

## Baltic Bride (4)

The next weekend saw frantic activity around the vacant cottage. Everybody at the homestead wanted to help with the repairs, cleaning and painting. Bluey had at one time in the past worked as a carpenter's assistant so he was in charge of repairs. Lucy and Mabel were the chief cleaners and I was surprised when Patricia volunteered to help Andrew and some of the stockmen with the painting. It was good to have so much help but I felt somewhat uneasy. 'What if I decide to return to Poland,' I thought, 'These people may be resentful that they put in all this effort for nothing.'



After a couple of weekends work the little cottage looked like a new one. I had agreed to move in with Andrew on the condition that a telephone and satellite internet would be installed as soon as possible. After we had been in the cottage about a week a Telstra van arrived. The driver got out of the van and introduced

himself as John. He asked if this was the correct cottage for the installation work. 'Ok', my new assistant and I will start work straight away,' he said. I looked through the window as the two men started unloading tools and equipment. The assistant looked familiar but I couldn't remember where I had seen him before. After a while I heard John call out to his assistant. 'Bogdan, get the blue cable out of the van please'.

Then it hit me. Darwin airport. I didn't say anything at that stage but soon an opportunity to speak to the assistant arose. John went to the homestead building to check the satellite dish. I went out to the van where the assistant was measuring out cable and spoke in Polish. My suspicions were correct. This was the same man that had assisted me in Darwin. 'What are you doing here,' I asked him. Bogdan explained that he had left the security job at Darwin after a dispute with the airport manager. He had accepted a job with John's business,

which is based in Tennant Creek.

It was so good to speak in Polish face to face. I sometimes rang Agnieszka or my parents in Poland but it just wasn't the same. Before long John returned from the homestead and the two men quickly finished the work. They



climbed into the van and were gone. I began to think about Kraków with its old buildings and green grass in spring. I began to have doubts as to whether I was doing the right thing in agreeing to move into the cottage with Andrew, here in the remote Australian outback.

The next day I felt depressed. I began to long for shops and the hustle and bustle of town life. I asked Andrew if he would drive me into Tennant Creek but he had work commitments. This happened a number of times over the next few weeks and I could see that my requests to be driven to town were annoying him. Then one day he suggested that I should learn to drive. I had never driven a car. You see, in Kraków I went everywhere by public transport. Learning to drive was a big step and I was apprehensive. Andrew owned a Toyota Landcruiser utility. It was big and rough with a manual gearbox. Not only was the vehicle formidable but the roads I would be driving on were shocking with sand drifts and potholes. There was no bitumen within 150 kilometres of Sandy Downs.

For the next month I found excuses to avoid driving lessons. But I found myself longing to have a break from helping in the homestead kitchen. I hadn't seen a shopping centre for several weeks and so one day I told Andrew I was ready for my first lesson. I must confess I knew nothing about cars at all. I found it extremely difficult to use the clutch and the gears. Andrew had been driving for many years and to him it seemed easy. He couldn't understand why I couldn't follow his example when he showed me the technique for gear changing and he quickly became annoyed. After only two lessons Andrew and I agreed that we may be compatible as partners but not as a driving instructor and learner driver. I had given up on ever learning to drive when help came

from an unexpected source.



Patricia, the cattle station manager's wife, decided that her gallery in Darwin would require renovation. It was shut for several weeks and she spent the entire period at Sandy Downs. Andrew happened to be talking to the manager one day and mentioned that I was having trouble with the driving lessons. The manager

suggested that his wife could be my instructor. When Andrew mentioned this to me I initially declined because I didn't like Patricia at all. However, the desire to have more independence finally got to me and I agreed. Actually Patricia was a good instructor and I quickly mastered the clutch. But I also found that I had been mistaken about her. On the outside she appeared to be arrogant and stuck up but underneath I found a completely different person. As we travelled along the dusty roads during my driving lessons she often talked about her lonely life as the wife of a cattle station manager. She told me her husband was often away from the homestead organising cattle musters and other cattle grazing tasks. It was a 24 hour, 365 days of the year job. She just had to get away as much as possible, so she set up the art gallery in Darwin. Not once did she mention her relationship with her employee at the gallery and I thought it prudent not to reveal that I knew about it.

I remember the happy day that I passed my driving test in Tennant Creek and received my driver's licence. From that time on I drove into town nearly every week. It was a bit dangerous for a woman on her own I suppose but I survived a dust storm, a flooded creek, emus on the road and flat tyres. And it's also a long way, which provides plenty of time for thinking. I often thought about Patricia's story. I could see myself falling into the same trap. If I married Andrew I could end up spending the rest of my life at Sandy Downs. 'What if he becomes the manager one day? I would be lonely just like Patricia,' I thought. Six months after I arrived at Sandy Downs I reached a decision. I decided to return to Poland.

End of Part 4