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ONDOBONDO

A Papua New Guinea literary magazine K1

Upon a lonely sandy beach
I heard you like the quiet call of a seagull

ONDOBONDO

A magazine of new writing from Papua New Guinea

Editorial

This Lahara issue of **Ondobondo** continues to be a channel for publication by Papua New Guinea's creative writers. The periodical has proved to be a valuable tool in introducing literature into out-station schools as well as providing public acclaim for writers. Published by the Literature Department, U.P.N.G., **Ondobondo** celebrates a continuing concern for the expressive arts in Papua New Guinea.

There are impending staff cuts in the Literature Department, however, and it may be difficult to maintain **Ondobondo** in its present format. Possibly the output will be reduced to one issue a year, since the two Literature Department staff members will have to be mainly occupied in teaching Literature academic programmes. Nevertheless, the editors encourage readers and contributors to continue their support for this magazine.

Ondobondo is a Binandere word for festival or singsing. This issue comes at a particularly festive time — Christmas and New Year — thus the Motu word, Lahara.

Contents

This issue has been edited by Bernard Minol and Patricia Hardy. Editorial Board: Prith Chakravarti (Chairman), Bernard Minol, Patricia Hardy, Kalyan Chatterjee, Alan Chatterton, Ganga Powell, Russell Soaba. Editorial Advisory Committee: Arthur Jawodimbari, John Kasaipwalova, Greg Murphy, Neil Curnow, Nora Vagi Brash.

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Short Stories

The Savannah Man by Bernard Minol

Across the Queen's Park Road from the Savannah stands a modern four storey building. Flanking it on both sides and behind are other houses showing their ages in varying degrees. By the way they look a few of these must have been erected by the Catholic Spanish masters in the late eighteenth century. The one whose roof can barely be seen occupying the block between this modern building and not so modern Queen's Park Hotel, is most likely the remains of an ancient church. The dilapidated holy shrine has lost its magnificient glass pane windows and is avidly being reclaimed by perhaps the only aboriginal owners of the !and still surviving — the tall grass. Even the trees that provide the shade for the seats along the Queen's Park Road have come from other lands. The very manner in which they tower over and strangle the grass and other forms of flora beneath them shows colonizing propensities.

From the front of the four storey building which houses the Venezuelan Consul on the first floor, the Argentinian Embassy on the third floor and the headquarters of the Organisation of American States on the top floor, one could see the tall trees on the north side of the Savannah. Beyond the Savannah one can clearly see the northern ranges showing off their undulating peaks from east to west. In line with the roof tops the vegetation is shrub and in one place a whole side of the mountain has been carved out to make way for a road. Further up the mountain the trees have obviously been planted. The straight lines in which they have been planted can easily be seen even from this distance. I am prepared to bet that the trees on the upper slopes of this embracing ring of mountains are not native to this land either. I did not want to ask anyone in the Savannah because several of them had inquired from me where Nelson and Queen streets were. Though I had been in the city for only a week, I happened to know where the above streets were and pointed in the general direction of their location. As I waited in front of this building I begin to notice certain activities going on in the Savannah. On the other side of those majestic shade trees there were three gates leading into a huge complex: It looked like a pavilion of some kind but I couldn't tell because of the high outer wall.

While I was still imagining what this complex would be for, from the middle gate a human figure appeared wearing only a pair of football shorts and leading a stallion onto the green patch near the fence. Soon after, a Toyota Range Rover pulled up at the first gate towing a green trailer. Out of this trailer came four horses, each being led by a stable hand. I guess the driver of the Toyota was the owner because all he did was come out of the car and stood watching as others opened the back of the trailer, took the horses out, closed it up again and then led the horses into the complex. With an air of pride and satisfaction the supposed owner followed into the complex. Two other men led another horse out through the other gate and holding onto the bridle gave the horse a warm trot. By now I had decided that the complex must be the local race track where a few make thousands and the majority return home empty handed to their angry wives and starving children.

On the western end of the complex a soccer team was having its weekly training session. The coach, clad in black T'shirt and black football shorts had a group of about fifteen young men running from one goal post to the other. They started off with running then split into smaller groupings of twos and threes to practise specialised skills relating to the position of each player. After about an hour of this and while I was not watching, the team must have dispersed because my attention had been diverted by something more immediate, just across the road and directly opposite where I stood. An old identity of the Savannah, I am sure, had appeared and was cursing the seat he had just vacated. I thought for a while he was cursing at me because he was pointing at the seat and looking straight to me as if I was responsible for his inconvenience.

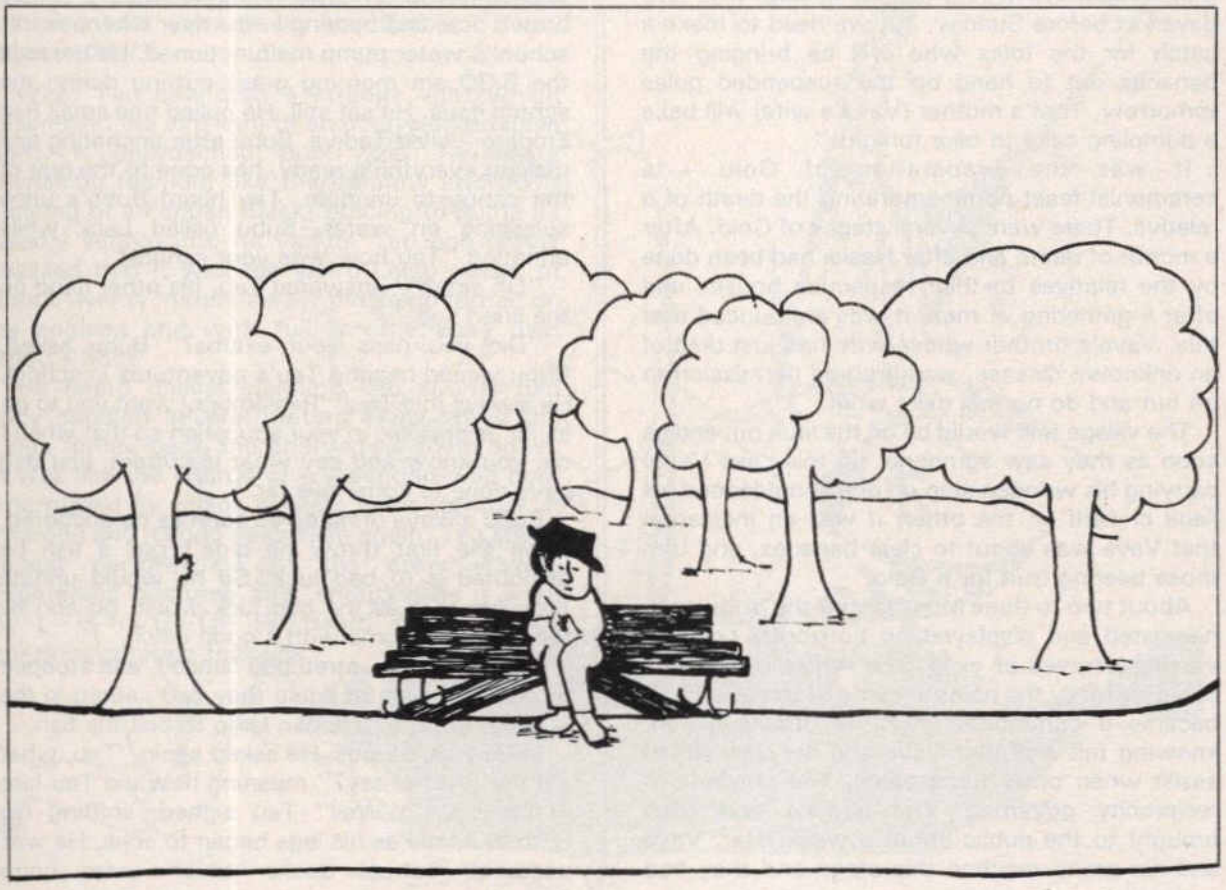
In his hay-day the half bent figure must have been close to six foot tall but through the normal process of growing up and weathering down, the old fellow had shrunk to about five foot four inches in height. He wore a dirty brown pair of trousers and a long sleeved maroon shirt with stripes. His temple was fully covered by a brown cap which seemed to be glued to the scalp because, despite constant movement of his head the cap never looked like falling off. I first noticed him when he suddenly walked off the seat and then turning around yells back at the seat. Not only that, it seemed as if the seat had retorted, making the old man unlease another round of choice English adjectives and bending low, almost physically assaulting the seat. I discovered that I was the only privileged spectator of this rather unusual exchange between the Savannah Man and the green seat. Lots of people passed the scene in cars and on foot but nobody showed neither interest nor curiousity in the the whole drama.

Disgusted with the seat, the Savannah Man moved on but at intervals he turned around and shouted insults at the seat. Thirty yards down there was another seat also green in colour. The

old man eventually sat on this one but continued talking and looking back at his previous seat and violently gesticulating with his hands and his head. Abruptly, the Savannah Man stood up and looked my way hurling another round of abuse accompanied by perfect movements of arms and head like a priest driving a point home during a Sunday sermon. For a while I thought he was telling me to vanish because I had disturbed his intimate altercation with the green seat. Perhaps he was right, I had been rude. After all, nobody else took any interest in the affair. All the time cars flew past in their hundreds heading for their westerly destinations or just driving round the circle of the Savannah, making style for the day.

The Savannah Man never ceased talking. His head constantly bobbed up and down like a cockatoo in a cage. He did not abuse the seat or anyone but one could see that he was still very angry. At last, out of his green haversack came a bottle of Vat 69. The Savannah Man displayed a happy grin and then empties an amount into his throat that a barman would never dish out to a customer in one dose. He sat up erect after this refreshment looking as if he was thinking out some great idea. For the occasion he even took off his cap and revealed his head which has been heavily deforested like the Savannah on whose edge we stood. He put his cap on, swung the haversack onto his shoulder and like a true Trinidadian city slicker,the Savannah Man walked straight across the Queen's Park Road with his right hand raised above his head. The rat race traffic temporarily came to a halt as the Savannah Man merrily crossed to my side of the street. He executed the crossing so well and in such a mocking spirit I thought he would turn around and cross again to the Savannah. But this was not to be, he apparently had made his point and must move on to other places. In a matter of seconds the Savannah Man had disappeared into the street with a No Entry sign on the entrance.

After the Savannah Man had disappeared into the No Entry street, it suddenly dawned on me that I had been priviledged to a rare vision of the past. It must have been the ancestral ghost still bemoaning the fact that the now Savannah has been desecrated. The scene that I witnessed certainly showed a disappointed man. My standing there did not help the situation because I am sure I would neither pass for a Carib nor an Arawak. No wonder the Savannah Man had to pull out a bottle of Vat 69.



