

**Gabi
Edwards**



It took a few years for the plantation and the Co-op to become debt-free operations while Molly and Eban became regulars in the affairs of the town and the province. They joined the newly-formed yacht club and Molly demonstrated her prowess at bowls when the expatriates built a court near the middle of town. Molly and Eban danced at parties, and attended all the village sing-sings.

The morning after her 38th birthday, when Eban left for work, Molly finished clearing away the breakfast dishes and felt a bit nauseous. She took a quinine capsule, and went out to the verandah to sit a while and play with Cocky. She guessed that she had sampled too many of the sweets that had been laid out for the guests after her party, or perhaps it was the onset of a malaria attack. After an hour of relaxing, she went out in the garden and helped Helen clean up some of the flower beds that had been neglected during the past fortnight.

Molly had never been sick except for the time a few years ago when she experienced a mild attack of malaria. Last year when they took a holiday in Moresby, she had been examined by a doctor who had given her a clean bill of health, so she did not worry too much about what was bothering her now.

That night she ate sparingly, and felt quite good when she went to sleep, but in the morning before breakfast, she again felt nauseous and as soon as Eban left, vomited and felt quite weak. Helen noticed her condition, and asked Molly when she had her last menstruation. "Oh, it was right about this time last month, I am sure it will start any day now." Helen raised

her eyebrows, and looked at Molly more closely, and almost to herself said "Gat bel." Molly looked down at her abdomen, and said "That's ridiculous! I am not pregnant!" Helen then asked her about her last period, and pointed out that Molly was a bit late, and hardly passed any blood. "You'll see." she said, "I'll ask my mother and see what she thinks."

Molly dismissed her and went on about her work, but couldn't get the conversation out of her mind. Molly always had wanted a baby, but she and Eban were so busy that Molly decided that it had never been the right time. She remembered that both she and Eban had occasionally skipped precautions lately, but couldn't remember exactly when.

Well, a week went by, and Molly no longer was nauseous, but neither did she start to menstruate. Molly did not mention any of this to Eban, and resolved that when the Government Doctor came to town next week, she would visit him and ask his opinion. For Helen, there was no doubt. She assured Molly that she had talked with an old woman in the Village who had confirmed her diagnosis.

By the time that Molly was able to see the doctor in town, all of the women in the villages already knew that for certain Molly was pregnant, so it was an anticlimax when the doctor confirmed Helen's diagnosis. There was no excuse now for Molly to delay telling Eban, in fact, without his realising it, he was the last to know!

Ecstatic, was the way to describe his feelings. His only serious thought was that Molly would be endangered by her age. Molly assured him that the doctor gave her a clean bill of health, as well as a regime of vitamins and a proper diet that would assure a perfectly normal pregnancy. Eban, however had to fend off the ribald remarks of the men, who all professed to wonder how a man of his age could manage to produce a baby! Already Bilbil village women were making plans for a birth festival, and entreating Jori's spirit to make the event a glorious one. They assured Molly that her baby would be a full member of the clan and that Molly

herself would take a new, more important place in the heirarchy of the village. The Lumber Co-op voted a full share to the coming baby and vowed that he would be trained for one of the top jobs. As her pregnancy progressed, Molly's affairs became more and more public and each time she visited the market was a gala occasion for the local women. When Eban went to the hotel for a meeting and drinks afterwood, the price of palm oil took a back seat to his report on Molly's current condition. One planter almost lost his social standing when he had the temerity to suggest that Molly might produce a girl baby!

It was the rainy season when Molly went into the last stages of her pregnancy. Eban had wanted her to move to town, but Molly refused to leave her home no matter what! And so it happened during the height of a heavy monsoon, that Molly started labor. The roads were flooded, and minor earth-slides were being reported when it became obvious that there was no possibility of getting in to town. Sarah and the village women rallied to the cause, and with the help of a midwife, delivered a wrinkled squalling baby girl in the dark of the night.

