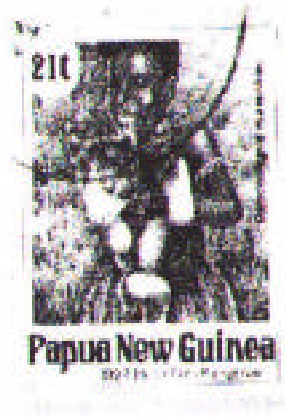


Getting Together



The next evening Molly hurried home from school to bathe and put on her best frock for her date with Eban. While he was away, Molly had missed his company very much and was breathlessly looking forward to their being together for the evening.

When they arrived at the Ela Beach Hotel, they were led to a table that Eban had reserved in a corner of the dining room. The hotel had been spruced up a bit since the influx of a number of government officials and traders and their families and, for Moresby, had become an elegant place for dining. There was now a choice of red or white wine for dinner, and a formal menu to order from.

While sipping their wine and waiting for their dinner, Eban told Molly about his trip and his visit with his father. He told Molly about the bats in Madang and the schools that the missions operated there. After they had finished with the meal and were having their dessert Eban told Molly about the necklace he had purchased, and then presented it to her.

At first Molly protested, but when she saw how much Eban wanted her to have it, she demurred and allowed Eban to place it around her neck. Molly had never seen such a beautiful necklace, and was thrilled at the colour of each bead. As Eban described how the pearls were harvested, and that these were not the cultivated ones that were grown in the waters off Northern Australia, she marvelled at the way that the largest pearls were placed in the centre of the strand and the smaller ones near the clasp.

She was sure that the pearls were very expensive, and worried that it might not be proper to accept such a gift from Eban. When she told him her thoughts, he assured her that he had paid a very low price for them and admitted that in Australia the cost would have been many times more.

As they sat at the table and talked, Molly reached over and took Eban's hand and squeezed it. "If I accept this from you I will never be able to tell anyone where I got it", she said.

Eban thought a while, and then said, "Well, I can't take it back, and besides, I will never give up your secret! So let's settle this by your taking the necklace and neither of us telling where it came from!"

They sat and talked a while longer and then reluctantly Molly relinquished Eban's hand and they prepared to go. It was a balmy evening, and when they passed the club at Ela Beach they saw a fire and a group of Europeans having a picnic. As Eban recognised some of the people from ANGAU he and Molly went over and joined them.

After exchanging pleasantries they withdrew to a corner of the shelter and sat on the sand side by side. Molly took Eban's hand again, "I haven't thanked you properly yet," she said, as she pulled him closer and placed a kiss on his forehead.

When she was about to draw away, Eban put his arm around her and placed his hand in back of her head.

"Don't go away Molly, I've wanted to kiss you for a long time, and now I am going to show you how grateful I am for your being so nice to me!"

He kissed her softly at first, and then as she responded, he removed his hand from her head and held her firmly in both arms. Molly relaxed and returned his kisses until her lips hurt, and she thought her lungs would burst.

By this time they were both laying on the warm sand, and when they finally drew apart, Molly realised that they could easily be seen by the other people on the beach, and sat up and smoothed her hair. After a quick glance around, she could see that everyone was busy around the fire, and no one was looking in their direction.

Eban laughed, "There was no one from the school," he said, "I looked before we sat down."

Molly was flustered, and a little angry with herself for losing control and letting her emotions take over.

"We shouldn't have done that.," she said, "But it was so very nice while it lasted!"

Eban indicated that he was ready to try again, but Molly re-minded him that it was getting late, and that the other girls she roomed with would be waiting for her to return to the dorm. "Let's not rush things," she said, "I'm afraid of what might happen if we stay here any longer tonight."

Reluctantly they got up from the sand and brushed off their clothes. As they walked up the beach to the road, Molly was already wishing they hadn't left. When they arrived at the dorm they exchanged a brief hug and kiss before Molly went in.

Pam and Aileen were both awake, and obviously waiting for her return. "Well," said Pam, "tell us all about it." Molly described the dinner and the drinks, and reluctantly showed the others the necklace.

When Pam asked if they were real pearls, Molly dodged the question a bit and pointed out that they didn't look like a regular string, and were probably only coloured bits of pearl shell.

After the girls talked a while, they finished their tea and got ready for bed. Molly could not sleep at first...she had many thoughts that had to be cleared from her mind. Romance had not been a part of her life for the past three years, except for the raw romance of being in a far country that was full of strange and exciting things.

Since the Yanks had left Rockhampton, and until tonight, she had never had a date with a man that aroused her the way Eban had. All her contacts before tonight were on a casual basis that precluded any thoughts such as she was feeling now.

She found herself wishing that Eban was still here, and that he was still holding her as he had done. Eventually she fell into a confused and fitful sleep and woke up the next morning still troubled in her mind.

