

## The Aftermath



Eban's efforts in the past to help the administration had come home to roost. Now, just at the time when his attention was focused on things other than the school system, he was being handed the opportunity to view the political system from a very local and personal level. Molly was also able to disengage herself from the local school so that she might help in the management of the plantation.

Soon after his death Paul's Solicitor revealed that the entire estate had be left to Eban and Molly jointly. The plantation was in good financial shape, and Molly and Eban, being the sole owners, immediately had available the considerable cash and resources to dispose of as they wished.

They talked about their new situation quite a bit, and came to the conclusion that Molly had time to spend at the plantation, while Eban was investigating the Independence movement. It was clear that any independence would affect the expatriates as well as the indigines and full knowledge of the situation was very important to the plantation as well as their personal lives. Molly's school was now on a firm footing, and there were enough teachers for Molly to leave without harming the school.

Eban was able to use the Education Department's vehicle, so Molly had the jeep at her disposal. In the morning, she and Eban would agree where to meet at the end of the day, and Molly would go out to the Plantation to continue the job of sorting out Paul's effects.

Helen had become a regular fixture in the house in Madang, and now she was put on the payroll to keep up that house while Molly and Eban were away.

The first time Molly went out to the plantation, she was greeted with open arms by the staff, with Sarah, Samuel's wife taking immediate charge of Molly and warning Samuel to mind his manners in the presence of the "Boss Lady". The first thing Molly checked was Cocky, her cockatoo, who had been brought to the plantation while the house in town was filled with mourners and guests.

Cocky was ensconced in his old cage on the verandah and immediately squawked his joy at seeing Molly. She took him out of the cage and kept him on her shoulder as she walked through the house followed by Sarah. Molly had only been in Paul's "office" a few times, and was surprised to see that it was set up quite efficiently. The young assistant Frank Archer was out in the field at the time, so Molly gave Cocky to Sarah and settled down to see what was what in Paul's personal effects.

In a strongbox under his bed, Molly found all of his bank statements, various bank books, deeds to property, and reports from his accountants and auditors. A cursory look revealed that there was a considerable amount of money involved, and she determined to see Paul's solicitor right away for an explanation of what it all meant.

She found very few pictures, but found an old leather-bound bible that recorded Eban's birth and the death and burial of his mother Joli. She also found some gold rings and ear loops and a shell and pearl necklace that was beautifully crafted.

Molly packed up the papers she thought were important and put them in the jeep and the went back to the house to take a tour with Sarah in tow. After she instructed Sarah to get the house ready for use again, she went to the houses of the workers and saw that they were all in good shape, and then left for town to talk to Paul's solicitor.

It was still early in the afternoon when she sat down in his office and showed him the papers she had retrieved. After shuffling through them and making a few notes he said, "I'll get in touch with the bank shortly and then we'll get together with you and Eban tomorrow and tell you what I have found out."

Molly already knew that Paul had left all his belongings to them, but at this point she could only speculate about actual figures. She and Eban had worried about Paul's involvement with the cooperative, and hoped that it had not depleted all of Paul's personal funds.

That night when they were sitting down for an after-dinner drink in their town house, they discussed Molly's findings, and speculated on what the visit with the solicitor would reveal. Eban knew that Paul had bought much equipment after the war, and that the venture with cooperative called for great outlays of cash. He also knew that Paul was a generous person, and was always willing to help when one of his friends or workers was in need of money.

Both Molly and Eban finally concluded that the best they could hope for was that there was enough money in the bank so that they would at least not have to spend their own cash to settle the estate. As Eban was leaving in the morning for a meeting with Wewak officials, it

was decided that Molly would meet alone with the solicitor rather than waiting for Eban to return.

Right after noon the next day, Molly, clutching a parcel of additional papers, walked down to Doloma Street to the solicitor's office in the Bank Building. After the usual pleasantries, they sat down at a conference table where there were a number of neatly stacked papers were laid out in several piles. "I talked to the bank people, and have gotten reports on Paul's finances as well as his bank accounts and mortgage papers." John Kroupa said as he picked up a pen and indicated the various piles.