After she was cleaned up, it could be seen that the baby had dark hair and green eyes, and a skin the color of light coffee. She was really a beautiful baby all of the women agreed, even though she, unfortunately was a girl. Molly, when she was given the baby to hold, thought she was lovely, and looked as handsome as her father. Eban had been banned from the whole birth process, and was only informed when the women decided that it was a normal birth and no special measures were required. He was allowed a quick look at the baby in Molly's arms, and then shooed out to tell the rest of the world about the miracle that he had participated in. Before going out on the verandah where a few of the other men had gathered after the rain stopped, he went to a cupboard and took out a bottle of overproof rum and a few glasses. Samuel took the bottle from him and poured out the first drink for Eban before passing the bottle around for the rest. Some of the men consoled him about the baby being a girl, but assured him that this would practically guarantee a boy the next time.

When the minister of the Lutheran church was informed, he came out to visit and asked what the baby's name was going to be. This was a subject that neither Molly nor Eban had really thought about. If it had been a boy, it would have been Paul, but as a girl, it would have been named after Molly's mother. Eban's mother's name was not considered available, as Jori's spirit was still around.

Molly had always liked the name Gabrielle, and as a little girl had pictured a Gabrielle as a most glamorous girl imaginable. But the name sounded too pretentious in New Guinea, so she shortened it to Gabi which she was sure would be easier to handle, and was similar to Jori's name. When she talked it over with Eban he agreed and so the name was settled. The pastor was informed, and so were the people of the village who could now begin arranging an appropriate ceremony. The first step was for Eban to arrange the purchase and delivery of four pigs and then announcing the date for the ceremony at Bundaberg which would include Bilbil as well as the villages in and around the area of the plantation. Samuel and the other senior workers made sure the grounds at Bundaberg were all cleaned and several temporary shelters were erected for the expected visitors.

Titus, as Luluai of Bilbil and Hana, representing the spirit of Jori, would be the leaders of the ceremony, which would include a feast, dancers, and a special Kwaitiva, sung and danced by men and women to honor the birth of Gabi. Right before the Kwaitiva, Hana would present the baby to the assemblage and announce her name and ask for the approval of the spirit of Jori. After the birth dance, groups from other villages would show off their dances before the feast would start.

The Lutheran pastor was planning on a quiet ceremony of baptism before the start of the festivities so that Gabi would not end up a heathen in the eyes of God. The Co-op declared a holiday for the day, and it ended up as the social event of the year for the expatriate as well as the indigenous population. There were so many Governmental and political guests at the sing sing that it was a miracle that no fights broke out, and that the Kiaps had no other chores than to prevent Molly and Eban being overwhelmed by the crush of well wishers.

Molly enjoyed motherhood, and managed to divide her efforts between running Bundaberg and raising Gabi and still find time to share Eban's interest in seeing that the independence worked out favorably to the villagers and the new nation. After she was weaned, Molly tutored Gabi at every opportunity in such a way that did not interfere with the girl's normal association with the other children of the village.

When she reached school age, Gabi attended the state school that Molly had been involved with, and attended the church that she was christened in. With the help of Ann Dale, she became knowledgeable about native plants and animals, and was as facile in Pidgin as she was in English. Her village aunts and sisters taught her local crafts, and like other girls her age, she shared in the bringing up of children younger than her.

At home, she was given limited responsibility for parts of the garden, and helped Sara with household chores. As she approached puberty, she learned to dance, as well as how to play field hockey and netball. Under Helen's tutelage she sewed her own clothes, and made simple necklaces from shells found on the beach. Gabi was a bit taller and slimmer than most of her friends, and took good care of her long straight hair. She had a good singing voice and a slight accent in her speaking voice that was utterly charming.

By the time that Gabi had reached her sixth school year, Molly and Eban decided that Gabi would not be able to reach her full potential in the New Guinea school system. Molly wrote to the Headmaster of the Rockhampton school where she had taught, and asked about the possibility of enrolling Gabi there as a boarding student. She included a thorough history of Gabi's education, and an assessment of her capabilities. Molly was as aware as Eban of the difficulties that Gabi's mixed heritage would cause in an Australia that was only now emerging from an exclusionist history.

