Esmeralda

Esmeralda's problem was that she only understood Bavarian. No, not German; just the Bavarian dialect and as I only spoke English, French and just enough Italian to get me from Rome to Venice and a toilet along the way, we had a major problem ahead of us when she suddenly came into our lives.

It began with an hysterical phone call from Elisabeth, a local Eumundi identity, famous for her fabulous theatrical costumes and full-on attitude to everything in life. Elisabeth performed in local amateur theatre, gave concerts wherever she could, entertained at shopping centres dressed as a clown and, gave poetry recitals dressed in her Black Forest national costume. She had her own radio programme on local FM stations and made the most delectable apfelstrudel. Wherever something was happening, there was Elisabeth and no-one could miss her!

She and husband Gus had arrived in Australia from Bavaria, not speaking a word of English. While Gus went out to work, Elisabeth learnt English by watching television soapies. However, even years later she still had a very strong German accent which sounded very strange with her version of "Strine." On moving to the Sunshine Coast, they nostalgically built a chalet style home and raised their sons along with a menagerie of animals.

Elisabeth also took in injured wildlife and had a very special connection with birds. She would "talk" to them in soothing, unintelligible tones whereas some people found her Teutonic voice strident and abrasive. More than once I was asked if she dabbled in the supernatural, but I only ever found her highly entertaining, extremely generous of heart and one of the most genuine people I have known.

Always bubbling with overwhelming enthusiasm for an incredible assortment of outlandish new projects, Elisabeth managed to involve me somehow in quite a few and always there was Gus, long-suffering, but totally devoted, quietly supporting her every desire, adding on extensions, building theatre sets, transporting her from place to place,

constructing cages and pens for the ever-increasing menagerie and offering genial hospitality to friends. That is until Esmeralda arrived.

"Eileen, you must help me!"

"Oh," I thought. "She sounds frantic but probably just needs a guest for her German language radio programme." This went to air on Thursdays around midnight. Even though I didn't speak German, no-one had complained before when I was a guest.

"I am desperate! You must help me!"

Perhaps she'd organised another poetry competition. The last one I had agreed to judge was part of the 'Gympie Gold Festival" and it attracted 2,000 entries. I had to invite friends over for dinner to help me judge. By the time we got through them all daylight was breaking and we'd consumed so many bottles of wine we weren't sure what our original criteria had been, nor whether the finalists really deserved their awards.

"Gus is going to kill her!"

Now, this really was serious. Who? They only had sons. Had one of them brought home a girl to whom the very amiable Gus had strongly objected?

"Esmeralda! He is chasing her around and around. And her children are terrified!"

Oh God! This was not just Elisabeth's usual hyperbole. I could hear shouts and high-pitched screams in the background. A woman and children were in danger!

I called my husband David to get the car and we raced over. On the way he questioned whether he should have grabbed his shotgun but there was no going back. There was no car outside the local police house, so we sped on. We had to rescue Esmeralda.

We were greeted by a madly gesticulating Elisabeth on the side of the road, causing quite some concern to passing motorists. She shouted garrulously; having forgotten we don't speak Bavarian. We hurried after her through the gate to find a very calm Gus, warmly welcoming us inside for a drink.

"What is going on? Where is Esmeralda?" I ventured apprehensively.

"I've managed to lock her up but the little ones have taken off down the back."

He sounded very satisfied with himself.

"If she isn't gone by this afternoon, I will take my gun to her. Look at what she has done."

He led us to a storage shed where he kept the tropical fruit, picked from his numerous trees, to sell at the roadside stall in front of their home. 'Chaos' is a mild word to describe the destruction before us. The shed was almost demolished and piles of squashed fruit skins covered the ground like a grotesque, putrid carpet.

"Please Eileen, you must save her life. I know you have a soft heart and you have a large place where she will be happy," Elisabeth begged. I looked at David, hoping he would have a solution without committing ourselves to taking in some unknown, obviously very violet woman and her offspring.

"Who the hell is Esmeralda?" he asked.

"Come!" directed Gus and we followed him around the other side of the house.

There in a cage on the back of his truck was the strangest creature we had ever seen. Gigantic, with long orange bristles and black spots, she filled the cage. Suddenly she sat down and looked at us beseechingly with eyes so sad that I, for one moment, forgot to breathe. Elisabeth began softly singing some Bavarian folk song. The creature started to make answering noises gently from the back of its throat. My eyes prickled with unshed tears.

"What on earth is it?" David broke the mood.

"It's Esmeralda. She's a Tamworth pig. I have had her since she was a baby but now she is too big and breaks out of her pen and since she has had babies they run wild all over the property and gobble up everything they see and Gus has had enough and today he was going to kill her with his gun and he really meant it so I rang you to come and rescue her so please take her because she doesn't think she is a pig and I love her so much."