"You might as well take notes, so you can tell Eban what you found out." Molly had planned on this and was prepared to begin immediately.

"I think first of all we will go over the cash situation, because that is what we will have to deal with immediately." Kroupa said. "I have the forms for you and Eban to sign to transfer the accounts so you will have immediate access."

"Paul," he said, "inherited a considerable sum when his parents died, and he has kept that in an account in Brisbane. That will take a week or so to access, after the proper forms are completed. If you want, we can have that transferred to the local bank. In all, it appears there will be in excess of 60 thousand pounds after interest is added."

Kroupa went on to detail the several accounts in the Madang Bank, including the Plantation accounts as well as his personal balances. As she noted down the amounts, Molly could see that Paul had indeed become a moderately wealthy man. While never ostentatious in his personal life, he never seemed to lack for material things when it came to running the business. Even so, Molly had no idea of the great extent of his wealth.

"Now that is the cash situation," Kroupa said, "and now we will get into the other assets and liabilities." This was the part that Molly and Eban were most curious about. They knew that Paul had financed most of the initial parts of the Lumber Cooperative, but had no knowledge whether this was from his personal accounts, or some sort of loan procedure.

"Oh, by the way Molly, there is one small cash account I neglected to tell you about. It is a trust account in your name for one thousand pounds. Here is the bank book, all you have to do is fill out the new signature card and you can access it immediately. It was opened right after your marriage, and Paul obviously meant it as a wedding present just for you!" Molly knew that she seemed to have a warm place in Paul's heart and felt pleased that he had thought so much of her to make this gesture.

Now John Kroupa started to detail the various debts and obligations and Molly had to concentrate to note them on her pad in their proper context. After a while it became obvious that Paul was an astute businessman, and had protected his own interests as well as those in the cooperative.

The Plantation was very profitable, and would prosper as it was set up now. Paul held a number of Timber leases that were well managed, and would continue for many years. The sawmill and trucking operation was operating smoothly and profits from the cooperative enabled loans to be paid on a timely basis.

In sum, the net worth of the estate was considerable, and with careful management would provide a comfortable income to Eban and Molly for the rest of their lives. The immediate future was bright indeed, with large amounts of cash being readily available for use as they saw fit.

After she concluded her talk with Kroupa, Molly went to the hotel for a drink that she sorely needed.

As Molly was walking home, she reflected on her change of circumstance. She had saved almost all of the money she earned as a schoolteacher, and never had any material desires other than a house, and now she and Eban had two houses in Madang and two in Moresby, and all of the material things that went with them. Suddenly, she and Eban were very rich and had no thoughts about how to use their new wealth.

Of course they would pay off the debt on the house in town, and probably purchase another car, but how to manage their assets would require some thought. Eban was not business minded, always leaving the handling of household accounts to Molly, and was not the type to be tied down to an executive position. Molly, on the other hand, had run her family's affairs since her mother had died, and was well used to keeping small accounts for daily living.

As Eban was not due to return till the next day, Molly had plenty of time to think about their situation, and what her course of action would be. She decided to bring Helen with her when she returned to the Plantation, and had some vague thoughts about using Helen's talents. Under Ann Dale's tutelage, Helen had been keeping books for her village's pottery enterprise and now knew basic accounting. Molly noticed that she seemed to like that work, and even showed an interest in using the ancient typewriter that Molly had for school work.

When they arrived at Bundaberg the next morning, Molly got Samuel to drive her around to see the various operations in progress, while Helen was left to look around the plantation grounds and the house. Samuel was anxious to find out what was going to happen to the staff of houseboys and their families, and asked Molly whether things were going to change. "Of course they are going to change," Molly said, "but I don't think you and Sarah will see any

difference. We are not going to sell or move away, but someone else will have to take Paul's place."

At each site she visited, she asked Samuel to explain to her what was going on, and soon found that he was well versed in all of the operations, and had a good rapport with the rest of the workers. When they got to the Co-op headquarters, Molly was surprised at the bustle of activity that seemed to pervade the whole area. The supervisor, and the Big Man greeted her and took her to the loading area where logs were being made ready for the sawmill.