Short Stories

Leigo by Goru H. Hane

The day was hot. It was the month of July when the south-easterly winds are at their best and the wild game season hunting or Reidou is on.

Bubu had just come out of the garden, his bilum on his right shoulder. His feet looked dusty apparently from trodding in the muddy footpath where small spools of overnight rain gathered. Dried cakes of thin mud covered his feet. They looked greyish. He walked to the beach to wash the dried mud off his feet.

Presently, he came back and asked for the previous night's discussions. He had been to another place and had missed out on what was said. "Vava" he called out. Vava and the others were gathered on the verandah and were busy mending the fishing nets to be taken out tonight.

"Vava," he called again. It was windy, the noise of coconut palm fronds swaying to and fro made it difficult for Vava to hear him.

"Oi" Vava replied. Bubu climbed the five stairs and sat next to his grandson Tau who had come for his Term Two holidays.

"What did you discuss last night?" asked Bubu.

Vava couldn't speak straight away, as he was in the process of peeling off a buai nut Bubu had given him. After chewing it he said "We decided that tonight we would go out fishing. It is two days yet before Sunday, but we need to make a catch for the folks who will be bringing the bananas out to hang on the suspended poles tomorrow. Tom's mother (Vava's wife) will bake a dumpling cake to take tonight."

It was the preparation of Golo – a ceremonial feast commemorating the death of a relative. There were several stages of Golo. After a month of death and after Hesiai had been done by the relatives to their respective houses and after a gathering of men, it was announced that Kila, Vava's brother whose wife had just died of an unknown disease, was granted permission to go out and do normal daily work.

The village folk would be on the look out and as soon as they saw someone, (in this case Vava) carrying his wooden step on one shoulder and his ilapa or sarif on the other, it was an indication that Vava was about to clear bananas, and trim those bearing fruit for a Golo.

About two to three months later the fruits were harvested and displayed on horizontal poles in varying degrees of yield. The whole clan joined and eventually the poles became a long stretch. It became a communal effort as others join in, knowing full well that Vava and his clan would assist when other turns came. The principle of reciprocity governed. The banana was then brought to the public about a week later. Vava and his group reached this stage and they had only to go fishing to catch some fish to feed the people who brought the bananas out. Immediately after this, the wrappings would be taken off.

But Bubu could not attend last night's meeting. He had been called to attend a deacon's meeting for the coming Holy Communion service next Sunday. He had instructed the men who came to call him, to proceed with the meeting concerning the Golo.

Now he asked, "How many canoes are going out?"

Vava answered that two outrigger canoes would go out. Bubu didn't say a word. It was usual of him not to make his movements known. Not that he disapproved. It was just that he disliked inconveniencing others. But his grandson, Tau, had been instructed by his mother to watch out for Bubu and accompany him if he decided to gather his fishing gear for the night's fishing.

This he did. Tau was on vigil and at about 8 pm when all was relatively calm, Bubu and Tau paddled out to the deep sea.

Tau looked forward to his holidays. It was not the usual regimentation he was now getting used to in the boarding school routine. His memory flashed to eating margarine, tinned meat and fish, brown rice, and bathing in the river whenever his school's water pump malfunctioned. He dreaded the 5.30 am morning grass cutting during the school days. He sat still. He pulled one small Red Emperor called Tadiva. Bubu after anchoring and making everything ready, has gone to the rear of the canoe to unrinate. Tau heard Bubu's urine splashing on water. Bubu called back while urinating "Tau how was your school?"

"Oh alright" answered Tau, his other hand on the line.

"Did you pass your exams?" Bubu asked. Bubu valued hearing Tau's adventures in school. He always told Tau, "Remember I want you to go as far as possible in your education so that when I die you know and say what is correct, just as I have done to come this far.

Bubu always urinated as soon as he anchored. If on the first throw he didn't pull a fish he attributed it to bad luck. So he would urinate believing that all the bad luck would go and he would return home with a good catch.

Bubu stood up, stretched himself, and stooped to collect a slice of squid they had caught in the evening using a Coleman lamp to bait the fish.

Bubu was curious. He asked again "Tau, what did the teacher say?" meaning how did Tau fare in his class. "Well" Tau sighed, shifting his bottom a little as his legs began to ache. He was used to school desks which were quite

comfortable but out on the sea now it was not at all comfortable.

"My teacher said I did quite well, especially reading. I like . . . I like . . . Bubu . . . Bubu . . . there's Vava over there! Can you see them?" He interrupted his own sentence at the sight of three lamps.

Bubu took out his favourite fishing line and hooked on a slice of squid as a bait. As he threw this in the water he said "There you are, it is coming. It is coming, Kokoroku. There is your dinner." (Kokoroku is a large Red Emperor).

Bubu waited. Suddenly, he felt a sharp jerk. It was a sudden and mighty pull. The line remained silent again. He cursed as he pulled his line up to check its bait. Yes the bait had gone. He knew that the fish was a mighty big one. He could judge it by the weight of the pull. He could tell whether a fish was a big one or a small one through his long years of fishing experience.

He fastened another bait and threw it down. As he did so, the Leigo sped past Tau's eastern starboard and missed their canoe by inches. Its waves almost sent them overboard. Tau crouched and swore but was petrified as if the Leigo had carried his soul away. Still crouching, he gave a glance over his left shoulder and was able in time to witness the crew on board the Leigo. They were skeletons waving at him in frightening gestures. He could see them clearly. Tau, terror gripping his spine, pulled his line up as fast as he could, at the same time shouting back towards his grandfather, "Bubu, what is this?"

What Tau saw was a strange light which resembled the dim light of an over-worked flash light. It approached Bubu and Tau in a menacing fashion, like the stealthy and swift running of a Papuan Black, bracing to pump its deadly venom into its victim. Tau had barely realised that it was the weird Leigo when, at about twenty meters away, the Leigo turned on its engines and with full throttle sped past Bubu's boat.

He heard chains clanking. No sooner had they paddled several meters away when the Leigo turned back and charged for them again. It was like the charge of a wounded wild boar interrupted by village hunters in his territory. It charged and it sped past them again. Tau saw a repeat performance of the crew waving frightening gestures and, shouting as it went by L—E—I—G—O!! He heard the skeletons speaking strange tongues.

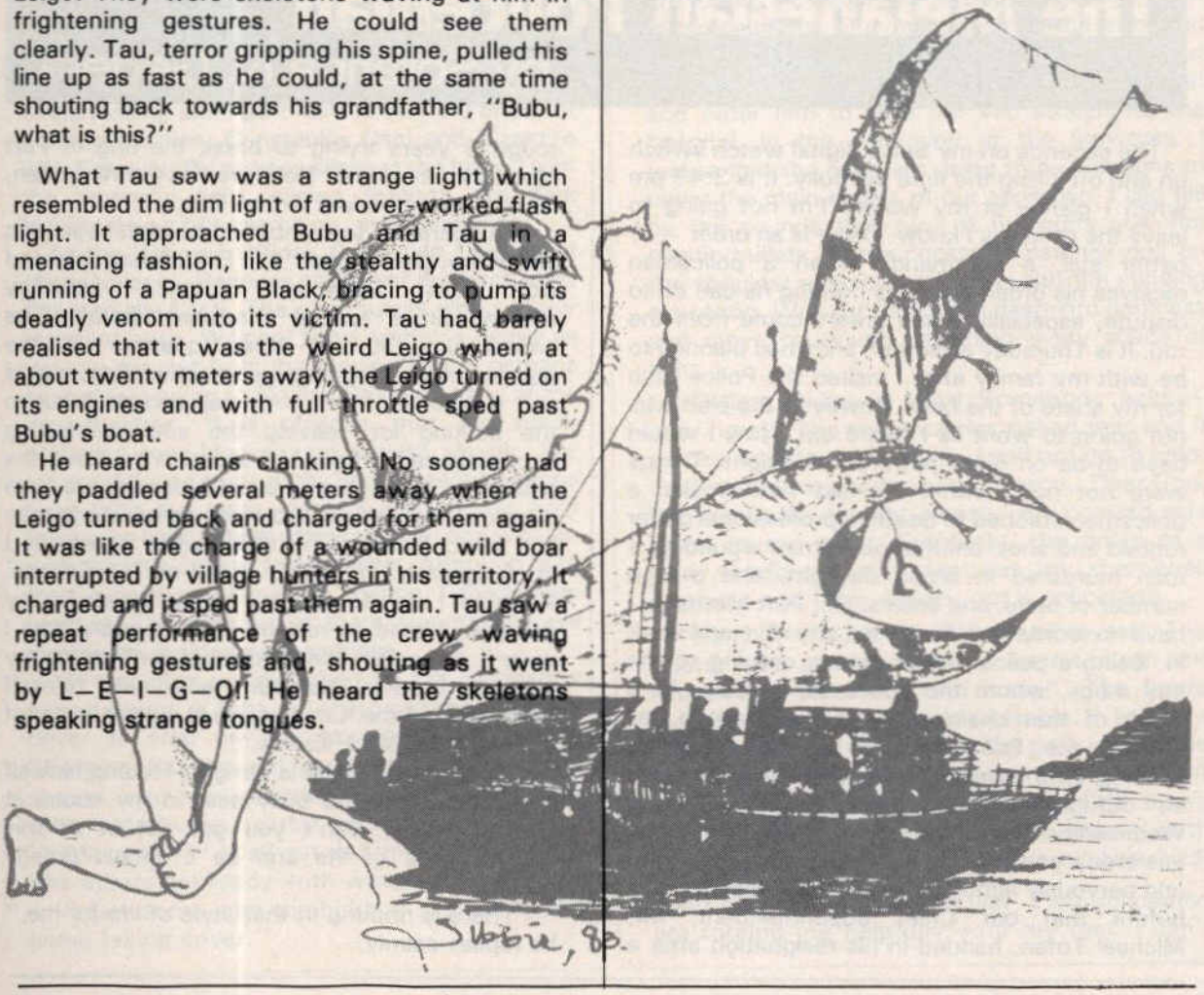
Short Stories

Bubu was silent, munching his jaws as he began to feel the night's cold air plus the aftermath of the wierd night ship that had just passed by, He whispered, "Tau, pull the anchor up, we shall go home, quick." Tau did as his grandfather instructed, and they both paddled home.

On reaching safety in the village, Tau reiterated his latest experience with Leigo. That night they returned home with a poor catch.

This was Bubu's second encounter with the Leigo. The other was again when he had gone fishing one evening. Bubu's hair, coloured by the salt water and sun, was blonde. His face, wrinkled, was sun tanned. He had a muscular build, the mark of physical labour that is necessary for sea work. His hands and fingers were rough and coarse like those of sandpaper. They wore the markings of fish fins and his years of toil on the sea.

Bubu had met some dangers in his fishing ventures. On several previous occasions he had evaded the deadly killer shark and met gale forces with deadly waves. He heard of the terror the Leigo brought and its spells upon fishermen. However, until this night, he never worried about it.



