

A Consequential Alliance

It was an expensive hiking trilby, pressed upon him with an expression of trust, by the Cafferky Patriarch that very morning and its loss was not something Adam could easily countenance, given his imminent likely need of the man's good favour. Yet how to get it back? He peered into the clear cool stream and resolved that the waters were little more than waist deep. He cast a long look back towards the house, too far to go for a fishing pole. He knew the farm to be deserted and he was shielded from the highroad by the copse of trees so he was soon stripped naked and entering the river, his bare feet disturbing small eddies of silt from the cobbled bottom.

In contrast with the swimming holes of north Queensland, the Deel had a biting chill that took his breath away, but in the brevity of the recovery mission and with his body well heated by the earlier sun he was invigorated and reluctant to immediately get out. Given the temperature and his risk of exposure, to the elements and otherwise, his reluctance was surprising, even to him.

He set the damp trilby out to dry and plunged headlong back into the stream, intent on a five-minute swim which was all it took for the chill water to drive him back to the tiny strip of beach. His reluctance was thoroughly dissipated but it seemed his surprise was to continue a little longer for as he made to exit, there sitting quietly on the shore casually folding his clothing into a tidy pile was Rowan, her every fibre emanating mischief.

He was struck dumb by her presence and his sudden predicament it caused, and he was freezing as well. He stammered, striving to force coherence from his chattering jaws, and the lame but obvious query limped from his lips, 'What are you doing here?'

'What am I doing? What are you doing is more the appropriate question, swimming stark naked in my father's stream! What's next, I ask you?'

Suddenly realising he was as visible beneath the water as he was above it, and further perplexed by the realisation that her parents must have returned as well, he was at a loss for a plan, though he knew it should not include his staying too much longer in the icy Deel.