

## The Farmer Wants a Wife

The interesting television program, 'The Farmer Wants a Wife' attracted a lot of watchers in rural Australia, where candidates for wifehood have been a bit on the lean side. In fact, there's such a shortage that even plain girls; many on the hefty side, have a lot of serious attention paid to them.

Thus, the after footy pub crowd at Balaklava take quite an interest when four Eurasian girls descend on the town. They're very easy on the eye and very bright and bubbly. They have three cars between them. They quickly join into things and readily admit they are after farming husbands. 'We hate the city, they say, it's all just a rat race, your hand's always in your pocket. It's hard to get a handle on people in such a frenzied ant heap. It's all just too anonymous; it's not for us. We're after fresh air, good country living, straight up and down people. We want to be part of the people that really represent the true Australia, the inland Australian.' They are all good-looking girls and very well presented. They flash their eyes at the young blokes and quickly find work locally – good jobs at that. They are hardworking and add substantially to social life in Balaklava; it's surely not a big town and good-looking new blood really hits the spot.

We can fast forward a bit to the after harvest and before seeding time and some matches are quickly made. Siti, the leader of the bunch, a skilled para-legal marries Peregrine Wilson at Easter; Aurora gets engaged to the elder Thomas boy, heir to a big farm and the other two, having missed out on the prize catches, successfully play the field for a bit. They only have to say the word to quickly become the wives of farmers. Notably the ones chosen by the leaders are the most financial of the boys around. When the last two announce their engagements, they've rounded up the boys who will inherit or have already taken over the best and most prosperous farms in the Balaklava region. Peregrine and Siti honeymooned in Hong Kong, and then returned to settle down on the farm.

Moving forward just a bit to when the girls have all married; they all give up work and burn up a lot of farm diesel in their SUV's going to town to play badminton and golf and netball; shop in Balaklava and the nearest big retail centres and once a week are in Adelaide and are often out at Glenelg Beach to display their latest swim wear, have a dip and to have a considered run through of the leading stores and boutiques. The young husbands are besotted with their good-looking wives and good sex and are very tolerant about the girls' increasingly indulgent lifestyles.

Their cars all disappear. Someone swarthy comes up from Adelaide with a small transporter and takes them away. Peregrine asks Siti what she got for hers. She airily waves him off. "Never owned it," she says. "Friends lent them to us." Peregrine is a little mollified in that Siti doesn't hit him up for dosh for new clothes. She and all four girls have extensive and expensive wardrobes, but he has also noticed that these are going down in quantity.

"Where's your flash gear going, Siti?" he asks.

“Oh Peri, my darling,” she simpers, “I have just too many and I’ve been quitting quite a lot into the recycling bins in Balaklava.”

Peregrine takes a stepladder into town in his Tojo and has a quiet look into the bins. There’s not a trace of any of Siti’s clothes, despite the bins not having been emptied for quite a while. He is now starting to smell a very large rat, but just for the moment, keeps his own council. Out of the blue, she tells him her bank card is maxed out. *‘Oh well,’ thinks Peri, ‘it’s only got a \$2,000 credit limit, so that’s okay.’*

A few days later, his bank manager calls for a chat and a run through things. They run through his well-managed farming affairs and towards the end of their meeting and almost in passing, the banker brings out more paperwork. Siti’s bankcard is the subject of this. He’s amazed to find that this is maxed at a new limit of \$22,000 and she has applied for a further new limit of \$44,000 extra. Under a bit of pressure, the man from the bank unlimbers his laptop to see where Siti’s, or rather Peri’s money has gone. It’s all cash advances; all to her account at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in Hong Kong.

“About this Hong Kong money, Siti?” he asks at tea time when she is feeding him a scratch meal of fish fingers, Greek salad and tinned peaches.

“Umm,” she prevaricates. “It’s just to keep my dear mother alive. She lives in a nursing home in Hong Kong and they are very, very expensive.”

“But, Siti,” he says, “we honeymooned in Honkers and you never said a word about family there.”

“Ah, Peri,” she says, “as I vividly recall it, we were full time jiggy jigging when we were there.”

There’s a very good young computer hacker in Balaklava and with a cold six pack in hand, he is his next stop. The expert spends a bit of time on his computer and then juggles a printout of the girl’s account, no mean feat, but easy peasy to this young computer nerd. It’s all money in and not a penny out; it seems she’s hoarding the cash.

Peri realises that the four girls are running a big, big scam and he is not at all surprised the following morning, when Siti whistles him up for morning smoko and puts a heap of papers, along with his cuppa in front of him. The papers cover in close detail, details of his financial affairs, searches of his land titles, certificates of insurance, valuations of his big sheep flock, values of his Murray Grey cattle herd and lists of plant and equipment at value less any finance on them. It’s a searching and first class review of everything he owns or has an interest in, some of which, such as his big share portfolio are inherited wealth from his parents, items he’s never really looked into.

They have been scratchily married now for 27 months and the half of his assets she is claiming run out, on the list in front of him, at \$5.2 million. It’s enough to end his farming career and lifestyle. He feels like his veins are full of ice, but he doesn’t huff and puff. Instead, he concentrates on running through the figures. He is intrigued that every asset, some of which he wasn’t really aware of, has been identified and thoroughly valued. A lot of specialist work has gone into this. He

allays her fears by asking who did all the valuations and assisted her with the legal side. He, of course, knows the who; the valuations are signed. He knows the who, now wants to know the how.

