

**FARAWAY
SANDY TRAILS**

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Faraway sandy trails by L. M. Newton

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L. M. NEWTON

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by

L. M. Newton



AFRIKAANSE PERS-BOEKHANDEL | EDMS | BPK

JOHANNESBURG-KAAPSTAD

LOAN STACK
1972J

*To my husband for his help and
encouragement and also to the people
of South West Africa and here
especially the Police.*

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ON TRANSFER

The front door slammed. Oh, dear! thought I, another grouse from the landlady who shared the house with us to the extent of a built-on bedroom. There was much about us and the running of our home she didn't like, and banging doors was one of the things.

"Here in the diningroom," I answered to the usual query, adding, as Charles appeared, "making curtains."

"I've news for you," he announced, "You needn't worry about those curtains, we're transferred."

"Transferred! Oh, no! We've only just moved in here."

"Let's have tea and I'll tell you about it."

"But first, where to? Is it the Cape this time?"

"No, Windhoek, South West."

"Windhoek!" I repeated. Of all places! What had I heard about it? Desert, sand, heat, very little rain, no vegetables nor fruit, lots of beer, lots of parties because there was not much else to do, no opera nor ballet, difficult servants, and worst of all: our friends and relatives hundreds of miles away and trains only twice a week, unless there were washaways, when there were none! Well, there didn't seem much to look forward to, but I was wrong in nearly every item.

We discussed it over tea. It seemed there was quite a lot of work to do as far as Charles was concerned — they were short of staff as usual. We had a house waiting for us, apparently the only bright spot in our dark future; it was a big house with lots of trees around it.

"Trees? Are there trees in Windhoek?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I'm told it's quite a pretty little town."

"It seems impossible from the scraps I've heard of the place. Anyway we can now take those hammocks you won

a while ago and hang them up under the trees; probably it will be the only cool spot there in summer."

"We've got to leave as soon as possible. Tomorrow I'll fix up about the packing of the stuff and it can go off early. Furniture takes a devil of a time to get up there. Come, we'll call on the landlady and break the good news to her; I don't think she'll be sorry."

"I don't either, especially after the door-banging today!" I had my little dig.

Less than three weeks later we were on the train crawling across the northern Cape. It was very dry and dusty and for late winter, rather warm. We'd left Pretoria at five-twenty on the Monday afternoon and all the local members of the family had gathered on Johannesburg station to wish us luck before we disappeared into the bundu. Our parents shook their heads solemnly as they remembered the soldiers' reports of the country.

Near Nakop we passed the "down" train and waved to our predecessors as they sped joyfully back to the Union. The countryside did nothing to cheer us up, for South West Africa was in its third year of drought and for hours we tired our eyes watching unending stretches of sand, squiggly dried shrubs and apparently dead bush and stunted trees. But on Thursday morning we saw high mountains in the distance and in due course our little train chuffed its way over them and there was Windhoek lying in the hollow far below.

It was true. There were trees everywhere and the town looked ever so much bigger than we had expected; however, the approach to the station was flanked on one side by the location and rather spoilt the effect one had gained when the whole was first seen from the pass. We were feeling tired, dusty and far from home, and wished with all our hearts that our stay, however long it was going to be, was over and the train was pulling out instead of in. We were given a great welcome by our new "fellow-sufferers", only none of them seemed to be suffering very much, quite the opposite in fact, for they all looked remarkably happy and satisfied with things in general.

Our first night in the hotel was none too comfortable. It was an old, though good hotel, but unfortunately our room was next door to the most popular retreat in the building, (after the bar, of course) and much used by the general public as well as the residents. Every time we were just going off to sleep, bang! went the cistern and grr-u-upp rushed the last of the water down the drain.

"For Pete's sake! Don't these people ever go to bed?" burst out my irate partner. "Tomorrow I'm getting out of this; we'll go to the house and stay. In fact, if there's a train home, I think we'll take it or start walking if there isn't!"

"There isn't a train; I've already enquired. And what shall we use as furniture in the house?" I also had developed a hatred for the little room next door, and my tone of voice was very acid.

"We'll see. But something will be done; I'm not spending another night listening to that confounded noise!"

Grr-u-u-pp it went again.

"Pity the water supply doesn't give in," I remarked during the next silence, "though I suppose that would be a thousand times worse."

We slept in the house the next night, for we borrowed beds from the school hostel and everything necessary was heaped upon us by all the Good Samaritans around, for the Territory abounds with friendly helpful people. After two weeks, half our furniture arrived: the springs and mattresses of the bedroom suite; the chairs for the diningroom; the lounge suite; all the ornaments, the kitchen utensils and the carpets; but there was no linen, no crockery nor cutlery, and not a table. All this came a fortnight later and some never came at all. However, the school beds were very comfortable and I had a holiday from cooking, doubly appreciated because electric stoves were banned just then and my culinary masterpieces would now have to be produced on a wood-burning Dover stove!

Our predecessor had left us his servant, with misgivings as he later informed us, for he had not had him long, his language had come from the army in its more expressive