At school, she couldn't concentrate on the lessons, and had to resist the urge to walk down to Eban's office and.... well, just to see him. At the end of the day she was relieved and disappointed when one of the other teachers told her that Eban was at the Colonial office all day.

That night she made a valiant effort to do some studying, and forced herself to read a very dry text on the construction of the Pidgin dialect. Finally, exhausted with emotional conflict she went to bed and managed an almost normal night's sleep.

"Molly," she thought to herself, "You've really got it bad."

Things brightened considerably when she found a note from Eban in her mail box asking if she would have dinner with him on Friday night. Of course she accepted, in spite of thinking that she should at least have waited till the next day to answer.

She was a changed woman for the rest of the week, washing her hair and pressing off her best frock. On Friday evening, Eban came to the dorm and was greeted by a radiantly smiling Molly who was wearing the pearl necklace that he had given her. Instead of the Hotel where she expected to dine, Eban drove to the Officer's Club at Jackson Drome where they met Pat and Alec.

After dinner they danced, and Molly felt light as a feather as Eban held her in his arms again. When Alec and Pam decided to leave, Molly waited anxiously to see what would happen next. She didn't want the night to end, and yet she felt she would die if Eban did not kiss her again as he did last week.

Finally, Eban announced it was time to go, and still with his arm around her waist, he led Molly out to the car and got in beside her. He took her in his arms and kissed her, and when they finally broke away, he started the car and made his way back towards town.

As they drew near the Ela Beach shelter, they saw that it was empty, and Eban pulled up near the shelter and again they embraced. Molly felt an ecstasy she had never felt before as she clung to Eban and held him tightly.

"Let's get out of the car," Eban said, and then led her to a dark corner of the beach by a patch of grass away from the Hut. They kissed again, and soon were overflowing with passion. Eban moved his hands around Molly's body and felt the shivers of anticipation as Molly responded.

It happened as Molly hoped it would. She and Eban made love in a wildly uninhibited way and ended up exhausted on the grass with their clothes in disarray and their emotions at fever pitch.

As there was no one to see, they both stripped and plunged into the cooling waters of the bay. As they sat on the sand waiting to dry off, there were protestations of love on both sides.

" Well," Molly thought, "now I've done it, and I'm glad." They both got dressed and went back to the car. Before starting the motor, Eban turned to Molly and said, "I've been trying to resist you for a long time, but I can't wait any longer. I think I am in love with you!"

It soon became obvious around school that an affair was in progress. In such a small community there was little of a personal nature that could be kept away from the public domain.

On Eban's side, there were some rumblings from the die-hard colonials, who still considered Eban as only a half-caste and a bit presumptuous in dating an Australian girl. On Molly's side, there was some suspicion among some of the teachers that the romance was surely for Molly's political gain.

The women at the Ela Beach club were sure that Molly would be shunned by "polite" society, and some felt a bit sorry for her. As far as Molly and Eban were concerned, they both felt they had found their destiny, and were ready to let the chips fall where they may.

At the dorm, Pam was all for romance no matter what the cost, and Aileen took a more cautious tack. Les Jones, the principal, felt the two would make a good match, and countered criticism with a brusque "Bug off, Jack" to those who broached the subject to him.

Of course, Alec felt that Eban could do no wrong, and offered the facilities of the Officer's Club for any planned nuptials. The romance pointed out the changing times in that changing country, and caused many a debate when opposing parties met.

The other prime topic of interest in Port Moresby was the rapidly changing political situation. Several village councils had been formed, and a Countrywide Legislative Council that was formed in 1952 was now becoming active though not overly effective. During the period of their "engagement" Molly and Eban were so involved in educational activities that they had little time to think of politics.

Eban got a message from his father, seeking advice on how to deal with his latest labour problem. After speaking with his father over a newly-installed radio telephone, Eban decided to take advantage of school holidays and take Molly along with him for a visit. Molly was excited at the idea, and anxious to meet Paul Edwards. Besides, this would be her first opportunity to visit the North Coast and see if Madang was really as beautiful as described by Eban.

With the help of Alec, and the tacit approval of Commander Ward, a flight on a cargo plane was arranged. For Molly, this was her first flight, and it was with some apprehension that she was installed in a jump seat next to Eban just behind the pilot and co-pilot.

The flight over the mountains was smooth, and Molly glued herself to the window and watched the jungle go by beneath them. As they flew up the Markham Valley the distant Bismark Sea sparkled in the afternoon sun as they neared Madang. The pilot circled the plane over the town as he prepared for landing, and Molly was struck with the sparcity of buildings compared to Moresby.

Eban's father was waiting for them at the airport. He loaded their baggage into the jeep, and asked Molly to ride in front with him as they went to town to stop and have a drink before the drive to the plantation. When they arrived at the Madang Hotel they went into the lounge and Paul ordered Gin and lemon squash for the three of them.