Paul's superintendant, Frank Archer was engaged in a heated discussion with the sawyer of the mill, but stopped and came over to the jeep when he saw that Molly was there. Like Samuel, he was anxious to know what was going to happen to the plantation in the future. Molly assured him that things would not change very much, and asked him to continue as he had done with supervising all of the mill operations in Paul's absence.

"I would appreciate it if you would come back to the office today and bring me up to date on things so I can report to Eban when he returns." she said. He promised to come along as soon as he could, and gave her a smart salute as the jeep left the area.

Sarah had layed out a tea on the verandah when she returned, and as she and Helen were eating, they discussed what each other had found. Helen was fascinated by the office setup, and indicated that she would love to work in such a place and learn to do accounting and filing. She told Molly that she could get another village girl to look after the house in town, and would gladly come to the plantation to help out there.

Molly said that she still had a lot to learn about the marketing and management of the mill, and was hoping that Frank would be able to give her some useful information. She didn't say

so, but she was pleased that Helen was so interested. She determined that if Eban approved, she would try to teach Helen enough to prepare her for an office job.

When Frank arrived, he asked Sarah for a bottle of beer as Molly indicated that he should join her on the verandah. Molly knew very little about Frank except that he was a former Aussie soldier in the Sappers and asked Paul for a job after he was demobilised. Frank originally was teaching the native crew how to operate the machinery and taught some of the men how to do maintenance and repair. As time went by, he assisted Paul in all the field work, and scouted out new land for leasing timber rights. He had quarters in a small house near the maintenance sheds, but generally joined Paul at meal times.

Molly had located files on leases, and read several scouting reports filed by Frank. There were some recent reports that Paul had kept separate, and had marked as favorable, and had attached lease forms to. Frank said that these were good tracts, and should be settled soon as other timber dealers were desirable of getting the same ones. Frank said that the tract above where Paul had died, now owned by a Japanese dealer, had been lost because the villagers wanted cash instead of future benefits.

He explained that the way Paul set up his contracts, there was very little cash involved but a commitment to save as much good land as possible by selective cutting and adequate drainage along the roads that had to be built. His methods were decried by other Timber buyers as being too costly and less profitable in the long run.

Frank seemed to have a good idea of the plantation finances and indicated that he was not entirely in agreement with Paul's way of "pampering" the natives. "It's really not our worry about their villages," he said, "there is so much forest around that it will be here forever. Besides, they will be better off if they learn to grow more food in smaller gardens."



Molly knew that this philosophy was one that a lot of expatriates agreed on, but knew that Paul and Eban were strong believers in protecting the villagers from giving up their land. Selective cutting and standard roads and bridges would be more profitable in the long run for both sides, they felt. She soon concluded her talk with Frank, who then left in his utility to return to the sawmill.

Molly then went in to the office with Helen and started to show her where things were kept, and gave her a stack of papers to sort for later filing. Helen was a good worker, and soon was in the swing of things, and seemed disappointed when Molly announced that it was time to return to town. She had to stop at Kroupa's office to sign some papers, so she left Helen off at her village and continued on alone.

After signing what seemed like an endless number of papers, she left Kroupa's office and finally arrived back home just in time to put up a pot of tea before Eban arrived. While they were drinking their tea Molly reported on all she had done, and asked Eban about his last two days. "It was revealing and interesting," he reported, "I think the people in Wewak are still thinking that the Nips are coming back and the independence movement will soon go away!"

Because Wewak had been held by the Japanese longer than any other city on the mainland of New Guinea, the people had a fairly good relationship with the occupiers. They employed a large number of natives, and were not involved in any great amount of ground fighting. When the Japanese surrendered, the people obtained many material things that had been left, and that the allies had no use for. Later, when Japanese business men came to Wewak, they opened a sawmill and paid cash money for timber rights.