Loud tears finally stopped Elisabeth's outpouring. Gus stood patiently by with a wry smile. David and I looked at each other in silence for several minutes. I dared not speak but knew what his answer would be. Eventually he shrugged and sighed.

"OK. We'll take Esmeralda but not the piglets. It will be bad enough getting our 'normal' sows to accept her without bringing a whole tribe of them onto the property."

Elisabeth screamed with delight and gratitude, almost knocking him unconscious as she grabbed him in a bear hug. Actually, Esmeralda resembled a bear more than a pig.

So, that's how she moved in with us and dominated our farm for the next ten years.

Everyone lived in awe of Esmeralda. Our "Large Whites" paled into insignificance when faced with Esmeralda. They were terrified. Well, they were only half her size.

Even "Big Dick," hid from her, especially when she was on heat. He had begun life as Richard the Lionheart until his legendary sexual prowess led to his nickname by local pig breeders. He gladly did his duty by the other sows but with Esmeralda she took the initiative and chased him for miles up to the back paddock and halfway up Mount Eerwah, where she had her wicked way with him. Strangely, or perhaps thankfully, she only produced a handful of babies with each litter, which we quickly sold before anyone realised how they would look as they got older.

She especially loved mangoes. Often, we would find her paralytic, disgustingly drunk beneath a mango tree, having over-indulged in a gluttony of rotten fruit. We made sure to avoid her next day when she would awake with a terrible hang-over. It was best to leave her alone to get over her aggression and sober up. Eventually she would drag herself into the sties, angrily demanding every other porcine inhabitant vacated immediately while she snorted and grunted in stupor for several hours.

Even on her "good" days, whenever she was in the front paddock, the horses, goats, cows and donkeys took to the mountain. Our brave dogs cowered inside whenever she was loose to free roam.

We once watched as two terrified dingoes pelted back to the ridge when Esmeralda emerged from the dam just as they were about to drink. Visitors would stare in amazement when they saw her grazing alone.

"What is it?" was always their first question.

If she didn't like the look of their vehicle, she would sometimes charge at it like a rhino, which was terrifying for any occupants still inside. I mean who wants to be rocked by a creature the size of a hippo? Certainly not our local policeman investigating reports of a 'monster' on the mountain.

However, Esmeralda did have her softer side.

She adored our human daughters, following them wherever they went on the property. She happily trotted behind with the dogs, when the youngest rode her horse. Many a time, she would snatch up a Barbie doll in her massive jaws and bury it in the mud on the side of the dam. She didn't realise the girls were unimpressed at such antics.

Lovingly, Esmeralda would escort them to the farm gate as they walked down the lane to catch the school bus. She knew what time to be waiting there when they returned in the afternoon. The problem came if they were late as she would take herself off to find them. This, for some reason, enraged our neighbour at the Dairy. He threatened her life many times but then he was always threatening us over something. Some people are just not neighbourly. I mean we never charged him for the free services Big Dick provided when he went walkabout to the sows next door.

On hot days Esmeralda would join our daughters for a swim in the dam. Once the local Girl Guides troupe held a camp in our property and like good scouts they were prepared. They hung their food on strings between the tents to keep it safe from possums. However, they hadn't reckoned on Esmeralda. During the night she helped herself to the lot, almost demolishing the tents and terrifying the hysterical guides.

The next day she thwarted all their attempts to earn their kayaking badges on the dam by trying to upturn the canoes with her hippopotamus impersonations. They weren't appreciated. The guides never asked to camp on our place again.

However, the greatest moments in Esmeralda's life were regular visits from Elisabeth which continued over the years. No matter where she was on the property she immediately came running as Elisabeth's yodel echoed across the Eerwah Vale valley. As she listened to soothing Bavarian words of love, Esmeralda would dissolve into a helpless mass and roll on the ground like a puppy. We learnt how to gently rub under her chin and tickle behind her ear so that she would lie down and grunt in ecstasy but we never quite managed the special language which she and Elisabeth shared.

Occasionally we got "tourists" calling in. They had heard about the peculiar creature sighted on our property. Power line technicians and Council maintenance workers were all forewarned not to panic as she looked worse than she was.

However, as she got older, she became increasingly aggressive towards strangers, like aging dogs or people come to that! Most would race to get off the property before she

side-swiped their car. Many never returned after seeing, in their rear-view mirror, a mad giant hairy, orange pig with black spots chasing them the two kilometres to the highway. We never tire of sharing memories and laughter at her unpredictable behaviour and are so glad we shared our lives beautiful personalities like Elisabeth who begged us to adopt Esmeralda, the Bavarian speaking pig whose appearance belied her gentler side.