When the headmaster responded, he agreed to consider Gabi only after a personal interview with mother and daughter, and suggested that they fly down to Rockhampton after

the school year ended to let Gabi see for herself what may lie ahead. Eban assured Molly that he would be able to manage while they were gone, and suggested that they stop in Moresby for a few days to outfit Gabi with a wardrobe of western-stye clothes for the trip.

For Molly it was the first time in years that she had flown, and a long time since she was in Moresby to visit with old friends. Gabi, had never flown, and had infrequently worn western clothes. Their baggage was sparse when they left the Madang Airport, but would soon grow in Moresby. Molly had written to Pat who was now married to Alec Lund who became manager of a small airline when he was mustered out of the service several years after the war ended.

The Lunds had purchased the cottage that Paul had given to Eban and Molly after it became obvious that they would not return to Moresby to live. Pat met Molly and Gabi at the airport and drove them to her home where she had prepared the small bedroom for their stay. Pat knew all of the new shoppes that had opened in town since Molly left, and volunteered to chauffer them around and help in the selection of Gabi's wardrobe. For three days Molly was in a whirlwind of visits to old friends and new shoppes, and when it finally was time to fly to Rockhampton, she was ready to sleep on the plane for the whole journey. Arrival at the former military airfield in Rockhampton and registering at the Criterion hotel finally ended their journey.

After they settled in they took a walk around town, and Molly pointed out familiar places to Gabi and marvelled at how little the place had changed since she left in 1946. Before going to meet the Headmaster of the Grammar School, they took a short walk around the Botanical Gardens where all trace of the military encampment had been removed.

Molly was pleased to see that some of the teachers that she knew were still there, even though their names had changed. The Headmaster took Gabi in tow and walked her around the grounds and classrooms while Molly visited with some friends. He showed Gabi some of the Dorms, and assigned one of the students to take Gabi to the lunchroom whilst he

and Molly had a snack and talk in his office. His recommendation was that Gabi live in the Dorm for the first year, and then see if she was ready to move in with a family in town. Gabi would take all the standard subjects the first year before being assessed by the instructors as to her progress and capabilities.

Gabi would stay at the school and be tutored during the school holiday, and when classes resumed, join the regular classes. Molly would stay in town till then, and return to Madang only after she was assured that Gabi would fit in.

Again it was shopping time. A trip to Stewarts department store would get her fitted for the school uniforms and the necessities for dorm living. Molly visited her old church, and was pleased that the minister assured her that Gabi would be welcomed and looked after by the rest of the congregation.

Molly's last purchase was a new bicycle, before opening an account for Gabi at the Bank of Northern Queensland. In the last days before Molly was scheduled to go she took Gabi to a movie in the Wintergarden, and told her all about her experiences with the servicemen during the war, and how she still remembered with affection Charlie Reinhard and the good times she had with him.

Finally after tearful Goodbyes Molly boarded the plane for Cairns where she would transfer to the flight back to Moresby. She was saddened by having to leave Gabi, but was sure that Gabi would adapt to the change and broaden her perspective.

When she finally arrived at Jackson's Drome she checked in to the Ela Beach Hotel not wanting to burden Pat again. She called Eban and then talked to Helen and got a list of shopping chores for things not available in Madang. She had dinner with Les Jones and Sally, and was surprised to learn how well known Eban had become. Moresby had grown so much that she longed for the serenity of Madang. As she got out of the plane in Madang she was enthusiastically welcomed by Eban, who assured her that the whole household of

Bundaberg was anxiously waiting for her. Cocky was the first to greet her with raucous cries that brought the rest of the house to the verandah as the Jeep drove up. The rest of the evening was spent with Molly answering all sorts of questions about the school, Gabi's clothes, Rockhampton, and how to send letters to Gabi.