Short Stories

The village folk of this coastal village, Gaire, have a long and mysterious story surrounding this strange night ship. It is said that the night ship carries a light and is believed to be crewed by the dead relatives of the Gaire folk. Moreover, when the sea is calm at night, the Leigo anchors off Dago, the village cemetary. Strange stories are told of this brief period of berth.

When the Leigo anchors off the beach, a bright light like those of the powerful beams at the Boroko Rugby League oval, come on. An hour or two of busy activity ensues.

The clanking of chains and heavy metals can be heard, coupled by distant voices speaking unfamiliar tongues, It is the language of the dead relatives. An exchange of goods and food takes place between those from the ship and those in the graveyards. This exchange is essential for the boat's further journey along the coast while calling at other village cemetaries

Nowadays, folks in Gaire have observed that the Leigo appears when it is a relatively calm night, pitch dark with a sea that is as steady as ever. It varies in the brightnes of its light but it is said to move on the sea like a floating log. It is heard that the Leigo's appearance is a bad omen to local village fishermen. It haunts them. And when the Leigo's light appears, the village fishermen collect their fishing lines and paddle home, knowing that no matter how hard they try to catch fish, their effort will be in vain for they will return home empty handed apparently from the spell of the Leigo.

That night as he tucked himself with his blanket on his mat to close his eyes, Tau recalled the events he had just encountered with his grandfather. Immediately, his memory flashed back to one of the interesting stories he had read in the school — a novel called 'The Old Man and the Sea' written by E. Hemmingway. Presently, he heard a dog bark, apparently being disturbed in its sleep by a passerby. He heard his grandfather strike the lime pot for his night's buai chewing and heard his mother snoring the night away.

The Melanesian Policeman

by Sorariba N. Gegera

The seconds on my Seiko digital watch switch on and off killing the time painfully. It is 3:45 pm when I glance at my watch. I'm not going to leave the office as I know. Order is an order — or better still, a command. When a policeman receives his orders, there is nothing he can do to dispute, especially when orders come from the top. It is Thursday afternoon and I had planned to be with my family after I visited the Police Club for my share of the beer. However, the plan was not going to work as I found out. Now I would have to be on night patrol till midnight. Things were not right within the last two weeks: a policeman stabbed to death; a professional golfer robbed and shot; another policeman wounded; a man murdered in broad daylight, and a high number of break and enters. Oh, Port Moresby, I have no words to describe the city I live and work in. Being a police officer means nothing to the city thugs, whom the public call rascals. As a result of that chain of what we lawmen call crimes, the Prime Minister of the country, backing up the police force, eventually declared an outright war on crime in the city on Wednesday December 3, 1981. That was yesterday and here I am, slumped in my chair, and nervously lighting a cigarette. It was the day before that our Chief Superintendent, Mr, Michael Toten, handed in his resignation after a tough 3 years trying to break the ring of Port Moresby city crime. Now we have a new man, Chief Superintendent Anton Goro.

The operation to combat crime is to begin this afternoon. Our Project '21' Elite Squad returned from North Solomons Province yesterday evening on a special chartered aircraft. The orders brought out three quarters of the policemen working indoors to active duty, nights and weekends. I fix on my cap and stroll out to the parking lot, leaving the cool comforting airconditioned office. My squad is to leave the base at 4:30 pm, but as usual, I just want to have a look at the vehicle and meet some of my men and chat. I caress my hard-leather holder as I stroll liesurely. It usually gives me confidence. Although I am allowed only plastic bullets for my pop-gun, I tend to rely on it more every time I wear it. Especially the thought of confronting my younger brother, Kamburi, who calls himself Pexy, King of the Kanakas. He is a gang leader of the Six Mile 'Black Kaivas.'

"Pexy," I say as he is hungrily feeding himself with some rice and bully beef in my house at Gerehu, "Why don't you get out of all this bullshit style of life and be a simple orderly citizen?"

"There is nothing in that style of life for me," he replies calmly.

"Oh come on, you can try some odd jobs around the place," I say, perhaps for the hundredth time. In all his visits to my place, the subject upsets him a lot, but he never has any intention of quitting. He needs money. This is a hard situation to work out. I, a police officer, the lawman, and my brother, a rascal, a youth whose profession is breaking the law. "I would never like to see you in one of those stinking cells in Boroko Police Station," I say. "It would be embarrassing for me."

"It's my life. You were lucky you finished your high school education — Father never had the money for all of us. Bokoro is in grade 8 because you helped; me — you were in training and no one apart from Daddy could help send me to school. The other two are still at primary, I tell you, I help them a bit even though I am not a working man." Pexy is silent again, eating.

I feel guilty and ashamed in front of my wife Hilda and her sister Nelly. Sandra, our baby is fast asleep in the bilum suspended on a hook connected to one of the hardwood beams below the ceiling. Pexy is right, blood rascal; I love him as part of my blood.

The patrol van speeds down the Guise Drive towards the Waigani Offices. I am just nervous and shaky. It shows when I try to handle the lighter. Corporal Poiki behind the wheel notices it. "Sir, you alright?" he asks without turning to face me.

"I'm okay, Corporal, maybe just tired, that's all," I reply with a sigh. I never want to show any part of my weakness to my men. It is very embarrassing and I puff hard to feel the effect of burning nicotine. Constables Osiri and Meakoro with Sergeant Piripo keep silent at the back. I turn the powerful light, slicing through the dark blanket of a night searching, ever searching.

At the Waigani Offices Constable Osiri and I change places. He takes control of the torch and I move to the back. The van cruises along at our standard pace. Waigani Drive traffic is heavy as we can see out from the moving lights, perhaps everyone is going to Skyline Drive-in or any of the city theatres. It is obvious that our boys, enforcing road-blocks, make them slower. We are conditioned to be alert. Sergeant Piripo keeps busy with the radio, while I just let my eyes follow the light. I think of my old man and woman with the little ones at the Squatter. Although I see them whenever I have the chance, I always am worried. The thought of them starving always pierces my insides with sadness.

My thoughts are disturbed by the Sergeant's concentration of light and sharp command for the driver to step on the gas for P.S.A. Haus. "Keeping moving and don't you be slow" he shouts over our radioman who is calling the other patrol vans nearby to come in.

"What is it?" I call out as I hold my pop-gun. The others are ready with weapons.

"I saw some men climbing up the walls, and some taking cover."

Our blue lights flash and spin crazily as the siren gives out the usual war cry. "Steady all of you, we don't know what weapons they have with them," I command as the driver swings the van to shed light on our objective. A sudden smash of windscreen, and Constable Osiri moans and flings his head out the window. Sergeant Piripo ducks with several cuts. "That's a shotgun! It's coming from the second floor!" I get out fast, forcing the fear away and run, firing with sergeant sending off a flare. The flare illuminates the area of the P.S.A. complex. The man with the shot-gun stands out to release the fire works. I feel the barrel pointed at me. Any split second now it will fire I think, and I dive, hurting my shoulders. The ground, just a metre beside me, shoots up like an invisible force of spirits uprooting as the deafening bang of the weapon echoes. This is not what I see in movies; this is real, I think with mounting fear of death.

Osiri is in a critical situation, one of my best young men. "Shit!" I spit with anger and fear boils in my blood. Sergeant Piripo and Constable Meakoro charge blindly to escape the line of fire while I make my way back to the van in record time, to get our own shot-gun. I fire blind as other vans begin to park with reinforcements. Our men overrun the area and out-flank the possible routes of escape. Without hesitation, I get hold of a Corporal who jogs past and order him to take our van straight to the hospital. In the confusion of the fireworks, I realise that the gang are using three weapons to cover the main angles of our approach. I can tell by the sounds that two of the guns only fire plastic bullets. Some constable catches one on the shoulder and rolls painfully with the stinging sensation. Without thinking, I dash into darkness and move cautiously, avoiding every shade of light.

"Officer Diriba is shot! Somebody help — over here!" The voice carries naked fear and it comes from my right flank. I will not go to help. I will avenge my comrades, I reason. 'Dear God, let me not die tonight please,' my coward side prays in my mind. Suddenly, the noise of a body landing nearby captures my sharpened instincts and I see a man, not a policeman.

"Halt," I roar, not really sure of myself. The figure, taller and bigger than I, starts to run and I level and scream. "Halt I say!" The figure stops and whirls around, unstable. I see in a flash, Pexy, and feel a piercing pain in my side before I go deaf with my own gun release. A scream reports in the mountains and the figure falls, head down. I kneel slowly, heavy with pain, on the spot where I had stood and fired.

'God please don't let him die!' Two policemen are forcing me helpfully onto my feet. I can't

hear what they are saying, but I say;"I want to see that man I shot."

An officer and three policemen are looking over the fallen man as we get there. I see the man clearly by the powerful spot light. I had shot and killed Kamburi, my own blood brother, my mother's son. I feel my head spin. I know I am bleeding heavily and I feel sleepier than ever.

I open my eyes and the glare of fluorescent lights forces me to close them again. The ceiling is all white. "Where am I?" I try talking but my mouth is dry. My head is heavy, my nostrils catch the usual smell of the hospital, my abdomen is bandaged. Fresh piercing pain shoots up from my left side when I try to move.

"Don't move," the female voice sings and I feel the touch, tender and comforting. I keep my eyes closed. "What's your name?" the voice again.

"Samson," I respond weakly.

"Samson what?"

"Samson Kakito."

"Where do you work?" the annoying and yet sweet voice spars on.

"I am a Police Officer."

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as you are beautiful and I am half dead — get some water." There is silence and seconds later I feel the cold touch of a container on my lips. A hand supports my neck and I sip greedily.

"Can you open your eyes?" the voice comes on. I try and then my eyes hurt real bad.

"I'm weak," I mumble.

"Your wife is here," she says.

"Sam." It is Hilda's voice and I feel her soft fingers on my face caressing. "Sam are you alright?" the voice is shaky. I know she is in tears.

I don't answer her question but I say, "I killed Kamburi." I lose my manly core and tears flow loose from my weak closed eyes.

Hilda is weeping silently. "Please, Mrs. Kakito would you please sit quietly away from the patient and not talk to him? He has just come out of the surgery an hour ago. We'd like to have the patient rested thoroughly," the voice directs Hilda.

"Sister Mavis! Some policemen wish to visit your patient. Thomas just rang from Enquiries." The voice of a female is accompanied by the hurrying dit-dat of sandals.

"Not now — just tell them that. How many times are they going to ask? Oh, Sister Pauline!"

"Yes Sister?"

"Page Doctor Sere. The patient has come around and is talking now." I feel the presence of Sister Mavis beside my bed, the smell and the air tell me.