Now that independence was on its way, the people were afraid that government regulations would interfere with their trade with the Nipponese and were reluctant to lend their support to, what they called, the new expatriate leaders. There were many leaders who supported independence, but in a cautious way. Eban told Molly that there was a lot of convincing that needed to be done before Wewak would be completely supportive.

He and Molly spent the rest of the night going over the things that Molly found out about both the Plantation and Paul. Eban knew his father was financially comfortable, but not to the extent that Molly revealed. He agreed with Molly that they should not act in haste, but keep things going as they were and see what the future would bring. They both concluded that making the plantation their main living quarters would be for the best, but they should keep the town house for the present.

The next day they both went to the plantation for Eban to have a look for himself, and assure the people that there would be no immediate change. Samuel took immediate charge of Eban and insisted that he show his face to all the working crews while Molly and Sarah toured the living quarters and talked to the women. When they met for lunch, they talked again, and Eban told Molly about his childhood there, and the sentimental feelings that he had.

"I don't think I could ever replace my father," he said "He thoroughly liked the detail of managing this place, and had a wonderful business sense. I don't think I have the pioneering spirit that will be necessary in the next few years."

Molly too felt that the coming years would be a challenge, and felt that Eban was fitted more for a political role than that of administering a prospering business. Molly agreed that the business would almost run itself if everything stayed on its proper course. "If it were not

for the local custom of men being the bosses, I think that you could run this place as well as I could!" Eban said.

"As equal owners," he continued, "why shouldn't we decide for ourselves? In Bilbil it is the women who really are the managers; the men are the owners but would be lost without their wives making the money that the new way of living requires." Molly was surprised to hear this, but had secretly hoped that Eban would agree. "If the plantation is to prosper in the future," she said, "it is important that someone is in a political position to make sure the new laws are favorable to us. You have been asked to help with the new constitution and are well known to the natives as well as the expatriates, who better than you can look out for our interests?"

After some more discussion, it was agreed that Molly would take over the management (with Eban's help) while Eban increased his involvement with the independence movement. Later on, Molly thought about Yali accusing her of being like Queen Emma. "Good Lord," she thought, "If he finds out about this, he'll insist that he was right."

Molly never did find out what Yali thought, but word soon got around that Molly was going to be the Boss, and that her word was backed up by Eban at every turn. Most of the workers reserved judgement, but Frank Archer was outspoken in his opinion. He tried in every way to countermand Molly's orders, and began to treat the workers like an overseer in the old days. Even Samuel felt the sting of Frank's sarcasm, and spoke to Eban about it.

Things came to a head a week later when Eban took the list of possible leases and tried to contact the villagers. "Frank gave us cash yesterday," he was told, "He said that you were not going to give us any money and we signed with him." Eban checked out another village on the

list, and was told that Frank had approached them but they wanted to hear directly from Eban before they signed.

When he got back to the plantation he went directly to Franks bungalow but Frank was nowhere to be found. Samuel talked to some of the workers who told him that Frank had left yesterday with an agent for one of the foreign companies and had taken all of his possessions with him. Luckily the village that Frank signed up was a distance from Paul's holdings, and would not be using the roads and bridges that Paul had built.

When the co-op people heard of this, they sent some of their Big Men and Luluai's to talk to the other tract owners, and those people signed up after being assured that the co-op would help with labor to get the new leases operating.

Kroupa arranged with his accountant to send an apprentice to Bundaberg for a week to tutor Helen in proper filing and accounting, and loaned Molly a few books that would help her get up-to-date on the legal procedures necessary. Eban was called to Moresby for a meeting with the constitutional committee and left Molly to attend to things as best she could.

In town, Molly's new endeavour was greeted with mixed reactions by the other planters and businessmen. No one could remember a woman running a business since Queen Emma, and most thought that it was unlikely that she would be successful. The village women however, were solidly in back of her, and would not let their men say anything against her. Ann Dale was a frequent visitor, and took it unto herself to plant a flower garden in front of the Plantation house where Molly lived.

It was not that there was a great amount of work for Molly to do, but she constantly worried about her new responsibilities to the point where Ann said "Molly, you must take time

to look around you and see more than this business. Paul's house was built on the most beautiful ground in this area, and you should appreciate it!"