"So," he said, "This is the young woman I have heard so much about!"

Molly returned his quip with "And this is the father I have heard so much about, so tell me, what kind of a son is Eban?"

Eban reminded his father that they had a way to go before they reached the plantation, and would have plenty of time to talk along the way. They finished their drinks and soon were back in the jeep headed along the North Coast road towards Alexishafen.

Molly marvelled at the groups of people walking back from the market in town, some of the women had a bilum on their back, a baby in their arms, and two or three little pickaninny's tagging along. Every once in a while, she could spot a house in from the road, and she saw several gardens in cleared areas. After about a quarter of an hour the Jeep pulled off the main road into a side road leading into the jungle.

The road was unpaved, but was obviously well kept and gradually led to a grove of coconut trees and then past some low-growing bushes that Molly guessed were coffee plants. Soon they came to a weatherboard house in a clearing surrounded by a flower garden and a grassed lawn.

Paul stopped the Jeep and announced that this was Bundeberg, the plantation headquarters and Paul's home. He and Eban carried the luggage onto the verandah where they were met by a houseboy who opened the door and bowed low to Eban and Paul.

The place was lovely inside, in spite of the lack of glazed windows, it looked much like houses Molly had seen in the outback near Rockhampton. Molly was shown the guest room which was simply furnished with a dresser, a bed, and a washstand. Eban's things were put in his fathers room where a cot had been set up. Toilet facilities were just outside the door to her room, and were spotlessly clean.

After a quick wash and a change to a light print dress, Molly went into the main room where Eban and Paul were talking over a drink. After Molly was served by the houseboy, she

settled into a deck chair in between Eban and Paul. She was glad that she had remembered to wear the necklace that Eban had given her when Paul said, "So you are the one that Eban got that pretty necklace for!"

"Yes, Dad, this is the girl I have been telling you about." replied Eban, "You had better be nice to her, because I hope she will be around here a lot."

Paul asked some questions about Molly' job, and then asked about Brisbane and Rockhampton. Molly felt as comfortable with Paul as she did with Eban, and soon was telling him all about her family and her schooling. She told Paul how much she admired Eban and how they first met. Paul, in turn told about how he had come to New Guinea, and decided to make his life there. He said that he had married Eban's mother and never had regretted the birth of Eban.

"If Eban asks me," said Molly, "I will be proud to marry him. I hope you will give us your blessing."

Paul thought a bit and asked, "Do you realise that marriage to Eban could cause you some problems?"

"I have thought about it, and I think that I will be strong enough to face whatever comes," Molly replied. "I know that we love each other, and if we face things together we shall be all right! Things are changing here, and I think peoples' ideas will change too."

While they were having their talk Eban had diplomatically left the house and went out to look around the grounds. As soon as Molly and Paul walked out on the veranda, he joined them and saw that both were smiling and apparently had gotten along quite well.

Dinner that night was a festive occasion, with Paul bringing out a bottle of French wine to go with the meal. When dinner was over Paul excused himself and left the two lovers alone. "Well Molly, tell me what happened?" Eban said.

"You had better bloody well ask me to marry you," Molly replied, "because I told your father I was going to accept if you did!"

Eban grabbed her and kissed her just as Paul walked back into the room. "What's going on here? Are you two going to keep me in suspense much longer?"

For the next hour Molly and Eban held forth on their love for each other, and how they hoped that Paul would bless their marriage. Paul pretended reluctance at first, and then announced his complete approval.

Animated conversation spilled out for the balance of the evening till Paul announced his intention to call it a night. A few kisses later Molly confessed that she was overwhelmed by the events of the day, and was also ready to turn in. In spite of his liberal attitude, Paul was still quite conventional, and assigned Eban a place on a cot in his room, and Molly the guest room.

The next morning around the breakfast table, Paul told Eban and Molly his troubles with the plantation workers. Yali, the leading proponent of the cargo cult had managed to lecture to workers on the Bundaberg plantation as well as at the market about the vision Yali had for the future. He preached that the workers should not exert themselves in the fields, but act more like Americans and Europeans and wait for the good things that were due them to come along.

A few small villages had listened to Yagi and rebuilt their houses in neat rows, with flower gardens and raked yards. They made clearings for the promised cargo planes to land

on, and had endless arguments about how soon the kago would arrive. Those who could, gave money to Yali in order for him to help them get various things.

The result of the teaching (or preaching) of Yagi was a decline in the desire to work, as well as a reluctance to listen to the missionaries' preachings. Post-war New Guinea was only just beginning to become a society that dealt in hard money, having a traditional leaning towards barter in dealing with any kind of commerce.

"Work" was another concept that only came into existence with the arrival of the white man in the mid-1880's. Plantations needed labourers and enticed or impressed men into their service mostly with items of barter. Before that, working was only a matter for survival in insuring that crops were planted and harvested in order to maintain a subsistence of necessity. The idea of working for someone other than ones own family did not exist.