"Sister, can you have the lights out so I may try my eyes." That seems my longest speech and it stirs up a sharp pain below my left ribs. I force my eyes open and hold them like that, blink twice, and stare up at Sister Mavis. 'So this is the owner of the nice voice,' I tell myself. I can move my head. Hilda is staring when my eyes meet her's. She sits at the far corner, slumped on the chair, looking as though she has been sick for a week. "Kids?" I say.

"Home with Charlotte," she responds quickly, somewhat relieved. Sister Mavis leaves the cubicle. Hilda leaves the chair and walks up to me, "What are we going to do" she pleads, holding my left hand — trying desperately to hold back the tears.

"I'm finished," I said.

"What do you mean Sam?" she is scared.

"From the Force. I've served this bloody Force for eight years and all the things I tried doing have all turned out wrong."

"Sam, I don't understand."

"I am quitting Hilda, as soon as I leave this bloody place of the half-deads, question me no more on the matter."

Just then Sister Mavis makes her entrance followed by Doctor Sere. "How are you feeling Officer Kakito?" the Doctor's rich growl asks with a smile. The Doctor is very dark complexioned and bearded, not very big. Signs of baldness show and threaten his age. 'He must be from North Solomons' I think.

"Doctor?"

"Yes Samson?"

"I would be interested to know about Officer Diriba and Constable Osiri."

"Yes-Sir." He scratches his hair lightly. "Osiri has very little chance. He caught it in the face. I understand he is your man." He looks at me.

"Yes," I say.

"I'm sorry," he continues. "Officer Diriba, well — he may pull through, hopefully. Really I cannot give a clear report on their conditions, as I am assigned to you and the others who have had minor injuries. However, I was beside Dr. Chanlton when Officer Diriba was taken in," he ends with a shrug.

"And the gang members?"

"Four died at the scene and two hospitalized," he replies briefly. "You feeling any sort of pains?" the Doctor asks.

"Only when I try to move and when I talk too much."

"Ye — I thought you'd say that. Try not to talk and rest most of the time. Ask Sister Mavis if you need anything. I'll get back to you later." He leaves. Four dead, he had said. One of them was my brother and I was my brother's killer. Policemen say I shot him in the course of duty, but I know better; I am a criminal, a murderer. How will my old folks take it? I know that the Police do not usually blow off their operational

activities, but keep them confidentally. The next and only person would be Hilda. I have to tell her because I need to tell somebody, get somebody to share it — to make me feel a little comfrotable. I glance through the louvres. The trees hide the setting sun from me. 'Why didn't I die?' The question springs to torture my mind. I am on the top floor cubicle and I can look down and see the other wards and their patients and guardians moving about. "I am the last of the policemen," I mumble absent-mindedly to myself.

"Sam, what is it?"

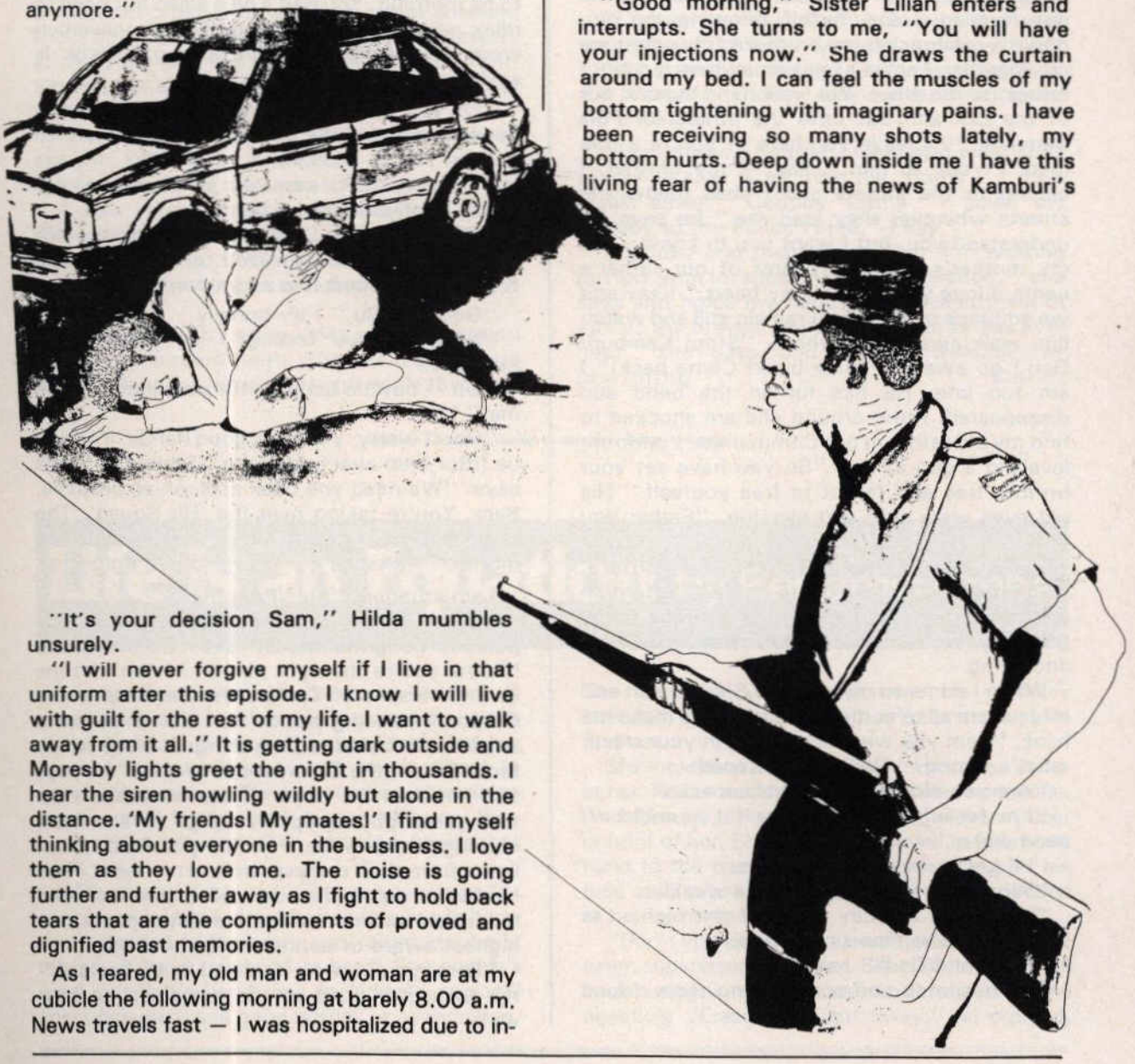
'Hilda! I forgot.'

"What did you say, Sam? I didn't hear you properly," she asks again.

"Nothing."

"But Sam I heard you say something," Hilda insists. She is near my bedside and we stare at each other, with Hilda searching for words in my eyes.

"I said, Goodbye to Papua New Guinea Royal Constabulary and the uniform. I don't like it anymore."



"It's your decision Sam," Hilda mumbles unsurely.

"I will never forgive myself if I live in that uniform after this episode. I know I will live with guilt for the rest of my life. I want to walk away from it all." It is getting dark outside and Moresby lights greet the night in thousands. I hear the siren howling wildly but alone in the distance. 'My friends! My mates!' I find myself thinking about everyone in the business. I love them as they love me. The noise is going further and further away as I fight to hold back tears that are the compliments of proved and dignified past memories.

As I teared, my old man and woman are at my cubicle the following morning at barely 8.00 a.m. News travels fast — I was hospitalized due to injuries. My old mother kisses me all over my face, cuddles my left hand in her spent-out bosom and weeps bitterly. I wonder whether they know about Kamburi. My old father sits near. Hilda sits and weeps silently. I start to feel relieved when my mother says, "Kamburi should have been here and stayed with Hilda. He stays away for weeks and we don't know where he stays. Is that where they shot you, my son?" she asks sadly, pointing to the linen-covered and bandaged ribs.

"Yes," I reply, feeling weak. 'Good old Police Public Relations,' I think — they have not released the names of the killed gangsters, only ours. My old man wants to hear what happened. "I'll tell you later, when I feel better," I say.

"This job of yours is very dangerous, you should leave it and find a new job — I'm worried about Hilda and the children," my father is saying throughtfully.

"Good morning," Sister Lilian enters and interrupts. She turns to me, "You will have your injections now." She draws the curtain around my bed. I can feel the muscles of my bottom tightening with imaginary pains. I have been receiving so many shots lately, my bottom hurts. Deep down inside me I have this living fear of having the news of Kamburi's

death exposed. I know that the Police will release the names of the dead after positive identification. How will my old parents take it? I get restless and worried.

"Have you been getting enough rest?" it is Sister Lilian. "Your blood pressure is very high. That will cause excessive bleeding; we might be forced to put you on drips." She is flipping through some papers.

"I've been on this bed ever since — resting," I say.

"No, you are thinking and talking too much — you need to sleep and relax," she says as she leaves the cubicle and returns a minute later. "These valium tablets will put you to sleep," she drops two 20 milligram tabs on my accepting hand. I get the water from her and drain it down with the tablets.

My dreams are heart-breaking. Kamburi is begging me not to shoot him, while I hold the gun levelled. I see myself throwing the gun down — embracing my brother in my arms; we cry together. I am in a cell somewhere. I cannot recognize the place. We walk hand in hand out of the cell and out onto the streets of Port Moresby. "I'll leave you here — you're a free man," I say to him. "Yes — my brother, I belong to the streets and I shall follow the streets wherever they lead me," he says. "I understand you, but I want you to know — as my mother's son and bearer of our father's name, I love you with all my heart," I say and we embrace once more. I remain still and watch him walk away to nowhere. "Stop! Kamburi! Don't go away — come back! Come back!" I am too late. He has turned the bend and disappeared. I turn around and am shocked to find my old father in our Commander's uniform, levelling a gun at me. "So you have set your brother free and forgot to free yourself." His old eyes were cold and piercing. "Father you -e."

"Call me by my rank!" he orders. "Commander," and I try to come to attention and salute him. He fires and shoots me in my guts, my thighs, my upper arm. I am screaming and dying.

When I come to my senses, Sister Lilian and Hilda seem all over me. Blinking lights make me blink. "Sam you were screaming in your sleep, what's wrong?" Hilda is frightened.

"Are you alright?" Sister Lilian asks.

"I'm feeling the pain now," I mumble. "I need water," I say dryly.

"I'll get some," Sister leaves.

"What time is it?" I ask Hilda weakly.

"You slept the day and half the night. I'ts 2:45 am," she reports nervously.

"Mum and Dad?" I ask.

She hesitates and says, "Sam, they found out."

"How?" I am jumpy.

"The parents of other gang members. They have taken it real bad. You were asleep and I was there with them until half and hour ago."

"Where?"

"Near the Morgue. There's a crowd. Charlotte brought some food. I left it with them. They are taking it so hard and I'm worried." She is in tears. "Simon came and saw you asleep so he went down to be with our old people. He is taking care of them," she says wiping her tears. Simon is her brother. He works with Wormald Security Services. "He brought some food and I'm keeping it for you," Hilda says, trying to be brave.