That night she and Eban confessed to a feeling of loneliness without Gabi, and prayers that Gabi would adjust well to her new environment. For Gabi in Australia, her first night in the dorm was also spent in answering questions the other girls put to her about Madang. The months ahead proved that Gabi was indeed adjusting, the Headmaster reported that Gabi was a delight and complimented Molly on the superb job she had done in preparing Gabi for Australian schooling. Gabi had made many friends, and indeed was much sought after for weekend visits to the homes of the day students that were in her classes. By the time that the semester ended, Gabi announced that she would prefer staying in Rockhampton rather than "putting her parents to the expense of bringing her back to Madang." Both Eban and Molly were disappointed by this announcement but realized that Madang would be unbearably hot, and that there was very little recreation available that could match that of Rockhampton or Yepoon.

For the next four years they only saw Gabi a few times, but sent and received many letters. Gabi was doing very well, and ended up her Grammar school years near the top of her class, and was qualified to be accepted in a technical school, or a university. The headmaster had kept in contact with Molly, and was now recommending that Gabi go for a degree in science, majoring in Biology.

Both Eban and Molly thought she should apply at the University of Queensland at Brisbane. They knew that Gabi would be fine there if things had not changed much since they had been students. Gabi was so used to dorm life that there would be no problem, and there were several other students from New Guinea that could help her get acquainted. Molly and Eban took a holiday and went to the university to help her make the move, and look up some of the professors that they had known.

In the years since the war, Australia had changed a lot. The influx of New Australians made the streets of Brisbane more cosmopolitan. No longer was "home" meaning England, but now many European countries were represented in the small shops and the workforce. Towns that had been sleepy backwaters before the war were now being expanded as a result of having been wartime bases. In Brisbane, a building boom was underway that included the expansion of University facilities as well as improved roads. The people had more time and money for recreation and travel, and with the advent of television, more interest in world affairs.

When Molly and Eban returned home they became more aware of how rapidly Papua New Guinea was changing. A year after Independence the new government was settling down, and Bundaberg was prospering as was the Co-op. Eban held a high appointed position in Madang province, and was the political advisor in matters concerning the Town of Madang. Molly was accepted as an astute business leader and the leading advocate for women's rights, and was sometimes called the "Second Queen Emma."

While she was in University Gabi took every opportunity to come home for a visit, and spent her long Christmas holidays in the jungle with Ann and Helen collecting varieties of orchid plants. She collected cocoons from butterflies which Helen cared for in a specially constructed screen house in the garden at Bundaberg. She frequently met with the province conservation officer, and helped him catalogue plant and animal species found in the area.

She was the most beautiful girl in Madang, and was never at a loss for an escort to any of the dances and sing sings. There was always a sadness at Bundaberg when she returned to university, and a general jubilation when she announced that after graduation she would return to Madang permanently.

Gabi, at twenty one, was indeed a beauty. She was tall for her age and slim but full bodied. Her hair was long and black and her eyes were green. Her skin was coffee colored and flawless, her hair was straight and long and black. Whether she was dressed in a laplap and

meri blouse or a western style gown she stood gracefully. Her voice was soft except when she sang at church and each note wafted to the rear of the auditorium. It was no wonder that Molly was proud of her.

When Gabi went into the bush collecting or cataloging, it was a different matter; she put her hair in a bun and covered it with a hat. She wore heavy boots and baggy trousers and an old bush jacket she picked up in Australia. She still could walk barefoot if it was necessary but preferred to put on shoes when she was away from home.

In addition to the screen house for butterflies and moths, Ann and Gabi persuaded Molly to set aside a garden area near the house for growing orchids. They set up an environment that would duplicate the jungle and piped water in to keep the area moist. A shaded section allowed the growing of seedlings and coconut husks were used for the growing medium. The collection of Dendrobiums was extensive, with Ann aiming for all the varieties that had been discovered in Papua.

A recent variety that Gabi brought from the slopes of the mountain was somehow different than the others and was still to be positively identified. It looked like *D. Conanthum* with long antelope petals, and a very bright yellow color, but the canes were very long, and were topped with circular leaves instead of the conventional strap shape. After Ann contacted several authorities, the conclusion was that this was a variety that was thought to have been extinct. *D. Lasianthers* was the verdict of the experts, and Gabi had made a very important discovery.

