

Thorn Birds 9

1933-1938

Meggie thought she had lost Ralph forever - he'd told her mother to encourage her to marry. Ralph became a bishop. Meggie became involved with Luke O'Neill, a new worker on the Drogheda estate, and agreed to marry him. Luke seemed to be only interested in her money, which after the marriage would be his.

Episode 9

Meggie and Luke were married very quietly in Gillanbone and they left the same evening on the long train journey to North Queensland.

They spent the first night of their marriage sitting on the crowded slow train which went north-east to Goondiwindi. When they got there they had to wait for another train. There was nothing to eat or drink at the station because it was Sunday. They changed trains again at Brisbane. Once again they had to sit up because Luke had bought second class seats.

'But Luke, we've got enough money,' said Meggie. 'Why couldn't we travel first class and sleep on the train?'

Luke stared at her, surprised. 'But it's only three days and three nights. Why spend money when we're both young and healthy? Remember, I'm not a rich man!'

Meggie sat beside the window and looked out. Luke seemed to think that she was a child, but she was too proud to argue. She wanted to be a good wife, and she remembered how her father had loved her mother. In time, Luke would be the same.

The train was crowded as it made its way slowly northwards. Meggie's head ached, and she felt sick. It grew hotter and hotter, and her lovely new dress became dirty. She almost hated Luke, who didn't seem to be tired at all.

Late on Thursday afternoon they got off the train. Meggie could hardly walk.

Luke asked at the station for the address of a cheap hotel, picked up their cases and went off down the street.

Their room was small and full of ugly old furniture, but it seemed like heaven to Meggie. She fell on to the bed.

'Lie down for a while, love,' said Luke. 'I'm going out to look around.'

Meggie lay her head on the pillow, and fell asleep.

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She slept for two days. When she woke up, Luke was sitting at the window, smoking.

'How do you feel now?' he asked.

Meggie sat up slowly and stretched her arms. 'I feel much better now, thank you. Oh Luke! I know I'm young and strong, but I'm not as strong as you are.' He came to sit beside her on the bed. 'I'm sorry, Meghann. I'm not used to

having a wife with me, that's all. Are you hungry?'

'Very hungry. It's almost a week since I've eaten.'

'Well, have a bath, put on a clean dress, and let's go out.'

They had a Chinese meal at a restaurant near the hotel, then walked around the town. The buildings were white, and there were trees and plants growing everywhere. It was completely different from Gillanbone, and very, very hot. Meggie noticed that all the women were wearing tiny shorts and tops. The air felt so hot and wet Meggie could hardly breathe.

'Luke, can we go back now?' she asked after a while.

'If you want to.'

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'I've got you a job,' Luke said over breakfast in the hotel dining room the next day.

'What? We haven't even got a house yet, Luke!'

'We don't need a house, Meg. I'm going to cut sugar cane; it's all arranged. I'll be living with the cane cutters, and we work six days a week. I could earn twenty pounds a week!'

'Do you mean we're not going to live together?'

'We can't, Meg. The men won't have a woman living with them. You don't need to live alone in a house. If you work too, we'll have more money for our own house. I've found you a job as a housekeeper. You can live there, and all your money will go into the bank.'

'But when will I see you, Luke?'

'On Sundays. They'll let you go out on Sundays.'

'Well, you've arranged everything, haven't you?'

'Yes. Oh, Meg, we're going to be rich! You'd like that, wouldn't you?'

'If it's what you want.' Meggie looked in her bag for the money that Bob had given her before she left Drogheda. 'Luke, where's my hundred pounds?'

'I put it in the bank. You won't need any money when you're working. It's out in the country; there's nothing to spend money on. I'm not going to spend any money, either. It's all for our future.'

'That's very sensible, Luke. But what if I have a baby?'

Luke had planned not to have any children until they bought their farm, but he decided not to tell Meggie.

'Well, let's wait and see what happens,' he said.

In the morning they went out to Himmelhoch, the farm where Meggie was going to work. It was a large white house on top of a hill. Anne Mueller, the farmer's wife, was waiting for them. She had a kind face, and smiled at Meggie.

'Call me Anne,' she said. 'I hope you're going to like living with us, Meggie. I hope you won't find the weather too hot for you. And I hope you won't miss your big handsome husband too much.'

Meggie didn't answer. Miss Luke? She didn't think so. But he was her husband. Perhaps things would be better when they got their own farm. He wasn't a bad man, but he had been alone for so long he didn't know how to

share his life with another person. He didn't try to understand what she needed. Still, things could

be worse; Anne Mueller was warm and friendly.

As for Luke, he soon settled down to the work of cutting sugar cane. He loved the work, and he enjoyed being with the other men.

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Meggie didn't see Luke again for four weeks. Each Sunday she put on a pretty dress and waited for him, but he didn't come. Anne and Luddie Mueller didn't say anything, but they watched her disappointment growing.

On the fourth Sunday, he came. Anne Mueller greeted him as he came into the house.

'I'm glad you've remembered that you have a wife,' she said. 'Come in and have breakfast with us. I was beginning to think you weren't going to come and see Meggie.'

'Well, I decided to work on Sundays, too. Tomorrow we're leaving the district.'

'So Meggie won't see you so often.'

'Meg understands,' said Luke. 'There'll be a holiday in the summer. I might take Meg to Sydney then.'

Luddie, Anne and Luke continued to talk about Luke's plans, but Meggie didn't speak. She drank her tea and listened. First Luke said they would get a farm in two years, now he was saying that it would be four or five years. Luke loved his life at present; would he ever give it up? How long would she have to wait?

The Muellers were very kind to her, and she didn't have to work hard. But the weather at Himmelhoch made her feel tired and ill. Why couldn't she wait for Luke at Drogheda?

After breakfast Luke took her for a walk through the fields.

'Do you think we could have a little house after a year or two, Luke?' she asked.

'Why? You don't want to be on your own, do you? Aren't you happy here?'

'Yes, but I want my own home.'

'Look, Meg, you know we've got to save our money. Do you hear me?'

'Yes, Luke.'

And so Luke left her at Himmelhoch. He intended to kiss her before he left, but in the end, he forgot.

'Poor little thing!' said Anne to Luddie. 'I could kill him!'

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When the summer came, Luke went to Sydney, but he didn't take Meggie with him. Back at Himmelhoch, the weather got hotter and the rain fell every day.

Meggie wished more and more that she was at home at Drogheda. She dreamed of it, but she was too proud to tell her family how her husband neglected her.

The months passed, then a year went by. Meggie had been at Himmelhoch for two whole years. Luke had visited her only six times. One Sunday Luke arrived to take Meggie to a dance. Meggie was left in a corner with some other women. Luke spent most of the evening drinking and talking to his friends.

'Well, did you enjoy that?' asked Luke as he drove Meggie home.

'I didn't dance very often,' she answered. 'I don't think you really want me to be part of your life. I'm tired of living like this. I never see you alone. I want to go home to Drogheda!'

Luke thought of Meggie's two thousand pounds a year.

'Oh, Meg!' he said. 'It won't be forever, I promise. And this summer I will take you to Sydney. We can live there for three months and have a wonderful time.' Meggie looked at him as the moon shone on his handsome face, so much like Ralph de Bricassart's. She still wanted his babies. 'All right,' she said. 'All right. I'll wait another year. And I must go to Sydney with you this time!'

End of episode 9

1556 words, including intro.