The white man's religion was another recent innovation. For aeons the natives had adhered to spirit worship, usually without the benefit of any concrete symbol or manifestation. Spirits were all about them, in the trees, the air, their dreams, and the good or bad fortune that followed any event.

They professed to learn their catechism from the preacher, but usually joined the church for the material things that were offered. Real conversions were rare because of the missionary attitude that the native was very rarely qualified to enter the kingdom of God except as a "saved soul." Yali capitalised on this by saying that the missionaries were selfishly keeping all of the material things for themselves instead of giving a rightful share to the natives.

Indeed, as Yali knew, Cargo itself was a remote belief until the war, when errant supply drops to jungle troops missed their mark and were discovered by passing natives. To a spirit-believing native, this was indeed a "gift from the Gods." The fact that Yali was lionised by the

ANGAU people and brought to Australia as a reward for his heroic war service amplified his belief that the real benefits of cargo were being kept from him.

After returning from Australia, he emulated his hosts and wore clean neat shorts, a white vest and proper shoes. He thought by looking and acting like a European it would entice cargo to come to him. His exploits were generally known to the natives, and when he held forth in the marketplace on his new ideas, many people listened to him. This was the start of the troubles that the planters were now facing.

Paul was now asking Eban for advice on how to deal with this situation, and proposed that they all go to the market to see first hand the influence that Yali had.

Molly was glad to be included because she wanted to see the marketplace and also look at the rest of the town. This time Eban drove with Molly sitting beside him and Paul took the rear seat. As they approached town traffic on the road consisted of laden-down families carrying produce to sell at the market. The Women were wearing the newly popular Meri blouses over a laplap, and the men seemed to favour army shorts and singlets. The children, according to their age, either wore a shift or went naked.

Eban parked the Jeep near the German cemetery and Molly and Paul went into the market by themselves. Eban had decided to walk around a bit and catch up on the latest gossip from groups who were squatting in the shade of the giant causerine trees.

The market was exceptionally neat compared to the one in Moresby, Molly noted, and then Paul explained that this was partly due to the Mission influence. Another noticeable change was the small amount of betel chewers in evidence, again because of the mission attitude. Molly was used to large amounts of red spittle liberally sprinkled on the paths in Moresby, and the bright red lips of most of the vendors in the stalls. Here it was apparently tambu to use betel in the marketplace, and a great improvement.

As more and more Europeans were staying in Madang, there was a greater variety of produce being offered for sale. Pineapples, oranges, and bananas were easily available as well as the traditional yams, sweet potatoes and corn. Fish and other seafood were in a covered part of the market where pork was also sold.

The Japanese had left huge stores of rice when they left, and this was still sold at reasonable prices as was food in tins and bottles of Soya and cooking oil. Cloth and utensils were arriving every day from traders who were buying copra and coffee, and the market as a whole was enjoying prosperous times. Most of the trading was done in Australian pounds, but there was still some bartering between rival stall keepers.

The small section given over to trinkets attracted Molly as she saw some well-made bilums, and several seed necklaces dyed in bright colours. There were a few shell necklaces, but none even approaching the one that Eban gave to Molly. Kina shell in various sizes and degrees of carving were a big attraction to the inland natives, as well as pots and drinking vessels.

While Molly was filling her newly-bought bilum with things she had purchased, Paul had wandered over to a group of other planters near the entrance and was hearing the latest gossip about the town.

Eban, meanwhile had joined a group of loudly speaking people who were talking about the latest speeches of Yali. He was reported to have announced that he would come to the market at midday and speak to his followers under the large tree next to the German cemetery.

Eban joined the crowd and squatted down in a good spot to hear the self-appointed messiah speak.

"Where did all this cargo come from?" Yali asked, and then without waiting for an answer, he said, "This is only a small part of what is being sent to us, the rest being kept by the Europeans! The ships that are arriving daily have cargo for you but the white masters are not giving it to you!"

There were some shouts of encouragement from the crowd as Yali continued his harangue. Yali said that the fault lay with the people who did not listen carefully to what he was saying. He pointed out that not enough people were putting cloths and flowers on their tables, and that airstrips were not being built long enough to accommodate the planes that would be coming to deliver cargo.

He told the crowd that they should not waste time working on the plantations, but devote all their efforts to preparing for the coming cargo. "You work now for a few shillings, but are losing the chance for much more by not listening to me!" He told the audience to go back to their villages and redouble their efforts to entice the spirits to send cargo.

When he was finished and left with a small crowd following, Eban went looking for Paul and Molly in the market. Molly had an almost full bilum and Paul announced that he was ready for a drink and a talk. After they arrived at the hotel and were settled on the veranda with their drinks, Eban began to tell Paul about Yali's speech.