"I can't eat," I say. "Do you think they know . . . ?"

"No, common story — Police."

"Ye, it's better that way," I say and receive the icy cold container of water from Sister Lilian.

"Do you want something to read? It's going to be morning. You had a nice sleep but need to relax your body and mind. Some policemen were here while you were asleep," Sister is saying.

"Oh yes, Sam, I forgot to tell you. Inspector Lucas Tama and the others. I don't know their names," Hilda joins in.

"They wish to see you in the morning," Sister Lilian says and leaves.

"Goodday Sam." Inspector Tama's voice booms as he materialized at my bedside, flanked by a constable and a corporal.

"Goodday Sir," I try bravely.

"How are you feeling?" his usual rough manners.

"Oh — not too bad. It's the pain that is killing me," I say.

"Don't worry, you're in good hands. You will be fitter than ever in no time," Inspector Tama says. "We need you back as soon as possible, Sam. You're taking over the 'Hit Squad'. The chair is yours and I'm off to Rabaul within a month." He takes my left hand in a tight grip.

I am stunned. "Me? Promoted?"

"There is no one else besides you. My personal congratulations. Take it from me Sam, I know you're the right person — don't let me down," Inspector Tama says. He turns to the Corporal standing beside him and takes out a small black box and then brings it close to my face. "From the Commander to you," he says and removes the cover of the box. Just then two press photographers barge in and start clicking away while I remain paralized. Flash lights from their cameras irritate my eyes. Then I see what was in the box, a silver shield shaped medallion awarded to the bravest coppers, the highest award of honour in our business.

"Sam, you've won it — you lucky bastard," the Inspector grins as the pressmen go haywire.

"I — I don't know," I mumble. The opened black box is thrust into my hand and I see the inscriptions: 'Yopare Samuel Thomas Kakito'. O.H.M.S. for Bravery. The Commonwealth Coat of Arms and Papua New Guinea Coat of Arms were set out, each on one side of the worded column.

"Inspector Kakito, my congratulations." I hear the voice and look up. God! the Commissioner of Police is there followed by the ever smiling Commander! The cubicle is crowded. It is just like a beautiful dream. I try to shift my body and greet the pair of VIP's but my ribs scream in pain. The curtains close to breed black darkness and deafness. I am floating and passing quietly in the dark space.

When I come around, only Hilda, a nursing Sister and Simon, my brother-in-law are there. "Sam," Hilda calls softly, "you passed out and fell into a deep sleep."

"Where are all those . . . " I start to ask.

"They left six hours ago Sam," the Sister says with a smile as she feels around my wound delicately. The smell of sweet smelling fresh flowers fills the cubicle. I see the flowers in the vase and the little black box beside it. Several get-well cards lie in a neat pile. I know they are all from the police.

"Samuel, a reporter from N.B.C. is waiting to see you. Will you be able to talk to her?" Sister asks and as I nod she leaves the room.

A slim young reporter enters with a smile. She is beautiful with a pure brown complexion and the neat afro. "Hi, I'm Cathy from N.B.C. News. You're Inspector Samuel Kakito I understand?"

"Yes," I say, trying to smile with admiration at her well-formed teeth. She has a shorthand note book and a pen in one hand while the other

cuddles the hanging portable tap-recorder from her left shoulder.

"Care to make some comments? Everyone knows you're the bravest copper in the country with such a medal. I should say the first and only policeman in the country to be awarded the medal. My congratulation," she is smiling.

"Thanks," I reply. "I'll not only make comments but I'll tell you more than you wish to know." I make signs to Hilda. She comes over and fixes the pillows to suit me more comfortably. Cathy settles on the chair that Sister has offered. "Just tell the nation that I refuse to accept the award and the promotion. I'm finished on the Force," I say.

"What? You ...." she is shocked and keeps her mouth open.

"You heard me," I say staring into her eyes.

"Y-yess," she manages with a nod. "But, are you serious?" she asks looking worried.

"I am very serious, Cathy. Go back and write your story," I tell her, yet she remains sitting.

"What are you going to do when you leave the Force?" Cathy asks with new found courage.

I'll say nothing on that. I have said what I had to say — that is all from me, Cathy." I try a weak smile. "Goodby Cathy — pass my goodby to the Police Force," I say.

"Goodby and thanks alot Sam. I'm walking out on you to shock the whole nation," she says and holds my hand. "I'll always think of you as the bravest copper the country has ever had," she says and leaves, wearing her charming smile.

Life is an Equation by Benjamin Umba

She sat there with both hands on the desk, a pencil in her right hand and an eraser in the corner of the desk top. She held her head high, but her knees and feet vibrated as if keeping beat to some silent music. The heavy noise of walking boots grew louder and louder still, as they approached her and then stopped beside her desk.

With bowed head and, from the corner of her eye, she could see a neatly ironed pair of shorts that belonged to the exam supervisor. Her body tensed. A hand touched her head. She couldn't work out if the hand was to indicate personal encouragement and good wishes or a reprimand. She hoped it was the former. He probably intended the latter. There was only one way to find out.

She looked up at him askance. He stared down at her. For a moment he neither smiled nor spoke. And then his other hand went to the exam paper in front of her. She allowed her eyes to follow his hand to the paper and then flashed back to his face as if to ask, "So what? Isn't that supposed to be my name?"

"Don't you understand any English at all?" the exam supervisor asked her. She didn't answer. In such a situation, it was safer not to answer the question. "Erase that right away," he ordered.

Short Stories

"Who wants to know your name? Nobody asked for that! We're least interested in your personal name. Hurry and write down these numbers ..... H9284 .....," and he continued to stand beside her for a few more seconds to make sure she entered the numbers in their correct order and space before he left her.

At first, she had written JOSEPHINE KIMANA as her name but, at the supervisor's correction, she had erased that and instead wrote H9284, which was her exam number. Her left hand supported her already bowed head, while her legs vibrated faster, this time in fright. The other boys and girls, and there were thirty-four of them altogether, laughed, giggled or coughed in mockery.

"Has everyone written his or her exam number close to where it says NAME?"

"Yes, sir!" the class yelled, without any hesitation.

"Has anyone forgotten his or her number?" The class maintained its positive silence. "No one except Kimana and that has been corrected. Good! Next, you will write the name of our school, then our district and, lastly, our province. But, before you write these things down, let me hear them first, just to make sure we do not have different people coming from different provinces. We have had such people before. Now, first of all, your school?"

"Saint Jamin's School, Niglongo," the class almost sang in unison.

"Your District?"

"Gembogl!"

"And your Province, please?"

"Chimbu," the class roared happily, as if it were the name of a national hero who was proclaimed at a public rally during the general elections.

"All right! Now write those down on your exam paper. All of them should appear on the first page. Now, put them in their correct places and start on the exam itself right away," he instructed and, turning to the blackboard, he wrote:

GRADE 6 FINAL EXAM
TUESDAY, 28th SEPTEMBER, 1977
SUBJECT: MATHEMATICS
STARTING TIME: 8.40 a.m.
FINISHING TIME: 11.00 a.m.

Except for a few grumbling noises and silent protests against the short time allocated to them, all was quiet again as they nervously commenced their tests.

Josephine Kimana, alias H9284, however, had her own and more serious problems. Two hours and twenty minutes was plenty of time for her. She knew that. But she didn't know if it was worthwhile sitting down for the exam. The very first question had already posed a threat to her. It ran thus:

If A = B, B = C and C = D, then A = D . TRUE/FALSE

For the answer, she had to cross out whichever of the two possible answers wasn't applicable. It looked too simple a question to be asked at a Grade 6 Final Exam but, nonetheless, it was there. Kimana didn't know which one to cross out.

At first sight, she wanted to cross out FALSE. Then she wanted to cross out TRUE. As she kept staring at the question, she suddenly decided that somehow and for some unknown reason, both answers were correct. The answer was both TRUE and FALSE. She studied that possible answer more thoroughly and angrily and almost tearfully she realised that her answer was impossible on the exam paper. The question asked for one of the two possible answers. To answer both meant crossing out neither of them. That automatically meant a wrong answer, because an unanswered question, to the examiner, as they had been warned time and time again by their class teacher, always meant a wrong answer. She had to choose one answer, although both were correct. If A was equal to B, B was equal to C and C was equal to D, must A then be equal to D?

Kimana looked around the classroom. Some students were busy writing. A few were sharpening their blunt pencils. Others were furiously erasing their mistakes. The turning of pages indicated that a few had already proceeded on to the second page of the exam paper while still others looked up to the ceiling with facial expressions indicating maximum concentration and effort. No one perspired as yet, but frequent heavy breathing indicated a steady progress towards it. Josephine would have sat there like a dummy, had it not been for the class teacher's advice to briefly skim through all the questions before actually answering any. Skimming would ensure some orderly thinking, besides helping to avoid what could otherwise bring a heavy strain to their tiny heads.

She breathed out her relief at not having to answer the first question just then, relaxed her muscles and allowed her eyes to wander to the other questions.

Number H9284 was only twelve years old, stood almost four and a half feet tall and was all health, sunshine and beauty. She had gone to school when she was six. Technically, that was considered under-age. However, she was so big for her age that the headmaster, who was also her maternal uncle, decided to let her go to school anyway. Her father, a policeman, a Senior Constable by rank, was the headmaster's only loyal drinking companion. This virtue was taken into serious consideration by the headmaster when Josephine was first presented for enrolment.