A division was sent to the National Botanical Gardens in Moresby, and the parent plant was given an honored place in the Bundaberg garden. Ann wrote a paper on the discovery for the Royal Gardens at Kew, and several botanists visited Bundaberg to verify the findings. The next year, when Gabi received her bachelor's degree at graduation, she also had an offer to work for the Department of Conservation of Papua New Guinea in the Madang office.

Her supervisor was an elderly expatriate, Ray Bennett, who was looking forward to retiring in a short while and devoted himself to transferring all his knowledge about the job to Gabi. An increasing awareness of the value of natural resources was mandating strict control of poachers and smugglers as well as the foreign and domestic exploiting of the forest land. Gabi was assigned to tracing the smugglers of endangered animal and plant species in the area of the Gogol forest. Her headquarters was in the Government complex in Madang town, and she worked closely with the Kiap who replaced Brian McGregor when he was assigned to Moresby.

The new kiap was a papuan from Lae and was one of the first graduates from the Lae Technical College. His name was Danny Matari and he and his wife lived in a house in Jomba near the Government Center. Whenever Gabi suspected illegal activities, he and his helpers would check shipments at the docks or at the airport and siezed items of contraband. There didn't seem to be any organized group of lawbreakers, but rather opportunists who were lured by promises of big money by collectors of wildlife and plants.

Three years later, when Bennett announced his retirement, Gabi was panicked by the thought of the responsibility that had been thrust upon her. Bennet had discussed her capabilities with the leaders in Port Moresby and strongly advised them to appoint Gabi as his successor. She was clearly qualified, had done her job well as Bennetts assistant, and knew the area as well as he had. Her appointment was confirmed and Gabi settled down to being an advocate for the preservation of PNG's natural resources.

She studied for her Master's degree with the newly opened University of PNG, her thesis being related to the preservation of the Birdwing butterflies that were living in an ever decreasing area. She and Ann had been successful in raising the species and even having enough eggs left over to supply a hatchery in the Morobe area. As tourist travel increased, illegal taking of the species was even more profitable, and even more necessary for increased vigilance.

As she grew older, she became more aware of her mixed heritage, and more resistant to any romantic alliance with men. She still dated for public events, and was indeed much in demand for attendance at sing sings and parties of a general nature. She was completely engrossed in her work, and found very few men who could share her enthusiasm. Like her mother, she was an ardent feminist and at every opportunity encouraged young women to seek higher education and leadership positions.

The new opportunities for employment for men were leading to a disturbing increase in the incidence of convenient polygamy that ended with women and children being left in a dependent state and no resources to draw on. The University of PNG was still predominantly male, but the number of young women in secretarial positions was growing by leaps and bounds. In the villages traditional living was still the mode for the older people, but gardens were getting smaller and handicrafts were being manufactured at a great rate for the tourist trade.

Australian money was now in dollars and cents, and New Guinea currency had shifted over to Kina, a far cry from the shell money that was predominant before the war. Village people still mostly walked into town when a Public Motor Vehicle was not available.

When Molly celebrated her sixty-fifth birthday she was presented with tickets for a trip to Hawaii by Eban. She still was the titular head of Bundaberg, but Helen and a new assistant were the practical managers of what had become a large diversified business. Eban had a knack for finding new investment opportunities that made him a silent partner in many local enterprises. They made frequent trips all over the island, and managed at least a yearly vacation in Australia.

In Honolulu they toured, shopped, and marvelled for three weeks before returning to Madang by way of Cairns. Eban was anxious to get home to receive the new air-conditioners they had ordered, and Molly was waiting for the new computer that she wanted for the office. They brought presents for Gabi and for Helen, and some new orchid references for Ann. While they were away their various enterprises all did well, and they felt that life had treated them

generously. They frequently looked back on their earlier adventures as they sat on the verandah at eventide when the bats were starting their foraging flight. They were content.

Gabi was a constant visitor, and was always looking to Molly and Eban for information that would help her track down the poachers who were scouring the jungle for rare bird feathers. Recently, there were complaints from some of the remote areas about timber buyers trampling gardens while searching for prime hardwood trees. Molly had heard about such incidents, and when Gabi said she was going to investigate the claims, she volunteered to go with her.

