

Last fall, when we put the cattle we keep inside during the winter into the barn, we had three heifers that we needed to tie and hoped they would soon be accustomed to a more “tame” existence than they enjoy during the spring, summer, and fall seasons. All of these heifers have names: Vitsippa for the little white snip of a mark in her forehead; Queenie for the Q on her flank; and Halvan because she looks “half and half.” From one side, she appears to be a light red animal; from the other, she is like a butterscotch and white Guernsey. And, in fact, she is half Guernsey.

Tying Vitsippa and Queenie wasn't much of a challenge. Sometimes, getting heifers used to being confined and tamed can result in a bit of a rodeo, but these two were particularly gentle and quiet, and we soon had them in stalls, happily chewing on some good hay in the manger.

Then, there was Halvan left. After several trips back and forth down the length of the old barn, Runo resorted to a rope. After a few futile tosses, he succeeded in getting the loop around her neck. We pulled her up into her place by wrapping the rope around a post on the other side of the barn's alley way, and then, gradually forcing her to get into position. We fastened a tie chain around her neck and snapped it to the ring in the manger. Now, we had her confined, but how long it would take for her to become accustomed to this sort of winter life was still a matter of conjecture.

We usually leave the heifers tied for a few days, watering them with a pail until they have been in the stall long enough to be “at home” there. Then, we let them go to the water tank to drink each evening. From the older cows, they seem to learn to go back to their own places. Two by two, these inside cows learn the routine.

So, we were quite concerned about Halvan. We watered her by hand for three days and then decided to turn her loose with her next-door mate, Vitsippa. They went to the tank, drank, and Vitsippa took a few turns back and forth before going back to her place. The wild one, Halvan, calmly walked back from the water tank, went into her place, started eating the little pile of temptation in the form of chopped grain that was in front of her. She let me tie her, and she was tame. It went as quickly as that.

A week ago, Halvan had a calf. It was a big bull calf, and she instantly found him an appealing addition to her life. But, after a day or so, he had his own pen and was let out twice a day to get his fill of warm, rich milk.

We wondered how much trouble it was going to be to accustom Halvan to our milking. After all, she was the wilding that it took a rope to catch. Would she be like Lily, who still needs hobbles attached to her back legs so she doesn't kick me while I am milking?

Runo pulled up the stool, sat down with a pail, and Halvan stood perfectly still. She has been the most patient, friendly, and well-behaved young cow we have ever had. And, it seems that she is also going to produce all the milk we need. The first batch of feta cheese is being made right now.