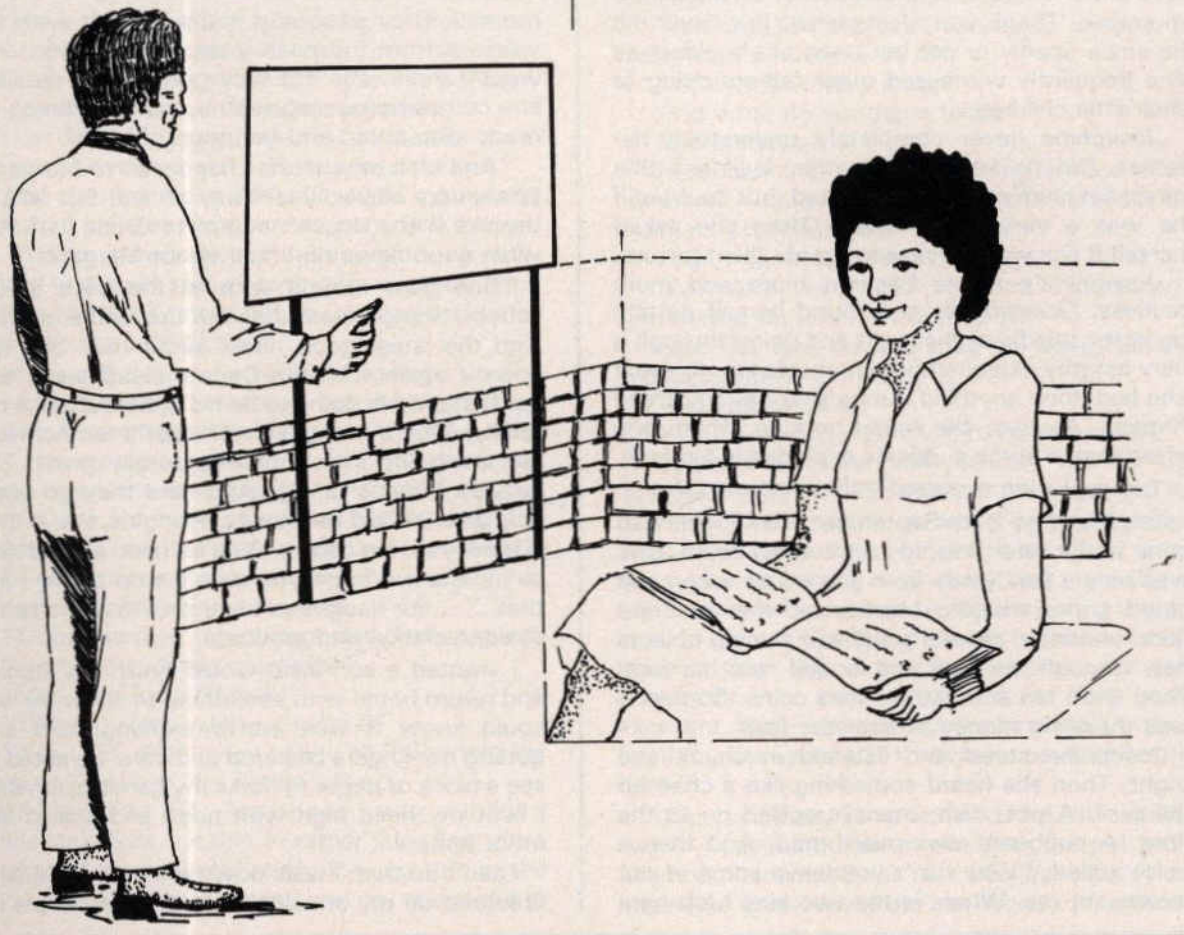
She completed First Grade successfully. Second Grade was a success, having come sixth

in a class of forty. The Third Year wasn't very outstanding. In fact, the class teacher for that particular year had personally remarked to her that she could have done better. During her Fourth Year, Josephine recovered and came third in her class. Academic performance in Grade Five was most impressive. She even emerged as the dux of that year. Grade Six studies didn't pose any threats or difficulties. The headmaster assured her at one time during the year that if she kept at it consistently, she could be sure of a place in high school, most probably at Kerowagi Provincial High School. And, after high school, university, or so Josephine promised herself secretly. She wondered if her parents, particularly her father, shared her dreams.

With deep regrets, Josephine realised that she didn't know her father, Kimana, as well as she knew her mother. He spent very little time with his family. Was it because of his work demands? That didn't sound acceptable. He seemed to be a very lonely man. There was something bothering him, some internal suffering which he shared with a few men, but never with his own family. He'd come back from work late in the afternoon, very exhausted. He talked very little, rarely smiled or joked with the family, ate very little and retired before eight in the evenings.

In the mornings, Kimana emerged with large rings around his red and swollen eyes. He'd wash his face, disappear for work without any breakfast and not be seen until five or six in the afternoon. If he was out on patrol, Kimana was away for long months. That seemed like a definite pattern, as far back as Josephine could remember. And she was frightened at the thought that the body and soul he was composed of, as the Anglican pastor had preached to them each Sunday, was gradually dissolving into beer and spirits.

Josephine's mother seemed almost like a great grandmother to her. Where her father hadn't shown much regard for the family, mother had tried to compensate by being annoyingly too concerned about them. Maybe she knew of Kimana's problems. Mother was always at home and talked too much, though most of the time she was either talking to herself or saying nothing. She used to joke and laugh a lot, even if there was nothing to laugh about. She ate from a plate that was no bigger than a normal saucer and usually slept after midnight. Whenever Josephine woke up in the middle of the night, either because of her dreams or to relieve herself outside, she'd see her mother, a well-weathered figure, sitting silently by the stove. If mother wasn't asleep at the time, she'd ask Josephine if she was hungry or sick. At other times, mother would complain that she was suffering from indigestion after having eaten too much. Such talk was a lie to Josephine.



Short Stories

Deep within her, Josephine had a special affection for her father, though she didn't completely understand what it was. Kimana didn't spend much time at home but, when he was around, little Josephine did everything possible to show him just how much she appreciated his presence. She brought a box of matches, or a glowing ember from the stove if there was no box of matches to light his cigarette or tobacco.

She made a cup of coffee or tea for him when he returned from work. Whether he drank what she prepared didn't seriously matter to her. She ironed his uniform and hung it in his closet. She prepared his bed each morning, swept his room, emptied the ashtrays and prepared a dish of hot water for him to wash his face whenever she managed to get out of bed before he did.

Josephine knew her father loved chewing betelnut and would buy some for him at the local market with the money her mother gave her to buy lunch at the school canteen. Often, through rain or sunshine, she went to the trade store and bought tobacco or cigarettes for Kimana. Until last year, she used to make it her hobby to undo his shoes when he returned home after the day's difficult tasks. She loved doing those things for him.

Kimana's reaction to Josephine's attention was either a nod of appreciation or an indistinct, mumbled 'Thank you, Josephine!' But never did he smile openly or pat her head or shoulders as she frequently witnessed other fathers doing to their little children.

Josephine never completely understood her father. Did he have any human feelings? She never saw him angry or frustrated, but doubted if he was a very happy man. Often she asked herself if she was the reason for his silent torture.

Josephine's nights became more and more restless. Occasionally she found herself getting up in the middle of the night and going through a very lengthy examination of conscience, to see if she had done anything during that day to offend Kimana. Always, she found nothing. Then, one afternoon, a bomb suddenly exploded in her face.

The explosion occurred only yesterday afternoon, Monday, 27th September, 1977. She had gone home after finishing an English exam. She was only a few yards from the house when she heard some metallic objects hit the concrete floor. Instantly, several small and shining objects flew through the door and landed near her feet. They were ten and twenty toea coins. Someone was throwing money all over the floor.

Josephine stood and listened in shock and fright. Then she heard something like a chair hit the wall. A pot, dish, utensils spilled on to the floor. A cupboard was overturned. And then a voice yelled, "Why can't you leave some of our money for me. Where is the two kina I left here this morning? Haven't I given you enough money already for you and your children to look after yourselves? Why can't you just allow a little bit for me for my betelnut and tobacco? What is there for me to have?"

Josephine searched her little string bag for the two kina her mother had given her that morning. Father must have been referring to that two kina. It was still in her bag. She was trying to take it out to hand back to her father when she nearly fainted at hearing his next words.

"..... I wanted at least one son, woman. And I wanted him very desperately. But who have you given me? Four helpless and hopeless girls .....

"Where's Veronica? Where is she? What happened to her? She completed Grade 10, went to the College of Allied Health Sciences. She was supposed to be there for at least five years. After three years she is not there any more. She's somewhere else, living with God knows who. How am I going to get the money back I paid for her education?

"You think I am being funny? All right! Look what happened to Maria! She also finished Grade 10 at Kerowagi Provincial High School, then entered Kuli National High School for Grades 11 and 12. We thought she would save us. See what has happened? Just before completing Grade 12, she is dismissed. You want to know what the Principal said about her in his letter?

" 'She keeps disregarding the school's rules and regulations — invites boys to her room or wanders off in the middle of the night to their rooms.' They even say she's done it with the workers from the nearby cocoa plantation and, what's more, she not only gets kicked out, but she comes home pregnant. Is that something for me to clap about and be proud of? Is it?

"And look at what has happened to Margaret! She's very clever, yes! They all are! But what's the use if she doesn't complete Grade 10? And what good news do I hear about Margaret?

"She goes around with all the boys at the school. She goes around with the teachers even. And the latest good news about her? She has done it again with the Deputy Headmaster and her first child is going to be his contribution to my family! That's great, isn't it? That's terrific! Now we are going into something really great. The famous Kimana family. And here they go again ..... after all I did for those clever girls, this is their 'Thank you, big daddy.' You've been a good man to us and we hope you won't stop there! I like that ..... our daughters have shown us no sense of appreciation and gratitude .....

I wanted a son who would finish his studies and return home with something to show me so I could know it was worth working hard and getting my fingers blistered and sore. I wanted to see a piece of paper to make my hands clap while I kept my head high with pride and smiled like other fathers .....

I can't do that. I walk down the main road with firewood on my shoulders and I meet people on

the road and walk past them — you know what they are saying? They are all talking about us and our big girls. I wanted a son. You gave me four girls. Three of them are complete failures. Josephine is now sitting down for her Grade 6 final exam. I know she'll pass. I don't want to know her as another complete failure. Otherwise I will curse the day I was born."

That voice belonged to Josephine's father. Then the door was flung open. Kimana emerged quickly and slammed the door after. However, before stepping outside, Kimana saw Josephine and stood by the door for nearly two full minutes. The very sight of her must have paralysed him. When he did leave the house, he took the path that led to Aukenigle, where Baundo was selling hot beer.

Josephine blinked her eyes many times in an effort to delay the tears that welled up in them. She rubbed her nose and scratched one foot with the other before walking into the house with her head bent slightly forward.

Josephine was a woman. Kimana had wanted a man. Was it worth being a woman? Her life didn't seem worth living after all. She cursed the day she was born. The whole life ahead of her seemed like a curse and a nightmare to her.

She entered the house. Mother was busy resetting the cupboard, table, chairs and utensils. When she saw her daughter standing by the door, she stopped to look up and straightened her back. She tried to smile while tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Have you heard what your father and I were .....?" mother tried to ask, but her voice choked. Josephine nodded. It wasn't necessary for her mother to continue her sentence.

That evening, Josephine and her mother ate in silence and retired early. Father was still out.

Well after midnight, Josephine was awoken by a gush of chilly air flooding her room. She listened to a door slowly being opened and carefully closed and quiet steps heading for another room. Father had finally returned. A few more seconds and her eyes closed again.

Josephine thought she was the first one up and out of bed the next morning, but the bright, cool and clear morning air flooding into the house told her she was wrong. The main front door was open when she emerged from her room. At the corner, the fire in the stove was burning brightly. Kimana sat near the stove, smoking his tobacco.

"Good morning, Josephine!" he greeted her cheerfully for the first time ever.

"Good morning to you too, dad," she replied.

"How are you this morning?"

"Very fine indeed, dad!"

