’ Mum laughed.  
‘You happy to drive?’

‘Sounds good to me!’ I smiled back at her in the side mirror.

‘I wonder what this pup’s going to be like,’ Mum said. ‘The farmer — Rob —’

‘Max’s parents’ friend’s uncle’s second cousin,’ Dad added helpfully.

Mum laughed again. ‘Yep, him. Well, Rob said there were four puppies in the litter. Rob’s keeping one, two have been adopted by families nearby, and we’re taking the last one.’

Dad looked at her. ‘I hope that doesn’t mean it’s the runt.’

‘Dad!’ said Lexie. ‘That’s mean!’

‘Well, it’s a real thing you know, in nature — most litters have a runt. The weakest, smallest baby.’



‘Like Eli, you mean?’

I rolled my eyes and poked out my tongue.

‘Lexie,’ Mum warned. Dad tried not to laugh.

‘Rob said to keep going past the sheds until we reach the house.’ Mum was reading from her phone.

‘There’s a big bougainvillea out the front, apparently.’

We kept crawling along the track, gravel crunching beneath our tyres. I looked out the rear windscreen. A cloud of dust hung in the air behind us.

Dad took a bend and Lexie squealed, ‘There it is!’

Dogs barked and ran towards our car. One was a beautiful black-and-tan kelpie.

‘That’s enough.’ A man wearing Blundstone boots and work clothes came out. He smiled and waited as Dad parked the car next to a huge hedge of bright pink flowers.

We jumped out. While the adults were talking the kelpie trotted over to us, tail sweeping from side to side.

‘Awww,’ Lexie said, ‘He’s beautiful.’

I put my hand out for him to sniff and said, ‘Hello, fella.’

‘That’s a female, actually,’ said the farmer to us.

‘That’s your pup’s mum.’

‘Oh, really?’ Mum came over for a pat. ‘She’s lovely.’

Rob laughed. ‘Yeah. We weren’t too happy when we

realised she was pregnant. We hadn't wanted any more dogs. But the neighbour's dog seems to have paid her a visit or two, and, hey presto, we found ourselves with a litter of puppies.'

Dad nodded to us. 'And that's how it happens, kids.'

'D-a-a-d,' groaned Lexie. 'Please!'

'We're really glad you came on board.' Rob lowered his voice but I still heard him: 'We didn't want to have to take him to the pound. We'd run out of options.'

'Well, it works for us, too,' Dad said. 'I think it's what we could call a win-win.'

'Absolutely,' Mum nodded. 'What breed is the father?'

'He's an Australian shepherd. They're quite big with a thick coat. Some folk reckon they're a bit sooky.' He laughed again. 'They call them Velcro dogs, 'cos they always stick close to you.'

Dad started to look worried.

'But they're really affectionate. Great family dogs.'

Mum let out a breath and smiled at us. 'Oh. Well. That sounds good, doesn't it? Just what we're looking for.'

'And mixed with the kelpie,' Rob went on, 'they're hard workers. Smart as. Great working dogs, especially with sheep. Really good herders.'

Dad started to look worried again, but I stood a bit taller. Our dog was going to be great!

Rob looked at me and Lexie. 'Do you want to meet him? Your pup?'

'Yes!'

'He's right over here. Let's go.'



## **Shiny-eyed, floppy-eared, jet-black cuteness**

Rob took us into a big shed next to the house, where the dogs lived.

Dad looked around. ‘So they don’t live in the house with you?’

‘No, our dogs are working dogs,’ Rob explained. ‘They’re not pets. They’re happy in here.’

Two puppies came bounding over to us. Lexie and I dropped to our knees to play with them. One was black with tan patches, just like its mum. The other was pure black, and fluffy, with a white flame on its chest.

‘So the black-and-tan girl is the one we’re keeping to train up and work on the farm,’ Rob said, ‘and this other little fella is your new pup. He’s eleven weeks old.’

The shiny-eyed, floppy-eared, big-pawed, jet-black

thing was so cute that we all made embarrassing love-noises. The furry bundle squiggled around as we patted him, our hands on his soft fur.

He was the newest member of our family!

Mum's eyes shone. 'He is adorable. I'm so glad Max told us about him.'

Dad couldn't stop smiling as he rubbed the pup's soft black cheeks.

Lexie kept saying, 'Awwww,' as she watched him.

I sat down on the ground, cross-legged, calling him over for a cuddle. His little body bulletted into my lap and sat still for a couple of moments. From my lap he looked up at Mum, Dad and Lexie. I put my hands around him and felt the size of him, and his warmth.

'Well, there you go,' said Rob, giving me a nod. 'Looks like he knows who's boss.'

Mum smiled. 'He zoomed right over to you, didn't he?'

Dad tilted his head at her and paused a moment before saying, 'Name idea?'

'Hmmm?'

'Zoom,' Dad said. 'For our little Speedy Gonzales here.'

'Well, he is pretty zoomy, that's for sure,' she agreed.

Lexie quietly said, 'Hey Zoom. Zoomy Zoom.'

I stroked his smooth head. He playfully put his mouth over my wrist and pressed down.

‘Yow!! Sharp teeth!’

‘Aaah, yes, those are his baby teeth,’ said Rob. ‘You’d think they’d be nice and gentle, but those things are razor sharp. You definitely need to be careful.’

I took my hand out of his mouth and rubbed it. Ouch!

‘What we do,’ Rob said, squatting next to me, ‘is give him something he’s allowed to chew on. Like this.’ He produced a rubbery puppy bone. ‘This toy is pretty well indestructible. You can take this one with you; it’s his favourite.’

I gave our puppy a big squeeze. He jumped forward and licked my ears with his soft pink tongue, making me giggle.

‘All right, let’s get out of your hair,’ said Dad to Rob. ‘Pop him in the car, kids.’

‘You’ll probably find he sleeps most of the way,’ Rob said. ‘He’s still a young ’un and needs his naps.’

We put our puppy in the laundry basket we’d brought, with soft blankets all around him, and he disappeared into his puppy nest. Lexie and I grinned at one another and then at him. We both had a hand in the basket, stroking him. His ears felt like pieces of

velvet from Granny's sewing box.

'He's like our own soft toy!' I said, feeling a big glow of love inside.

We waved our goodbyes and Dad bumped back down the track.

'They'll probably miss him, don't you think?' Mum said to no one in particular. 'Having cared for him since he was born. It must be hard to give young pups away, even if you know you can't keep them.'

She turned around in her seat to see what the puppy was up to in the back.

His eyes were glazing over and his eyelids were sliding down. And lifting up. And dropping down again.

'He's falling asleep,' Mum whispered. 'Just like Rob said he would.'

I held the tip of his tail in my hand. 'He's not very zoomy now,' I said with a grin.

'All that zoominess before is probably why he's so tired now,' said Dad. 'Everyone — *everything* — needs a break from time to time, even a high-energy pup like this.'

I turned around to see the disappearing farm. There was another cloud of dust between our car and Rob's house and sheds.

I rubbed the hairy tip of Zoom's tail. I hoped he was happy to be coming home with us. It was definitely better than going to the pound, that's for sure.