

Baltic bride (3)

Well as you can see, my first day at Sandy Downs was not actually a happy one but slowly the situation improved. Andrew and I got along quite well. He lived in the single men's quarters and went to work each day. To keep myself busy during the day I decided to help Lucy in the large kitchen. Lucy was



about 60 years old and a real character. She had to cook everyday for about 20 stockman. She had come to Sandy Downs because her son had been working there but her son has been killed by a wild bull in the cattle yards. Lucy had decided to stay and work as the cook because she liked the solitude of the Australian outback.

Besides Lucy there were two other women at Sandy Downs. One was Patricia, the manager's wife. I didn't like Patricia and avoided her whenever I could. She was posh and aloof. I always felt that she regarded all the employees at Sandy Downs as inferior. Luckily she spent much of her time away from the cattle station.

Apparently she owned some sort of art gallery in Darwin and had to attend to matters associated with this business. However, it was an open secret among the stockman that the man she employed as the manager of the gallery was actually her lover.

The other woman was an aborigine called Mabel. I really liked her. Mabel's husband was also of aboriginal decent and he was a part time stockman. He was only part time because he and Mabel often went on what they called 'walkabouts'. They would go into the bush for weeks at a time and live off the land. Mabel told me it allowed them to feel closer to their aboriginal heritage. It must have been dangerous in such remote countryside but when I queried her

about this she simply shrugged her shoulders and said that her ancestors lived there for thousands of years and they survived without any problems.



Andrew sometimes stayed overnight in my room in the cottage I shared with Lucy and this arrangement suited me because it allowed for intimacy but without a feeling of commitment. However, one night after I had been at Sandy Downs for about three months he said he wanted to discuss an important matter with me. ‘I have been talking to the manager about the vacant

cottage near the homestead windmill’, said Andrew. ‘It is a bit untidy but a few minor repairs and a coat of paint would fix that’. My heart beat rate increased because I knew what he had in mind but I pretended otherwise. ‘Is there a new stockman and his wife coming to Sandy Downs?’, I casually replied, trying not to show any emotion. ‘No’, said Andrew, ‘But it would be good for an existing stockman to get to know his partner better.’

I didn’t know what to say. Up to this point I had been treating my stay at Sandy Downs like a holiday, with the option of returning to Poland available at any time. Making some sort of commitment had not crossed my mind. I suppose I should have known that Andrew would have assumed that this was the logical progression but everything was happening so fast that I just couldn’t think logically. I was so overwhelmed that I started to sob. Andrew placed his hand on my shoulder. ‘Try not to get emotional’, he said, ‘Take your time to think it over’.

I immediately rang Agnieszka in Poland. ‘I just don’t know what to do’, I said. ‘Australia is alright for a holiday but as a long term proposition, well, I am not sure. I have known Andrew only three months and now he wants us to live together in the vacant cottage. I am sure that he will propose in a few months time.’ Agnieszka was in a more positive frame of mind. ‘I think you should agree to the cottage arrangement’, she said, ‘And if it doesn’t work out then you simply tell Andrew that Australia is not for you and return to Poland’.

I couldn't sleep at all that night. The next day I must have looked a bit run down because Andrew suggested we go for a swim. 'You need to freshen up,' he said. I expected that he would drive me to the swimming pool in Tennant



Creek but to my surprise he turned the Landcruiser onto a rough bush track and after about an hour we came to a beautiful gorge with a waterfall and a large clear pool. I had never seen just a serene place in my life. 'You never told me about this spot,' I gasped. 'You never asked me,' he replied with a twinkle in his eye. The water looked so inviting so I went to get my swimming togs from the back of the Landcruiser.

'Ah, don't worry about those,' said Andrew, 'No body ever comes here because not many people know it exists'. I stripped off my cloths and jumped into the clear water. It was so peaceful. Andrew joined me and we swam to the other side of the pool where a sheer cliff rose 50 metres above us. 'It's a paradise,' I whispered to Andrew.

After our swim Andrew produced a fishing rod from the back of the Landcruiser. He made a couple of casts into the clear pool and soon hooked a fish. It fought wildly but eventually he landed it on the sandy beach. 'It's a Barramundi, just perfect for our meal tonight,' he told me. He took the fish and put it into an esky in the back of the Landcruiser. We sat down on some rocks by the edge of the pool. Suddenly I saw a number of small reptile-like heads poking out of the water. 'Snakes,' I yelled, 'We could have been killed in there'. But Andrew was unmoved. 'Relax,' he said, 'Those heads belong to freshwater turtles. They are harmless'.

Finally we climbed into the Landcruiser and started the homeward journey on the rough track. Some wild camels appeared on the track ahead but they soon ran off into the bush. 'The government should shoot all those bloody camels,' said Andrew. I didn't take any notice of what he was saying. I was thinking



about the gorge and the beautiful pool. I felt a somewhat ashamed about my panic when the turtles appeared but I also felt a deep sense of relaxation and contentment here in the Australian bush with Andrew. I was so preoccupied with my thoughts that I didn't say anything for some time. After a while Andrew decided to initiate some conversation. 'I have to go

into Tennant Creek tomorrow to pick up some windmill parts,' he said, 'Is there anything you need?'. 'Yes,' I replied 'Can you get some house paint from the hardware store'.

End of Part 3