"Did you sleep well last night?"

"Yes I did, dad! I slept very well." She told the biggest lie of her life. Father knew.

"I hope you did, Josephine. I was out for a while last night. I came in rather late. I've got a bucket of warm water ready for you. It's in the shower room. There's soap and my towel there, too. Go and have a bath. Breakfast will be ready by the time you've had a warm shower."

"Oh, truly, dad? Thank you," Josephine replied before entering the bathroom. Mother was still tossing and turning on her bed.

Josephine would always recall the feeling of that warm water as it ran down her body — the special perfumed soap Kimana provided especially for her and daddy's own towel with which to dry herself.

"You still have your comb?" Kimana asked after she took her bath.

"No ....."

"That's all right — use mine then. Wait, I'll get it for you, Josephine." And then, "Here you are," after he returned with the comb. "Go comb your hair and get dressed. Your cup of coffee and biscuits will be ready very shortly." And, after she combed her hair, "Your hair is growing wild. You need a hair cut very badly. You also need a new set of clothes. If you come home early today, we'll go down to Alfred's store and see if we can find some clothes that will fit you. I could also give you a hair cut myself," he cheerfully offered.

"Yes please, dad!"

"What exam did you do yesterday?" he queried as they sat down to breakfast together for the first time ever.

"English!"

"That should have been very easy for you. It wasn't too difficult, was it?"

"No, it wasn't very hard."

"And what do you have today?"

"Mathematics!"

"Numbers! Oh, you like playing around with numbers. You should find that the simplest of them all. Two plus two?"

"Four," she answered him.

"Five! And we're both correct," he added. "And what do you have tomorrow?"

"Science! And on Thursday we have History and Geography. On Friday ....."

"Will that be all?"

"Yes! Friday will be the last day of the exams."

"Josephine, do the best you can. You can do it. I know you will! Put your whole heart into it. Show them you can do as much as anyone else. Your class has a lot of boys and very few girls. Boys may be strong and everything, but show them a woman can be someone they are going to have to reckon with. Women can be and are a lot smarter than the men. These exams are too simple for you. Your reports so far have been excellent. But remember, Josephine! Never take anything for granted. It always pays to work hard."

After breakfast, Kimana handed a little string bag to Josephine and, at the door, he put both hands on her shoulders. "I'm very sorry for what happened yesterday. I am very sorry, Josephine.

You must try to forget everything. I will do the same. And I will ask your mother to do the same too. I know she will. I know I will. And I know you will too. We are a small family. We are going to try to live a lot more happily. It doesn't matter what the others say or think about us. We are on our own now. What happened yesterday will never happen again, never. I'm betting on you, Josephine, because I know you will not let me down. Here — take this two kina with you for your lunch today," and he slipped a two kina bill into her little string bag. Then something warm landed on her hands and seeped into her fingers, dampening them as it flowed. It was tears. Kimana was crying. "Now go, or you will be late." And, with that, he wished her luck and best wishes.

Thus, Number H9284 dreamt while scanning the mathematics exam and then returned to the first question:

If A = B, B = C and C = D then A = D TRUE/FALSE

Different students put different answers to that question. To some it was TRUE. To others, FALSE. But, for Josephine Kimana, alias H9284, it was more than a simple mathematical equation. It was a challenge to her whole past and future life. That equation summarised the entire mathematics exam, if not the whole Grade 6 final exams. She was being asked to answer, in a few seconds, what was otherwise a life-time question and challenge.

Mathematically, the answer was TRUE. In practical living, the answer could be FALSE. She applied the equation to herself. Maybe her elder sisters could equally be A, B and C and not behave properly, but it did not necessarily follow that she would equally follow in their footsteps. Her own father had said that two plus two could be five as well as four.

Josephine Kimana suddenly knew the truth when she remembered her class teacher's remarks that mathematics was full of contradictions. She crossed out the TRUE. The final answer, for her, was FALSE. 'A' didn't have to be equal to 'D'. Josephine didn't have to be like her elder sisters. She was different. She was the contradiction in her family. The rest of the exam questions became simpler after that initial test.

THE END

Poetry

SMILE
by Arthur Jawodimbari

Driving slowly through the heavy traffic
Nothing unusual after 4.06
Along Waigani Drive
Passing numerous cars.

Some drivers with blank faces
A few a bit impatient to get home
Glasses and sun glasses
Long and short noses.

Wave of hands in a careless manner
Tooted horn in anticipation
Weary faces after work
A statue in M.P. car.

I pulled up next to a small girl
She smiled at me
I smiled back at her
Couple walked past smiling.

WHO AM I?
by David Las

Who am I?
Am I just flesh and bones?
But that can't be true,
Break my bones,
Tear my flesh,
But I still remain me.
Perhaps I am just a series of emotions.
But that also can't be true.
Emotions come and go.
I still remain me.
What then is the real me
that always remains me?

NUMBER GAMES
by Arthur Jawodimbari

Waves lashed ceaselessly on a deserted beach
Under the well lit golden sky
Coconut tree silhouetting against the sea
Our usual meeting place for our number games.

We squatted down to count the clouds
Waiting for the first evening star
Cool breeze whispered in our ears
First star had hidden behind the dark clouds.

Dozen after dozen stars appeared and twinkled
Followed by several hundred dozen stars
Clouds hid the shining diamonds
Performed a ritual to purify thousand of stars

Confused and bewildered gazed at the stars
Each star sent down a thousand kisses
In the form of soft dew drops
Inviting us to join them in the galaxies.

TREE OF LIFE
by Arthur Jawodimbari

A lone tree in the grasslands
where all living creatures take refuge
During storms and raining season
when floods cover the land.

During the days of Noah and his Ark,
our ancestors lived on your branches.
They abandoned your branches
when birds made their nests.

Men learnt to climb down.
Man taught pigs to climb up.
Sat down under the tree and dreamt.
Inspired by the singing birds.

Everyone looked to the tree of life.
The source of inspiration and hope
Sheltered all the living creatures
Failed to prevail the tornado.

All living creatures abandoned the tree.
Everyone thought the tree was broken.
The tree was strengthened for life.
Tree of life never breaks.

THE SONG OF THE ROWER
by Kumalau Tawali

Dedicated to OPM

1. The son said to his mother
The monster is defeated
Let there be a sign —
That I your son —
Your blood, your flesh
Have destroyed —
The terror of the monster's rule

2 Tie now, mother of my flesh
Mother of earth and liberty
The intestines of the monster
To this log and send
Across the ocean
To the refugees, among them
my uncles
Your brothers

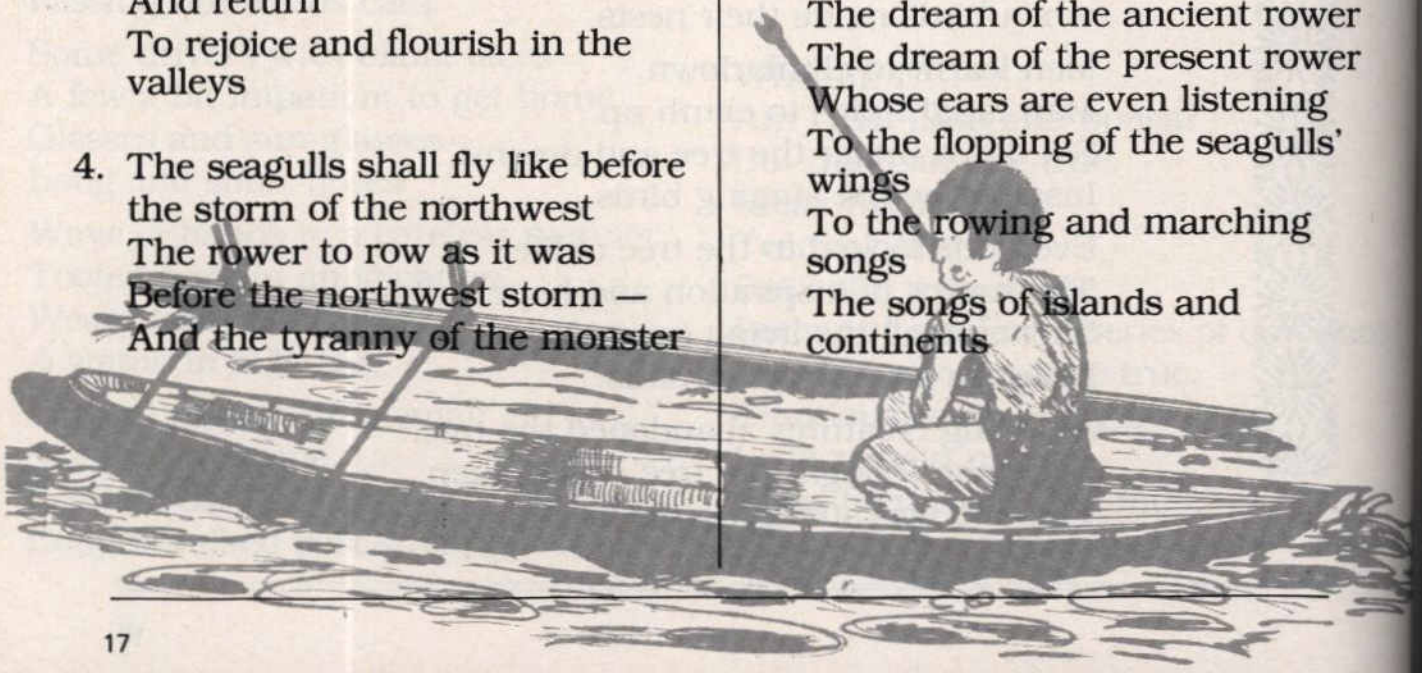
3. That they may know
That I your son
Am the master of the vanishing
island
That they may know —
The little streams flow quietly
here —
And return
To rejoice and flourish in the
valleys

4. The seagulls shall fly like before
the storm of the northwest
The rower to row as it was
Before the northwest storm —
And the tyranny of the monster

5. The rower shall swim among
the crocodiles
The dolphins shake hands with
the sharks
The seagulls fed by the tuna
The rower shall leave his canoe
unanchored
Yet currents nor tides dare
To take it away.

6. Dreams come true often
Solids melt in the heat of the
noon sun
Action often is wasteful and
fruitless
Rationalisation void and
murdering
But dreams often come true
Dreams walking on two legs
Dreams walking on a million
legs

7. Dreams bursting like dynamite
In a thousand million beating
hearts
The dream of the ancient rower
The dream of the present rower
Whose ears are even listening
To the flopping of the seagulls'
wings
To the rowing and marching
songs
The songs of islands and
continents



THE MOUNTAIN BREEZE
by Kumalau Tawali

The resting sunset sky
Opened her arms to receive the
warm body of twilight
With melodious touch
The mountain breeze descended
With love in the fragrance of a
flower
Hidden in the mystical crevice of
those loving hills.