They drove out to the far reaches of the Gogol tract, and left the Jeep at a small village and walked in to where the latest incident had taken place. Molly knew of the tribe involved, and questioned the Lului's wife about whether the trampling had been intentional or accidental. At first Gabi was reluctant to let Molly come along, but when Molly insisted, she acquiesced and they both followed the track to a small garden at the end. They came upon a cleared area where at one end a cluster of women and children were gathered around a man who was obviously arguing with them.

Holding a digging stick in his hand, he was shouting at the crowd around him and swinging the stick at water pots that the women were carrying. As they drew closer, Molly and Gabi could hear that he was shouting in pidgin and punctuating his words with English obscenities. When Gabi pushed through the crowd towards him he stopped for a moment, and then spoke to her. "What the Bloody Hell are you doing here?" he said, "Bugger off and go back where you came from! This is none of your affair!"

On a closer look, the man appeared to be a coarse-featured white man wearing a dirty bush jacket and a Japanese style field hat. His trousers were stuffed into the top of scuffed leather boots, and a canvas pouch was slung over his shoulder. Dale turned away from him and asked the nearest woman what the argument was about. "He says he is going to take away our garden," she said, "and the government has already given permission!"

When Molly heard this, she drew Gabi aside and told her that this was not so, because she and Eban had just discussed this tract with conservation authorities and had filed protective papers in Port Moresby. Independent timber buyers had been getting some villages to sign lease papers for the forest area and then pre-dating them in order to deceive the government and making it look like it was a pre-regulation lease.

Gabi then asked the man for identification which he promptly refused to give her. Some of the village women, emboldened by Gabi's action, picked up their digging sticks and told the man to go. Instead of making a graceful exit, he started shoving the women away from him, and lashing out with his stick, occasionally bringing cries of pain from those in his way.

Molly could contain herself no longer. She rushed into the middle of the fray entreating the women to stop, and let the man go, and urging the man to leave the women alone. Gabi tried to pull Molly back, but Molly grabbed the man's stick and tried to pull it from him. During the fray, Molly lost her footing and fell to the ground.

Gabi tried to help Molly to her feet, but Molly was unable to stand, and just lay where she had fallen. Most of the women formed a protective circle around her, while the rest of the women charged at the man and drove him to the edge of the garden.

When Gabi knelt down to comfort Molly, she noticed that Molly had turned unnaturally pale, and was breathing in short gasps. When she spoke to Molly there was no answer except a rolling of her eyes and a spasmodic clutching of her hand.

The women with Gabi saw this too, and sent one woman to run back to the village for help. Finally a few young men came with a litter, and helped to carry Molly back to the Jeep. With Molly slumped over in the back, in the care of a young villager, Gabi drove as fast as she could to the hospital in Madang.

While Molly was being attended to, Gabi called Eban and then went into the emergency room to stay with Molly. Doctor Oliver was busy examining Molly, but soon finished and came out to report to Gabi. "She has not been hurt, but she seems to have suffered a major heart attack" he said, "We have her on a respirator now, but she is very weak and I can't be sure if she will respond."

Eban arrived just after Danny Matari, the Kiap, was questioning Gabi about the incident. When Eban went in to Molly, he was shocked at how the vibrant active woman now looked. She was barely conscious, and could only squeeze Eban's hand when he talked to her. When Eban went back to the waiting room, Gabi had been joined by Helen and Ann, and several women from the plantation.

Word spread quickly and soon a group of men and women gathered on the hospital grounds. Bilbil village people claimed Molly as their own, and vowed vengeance upon the man who caused this to happen. Kiap Mantari returned from the Gogol village where he found a bloody beaten man in custody of the village men. He hustled him off to jail and thanked the Lord that perhaps this would prevent a blood feud from developing. In spite of a heroic effort by Doctor Oliver, Molly died during the night without ever becoming fully conscious again. Not since Paul's death was there ever such a public sense of loss as when Molly was finally layed to rest. Eban and Gabi were devastated, and indeed, Eban withdrew into his memories and never again took part in public affairs.

Molly's influence on the people she had loved and those she had lived and worked with would never be forgotten.