“How did you pay for all this, Siti?” She airily waves her manicured hand.

“We all girls contributed.”

“Contributed what?” Peri asks. She gives a sly, sly grin.

“You’ve kept us short of money of late,” she says, “so we contributed much of what we have to give.” *‘This is getting worse and worse,’ Peri thinks.*

They’ve obviously been giving little of the wanted to their husbands and have lavished this unstintingly on the suckers, to get from them the valuations they needed.

Peri equably says, “In 27 months, not one of you beautiful and desirable girls has produced a son for the farm.”

“Ah,” she says, “That was never on the cards, or indeed the agenda. Our Controller ensured that.”

Belatedly, Peri realises that an intelligent pimp must have been directing this whole scam. Peri, it should be mentioned, is an army engineer. He served in Iraq, alongside the Americans and also in the early campaigns in Afghanistan. He is a very tough nut under it all. He does a few head sums. For 27 months marriage these girls have milked the farm accounts when they could hardly stay home, hardly done any work. There’s been more takeaway food than home cooking. They’ve all had cleaning ladies and now all four stand to walk away with millions each. Siti alone, on her claim, is seeking the equivalent of \$190,000 for every month of marriage, leaving out the money she has scooped off on her bankcard.

*‘Nice work if you can get it,’ Peri thinks* and it may indeed be a goer, as there’s not a pre-nuptial agreement in sight. He can’t compromise himself by communicating with the other victim/husbands, but it’s easy enough to draw inferences on what is happening. Clearly direct and decisive action is called for and as in any decisive and violent action, its best to act solely on this. You can’t afford witnesses or co-conspirators on this type of thing.

The stock firm member who did all the stock and plant valuations does a district run. Peri gets him to book when he does a mid-afternoon run down a dead end road to the Smithers farm. This chap drives like a bat out of hell and heading homewards, a cold beer perhaps in mind, he never sees the metal strip buried in creek wash that shreds his tyres. He runs slap bang into a huge trunked red gum and the whole lot goes up in smoke and flame. Peri draws the contraption that does the damage, quickly away on a long cable connected to the winch on his farm vehicle. He drops a match in the gully to confuse the issue and is quickly away across the paddocks to dispose of the evidence.

The young lawyer implicit in the plot, is pillion passengering Aurora back from their weekly tryst on a back road. He never sees the length of wire at throat height,

nor do the cops later. Its long gone and the padding carefully put around the trees each side of the road conceals the real cause of the crash that takes two more players out of the picture.

Siti is totally appalled at the happenings, but Peri plays dumb. The penny hasn't yet dropped with her, but it's about to. At smoko, she tells Peri that \$3 million in cash with the rest to be paid over the next three months will see her out and gone. Balaklava, deep in the grip of South Australian drought, has had a dreadful year and she hasn't the foggiest that Peri, with so much less income into his farm account, has bought his last top-up of the farm fuel tanks on extended credit.

He lulls her into a sense of false security.

"Let me see if I can oblige you," he says. "I'll ring the bank at lunch time. How about coming down to the machinery shed for 10 minutes to help me with what I've got on?"

She goes and gets into her designer jeans, puts on her Armani sunglasses and goes with him to the sheds. He has his huge rubber tyred tractor out.



"Siti," he says, "I want a big chalk mark put on the tyre every 27 inches. Here's the tape and the chalk. I'll reverse the tractor back very gently and very slowly. Just stand here."

She stands, chalk in hand, where he says. He reverses the machine just a bit, he then guns the motor and pins her against the shed support. It's a finely judged event by a man used to servicing tanks in a war zone. He gets out of the huge tractor and walks around to where she is pinned.

"Siti, my love," he says, "you are just a throttle notch away from the end right now, but I'll let you out and we can go back to the homestead."

"To do what?" she asks. He can detect real fear in her, oh so big, slanted eyes.

"Firstly, to shred all those legal papers in my new Post Office Shop shredder and then you can sign a pre-dated post-nuptial agreement. Anne Thomas will be up at the house by now to witness it. When she's gone, we will go through your things to burn every pill you have and then we will set out on an intensive little joint exercise to produce a son for the farm. That accomplished, you are free to go and the farm will pay you the equivalent of a deserted wives pension for just twelve months and then you are on your 'Pat Malone'."

She realises she's beaten and she's also a bit frightened as well. As well indeed she might be; her cream puff husband is sailing now under his true colours and she realises his resolution, but she's a trier for all that.

"Okay," she says. "You realise my controller will be right on your wheel."

“Siti,” Peri says, “when you give us the details, in a few minutes, of how we can get our hands on him, this mysterious conniver, he will I assure you, be on no one’s wheel - now or ever. If you won’t tell me his whereabouts, one of the two remaining girls, who I will visit next, will spill the beans and the black mark will be indelibly against you. Bear in mind,” he contemplatively continues, “I have given this deep thought and the chance to let you climb out of the deep hole you are in, could and can easily go the other way this afternoon.”

Siti is long gone from Balaklava and similarly her controller is out of the controlling business forever.

We can fast forward this tale 12 years on.

Peri and his son, Aaron, are at the Balaklava Go Cart races. Aaron is racing in the Rookie class and has won six out of six races over two meetings.

“He’s a quick and smart little fellow,” the starter says. He’s looking at brown skinned Aaron. Peri is relaxed.

‘Yairs,” he says. “Takes after his mother.”