

Red Dog 2

For the first year or so of his life, the dog lived with Maureen and Jack Collins and was known as Tally Ho, Tally for short. But he repeatedly disappeared for days at a time, off on private adventures in the bush. Maureen and Jack moved from one mining town, Paraburdoo, to another, Dampier, taking Tally with them, and he quickly made new friends.

Episode 2 – Red Dog meets John.

'I don't think he's coming back,' said Maureen Collins.

'It's easily the longest he's ever been away,' said Jack, shaking his head. They felt a little sad, as though they had both known that they were going to lose him, and had been trying not to think about it.

'I hope he hasn't been run over.'

'We would've heard. In a small place like this, all the news goes round in a flash. Anyway, that one's got more lives than a cat.'

'I heard,' said Maureen, 'that he's been going from door to door, scrounging.'

'He's got a knack for locating tucker, that's for sure,' said Jack.

'I suppose he's probably all right, then. Still, it's a shame. I miss the little fella.'

Tally had finally left home. Unlike most dogs, who are happy to spend the day either sleeping or watching life go by, he found life too interesting to stay in one place. He wanted to see what the world was like, wanted to know what was going on round the next corner, wanted to join in with things.

He was too bright to spend his time being bored, and, whilst there were a lot of people he liked, he hadn't yet found anyone he could really love, the way that dogs are always supposed to love. There wasn't anyone to be devoted to. He would call in on Jack and Maureen from time to time, and he would always be happy to see them. He might stay a couple of days, and get fed and watered, but he and they knew that he had moved out for ever.

It was lucky for him that the town was so full of lonely men. There had been a few aborigines and even fewer white people there before the iron companies and the salt company had moved in, but just recently a massive and rapid development had begun to take place. New docks were constructed, new roads, new houses for the workers, a new railway and a new airport. In order to build all this, hundreds of men had arrived from all corners of the world, bringing nothing with them but their physical strength, their optimism and their memories of distant homes. Some of them were escaping from bad lives, some had no idea how they wanted their lives to be, and others had grand plans about how they could work their way from rags to riches.

They were either rootless or uprooted. They were from Poland, New

Zealand, Italy, Ireland, Greece, England, Yugoslavia, and from other parts of Australia too. Most had brought no wives or family with them, and for the time being they lived in big huts that had been towed on trailers all the way up from Perth. Some of them were rough and some gentle, some were honest and some not. There were those who got rowdy and drunk, and picked fights, there were those who were quiet and sad, and there were those who told jokes and could be happy anywhere at all. With no women to keep an eye on them, they easily turned into eccentrics. A man might shave his head and grow an immense beard. He might go to Perth for a week, go 'blotto on Rotto', and come back with a terrible hangover and lots of painful tattoos. He might wear odd socks and have his trousers full of holes. He might not wash for a week, or he might read books all night so that he was red-eyed and weary in the morning when it was time to go to work. They were all pioneers, and had learned to live hard and simple lives in this landscape that was almost a desert.

These brawny individuals took a rapid shine to Tally. They had little affection in their lives, and they could feel lonely even with all their workmates around them, so it was good to have a dog that you could stroke, and have playfights with. It was good to have a dog to talk to, who never swore at you and was always glad to see you. Tally liked them, too, because they ruffled his ears and roughed him up a bit, and rolled him on his back to tickle his stomach. They fed him meaty morsels from their sandwiches and dinner plates, and they brought him special treats from the butcher. Even though he was sometimes absent for days on end, there would always be a can of dogfood on the shelf, along with all the tools and oily rags, and there would always be a bit of steak left over from the weekend's barbecue.

No-one knew his real name, and before long he was simply called 'Red Dog'. A dog is happy to have lots of names, and it was no bother to him if someone wanted to call him 'Red'. In any case, a red dog is exactly what Tally was. He was Red Cloud kelpie, a fine old Australian breed of sheepdog, very clever and energetic, but some people thought that Red Dog might have had some cattle dog in his ancestry. He was one of three puppies, and Tally turned out a lovely dark, coppery colour, with amber-yellow eyes and pricked-up ears. His tail was slightly bushy, and on his shoulders and chest the fur was thick like a mane. His forehead was broad and his nose was brown, a little bit turned up at the end. His body was solid and strong, and if you picked him up you were surprised by how heavy he was.

Red Dog and the men from the Hamersley Iron Transport section got to know each other, because one of their bus drivers adopted him and became the only person to whom he ever belonged.

John was not a big fierce man like some of the miners. He was small and quite young, and he loved animals almost more than anything else. He had high cheekbones because he was half Maori, and people used to say of him that he was a friend to everyone. One day John met Red Dog in a street in Dampier, when he was standing outside his bus waiting for some of his daily passengers to arrive. When he caught sight of Red Dog he reacted with instinctive pleasure, crouching down on one knee and saying, 'Hey, boy!

Here!' and clicking his fingers and tongue. Red Dog, who had been busy with his own thoughts, stopped and looked at him. 'Come on, mate,' said John, and Red Dog wagged his tail. 'Come and say g'day,' said John. Red Dog came over and John reached down and took his right paw. He shook it and said, 'Pleased to meet you, mate.' John took Red Dog's head in both hands, and looked into his eyes. 'Hey, you're a beauty,' he said, and Red Dog knew straight away that from now on his life was going to take a new direction.

When the miners turned up to take their big yellow bus to work they found John sitting in the driver's seat, and Red Dog sitting in the seat behind him.

End of episode 2

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