But first, Molly insisted, she would have to change things within the house, which still remained unmistakably a bachelor quarters. Again Ann helped, and soon Molly was in town ordering new things from the merchants, and talking to the carpenters about new shutters and blinds, and arranging for fly screening for all the windows. When it came to the kitchen, she sought advice from the hotel manager who showed her catalogs for equipment and fixtures.

Paul had had the Plantation house built shortly before Jori's death, and had worked hard to pick the perfect setting. It was on the slope of a hill, with a view of the forested mountains at the back, and looking to the distant Bismark Sea from the front. You could make out Madang Harbor in the foreground, and the Town of Madang beside it. In between was a lush forest with only the treetops visible.

The house was in the Australian country style, built on posts a few feet above the ground, with a roofed verandah on three sides. All of the rooms were on one floor, and the kitchen was built in a separate wing to the rear. After the war, when the house was repaired, Paul had indoor plumbing installed at the same time that he got a generator and had the house wired for electricity.

There were two small bedrooms and two large ones, and a huge great room with a corner for dining at one end and large shuttered windows all over. The house was air-conditioned by the sea breezes that flowed over the lush forest below, and shaded by causerine and melaleuca trees that had now grown to heroic proportions. A lush lawn had been planted all around the house with enough space in the front for the addition of a pool at a future date.

Inside the floors were of polished hardwood and the walls panelled with wide boards that came from a mill in Australia. Shutters for the windows were made by local craftsmen, and the posts holding up the verandah were carved with intricate native patterns. Most of the furniture was brought piece by piece by shippers who were buying hardwood logs for shipment to Hong Kong and Singapore.

Molly did not take long to rearrange the furniture to her liking, and she and Helen organised the office off the great room to accommodate a full time work situation. After the kitchen was finished, (with much consultation with Sarah), Molly felt free to work on the garden that Ann had proposed.

As the months went by, Eban was happy for a refuge from the political scene, and used his time at Bundaberg to talk to the villagers and sound out their opinions on the proposed constitution. He and Molly took long walks into the forest, and long talks on the verandah after the nightly ritual of watching the Flying Foxes leaving town for their nightly forays into the jungle. Away from the glare of the lights in town the nighttime sky showed a brilliant display of stars that seemed almost within reach of an outstretched hand. Their bedroom now was decorated to Molly's liking, and she and Eban caught up on their lovemaking at every opportunity.

The Logging Co-op was now operating on a firm financial course, and the members were now reaping the benefits of their investment. New cisterns were showing up all over the villages, and gardens were producing bumper crops of food that could be sold in the market. A medical station was staffed, and available without the necessity for the long walk to town. For the doubters, the promise of Cargo was being fulfilled without the help of Yali and his followers.

More and more of the children were able to go to school as there was less need for their help in the gardens. But along with the benefits came problems associated with the men being the cash providers for the family. Visits to town exposed them to forbidden liquor and manufactured cigarettes. At Bundaberg liquor was strictly forbidden, and cause for immediate sanctions, so the problem was not obvious there unless it affected the performance of a worker.

Molly persuaded Eban to agree to open a small store near the maintenance sheds that would allow purchase of small items otherwise available only in town. This store was run by some of the younger women who soon learned some basic economics while broadening their social life. Bundaberg had settled down to a routine that was beneficial to all.

With Helen becoming proficient with the typewriter, she also started a library of books in the office, and increased her knowledge of the workings of the business. She and Molly made a routine of tea on the verandah, where all manner of subjects were discussed. A favorite for Helen was, "Molly, when are you going to have a baby?"

"As soon as the time is right!" was Molly's standard answer. She was not sure herself when that time would be, but as she became more involved with Bundaberg, she thought more about family, both Eban's and hers.

As the months turned into years, she was also aware that her biological clock was still running. Eban was now settled on the edge of the political system, Molly was now accepted as the manager of Bundaberg, and the village people were happy that Molly was adequately inhabited by the spirit of Jori.