BUT IT HURTS
by Kumalau Tawali

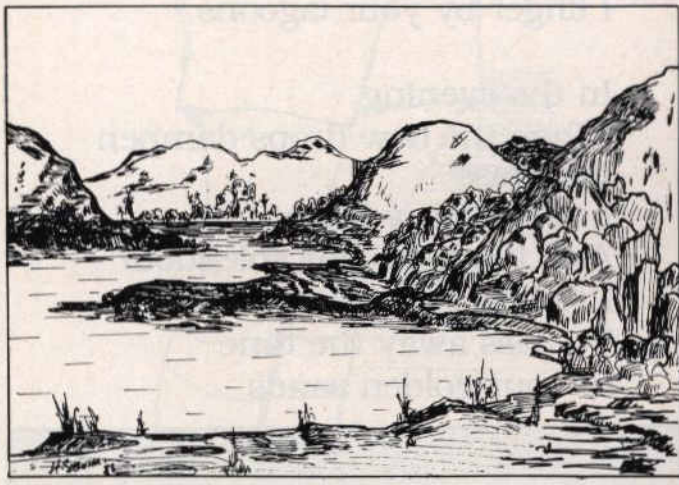
May this be a token of friendship
of a son of the South Seas
Who gives his heart to people
and gives blindly
But his heart gets hurt, real hurt ..

The pain is his own.
Like a child he gives in his joyous
innocence
His emotions to strangers
To friends.
But it hurts, real hurts .....
— This big foolish heart of his.

Must he laugh at himself
Under the golden morning sun's
rays?
Must he give this big heart of his
To others abundantly to the
strangers
to the friends and the loved ones
In love, deep warm love?
Love, blind love that sheds warm
tears
In the sweet silence of a moonlit sky?

CHARM OF THE SEA
Kumalau Tawali

You are the soft warm sea-breeze
In the cool of the day
A mirage in the Arizona offering
hope of water
To the thirst of the unknown
traveller
You are the eternal receding playful
water
Upon a lonely sandy beach
I heard you like the quiet call of
a seagull
Singing the eternal charm of the sea
to my spirit
But now the seagull is gone
Only the eternal charm lives on



IN THE HEART OF THE FOREST
by Kumalau Tawali

Here in the heart of the forest
Cool air descends
Twisting the early morning mist
Bringing quiet discordance to the spirit

In the huts women dwell
Sentenced with hard labour to polygamy
They toil each day in the garden and
pigsty
— Their wifely chores

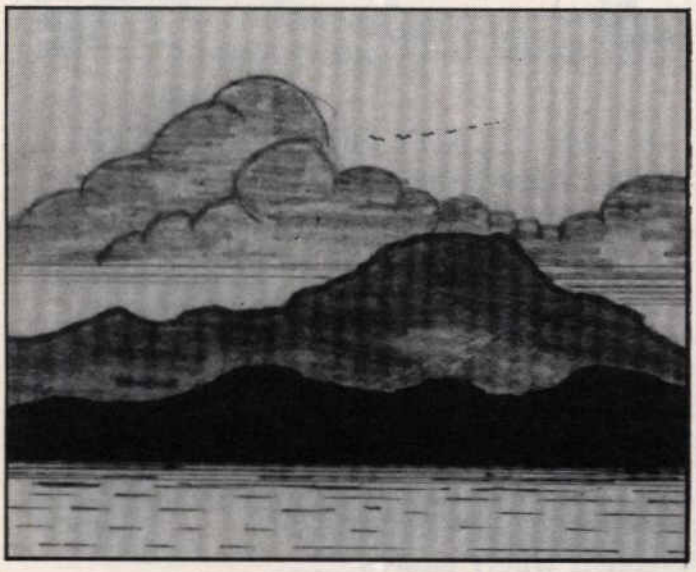
MY ISLAND
by Makeu Opa

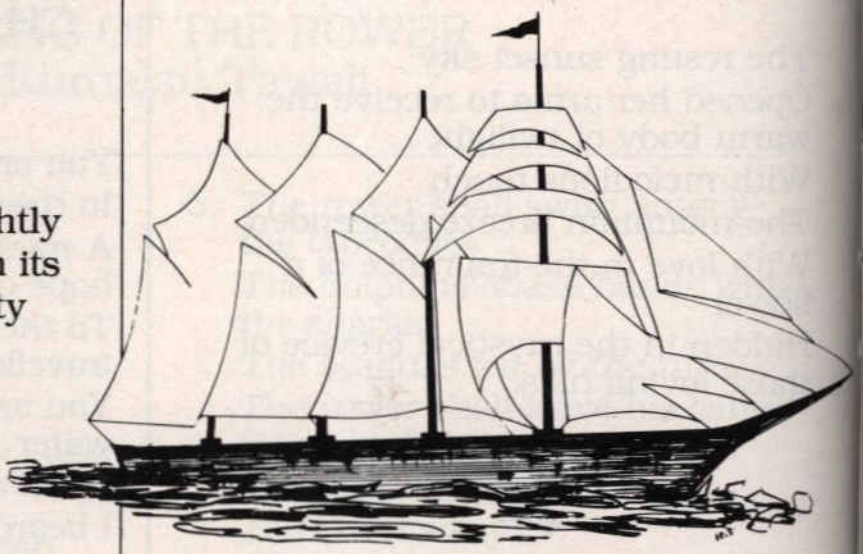
In the midst of night
When the moon shines brightly
And the sea below glitters in its
light. I wonder at your beauty

As I stroll along the shore
Listening to the echoes of
kundu drums
I stop to ponder:
"Shall I wander away from
your shores?"

At the break of dawn
When the moon goes to sleep
And the sun awakes from rest
I linger by your lagoons

In the evening
When the dew drops dampen
the grass
I retire to my kunai hut
And think of your splendour
I vow to give you my life
To pass away the time
In your golden sands





THE STRANGER'S ARRIVAL
by Makeu Opa

Out of the horizon
the ship appeared
like a dot
enlarging
as it drew nearer

Strange white faces
flashed before our eyes
at the distance
like harivu
the spirits of our dead
Never before harivus returned
in our lifetime

They brought
beads
tobacco
guns
tomahawks
calico
and
books
To buy our land
To save our heathen souls

THE WHITE BLACKMAN
by Makeu Opa

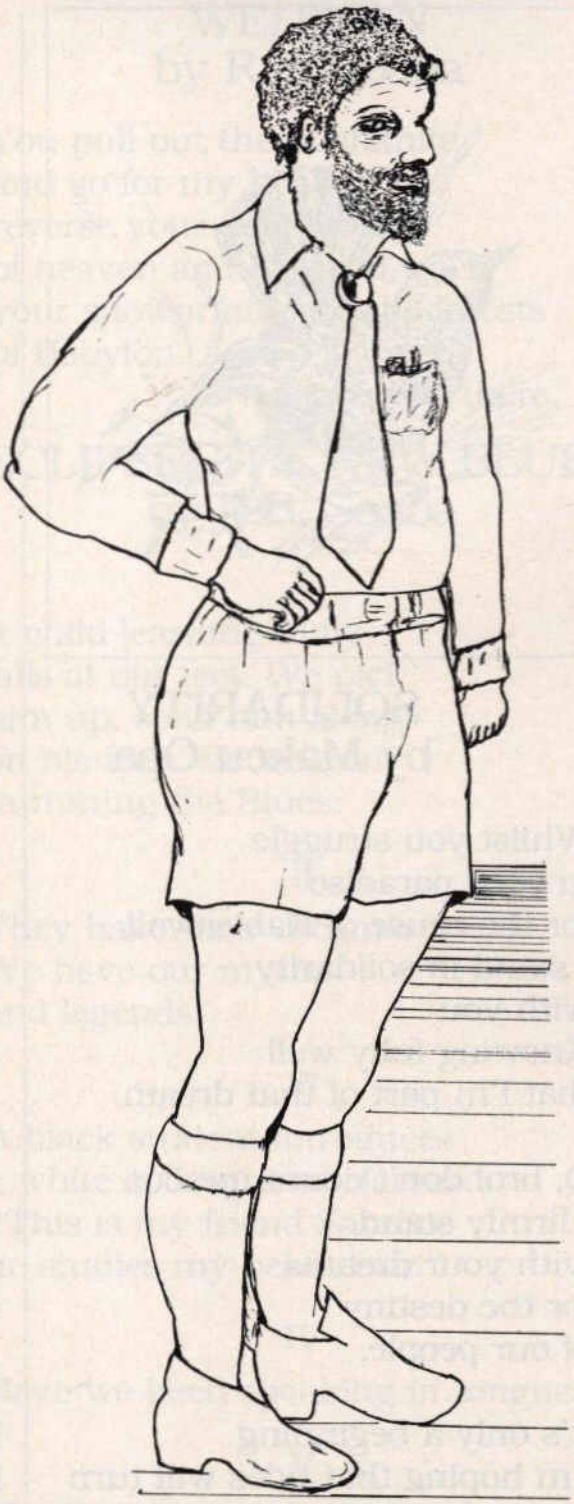
In the days of my ancestors
I lived in a little hamlet
Learning my crafts
Making my bows and arrows
Initiated into m Ualari
The manhood ceremony
I learned the magic
Of gardening and dancing
And fishing and hunting

I have left my hamlet
It stands lonely and desolate
Strange men in robes
And collars have taken me
Schooled me in their schools
Taught me the secrets of their God
Made me forsake my own
And opened their world to me
I now bubble with all their rituals
I act, sing, and dance like them

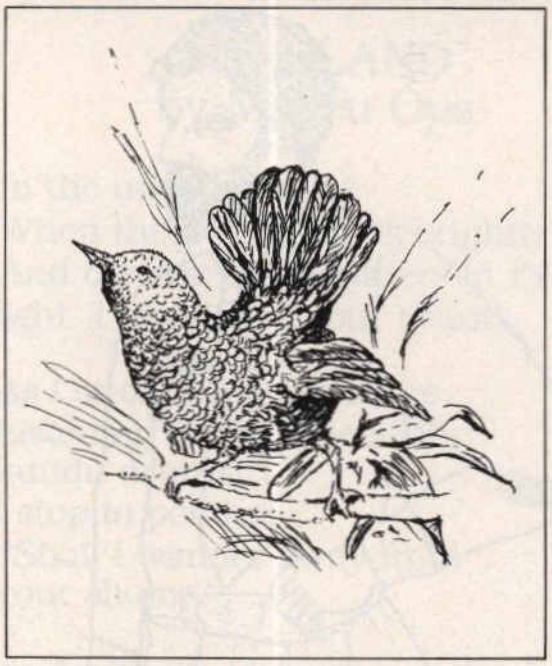
I shun my own culture
I dislike my folklores
I'd rather read Phantom comics
I call the stranger, 'masta' or
'taubada'
I try my utmost to be like them
Long socks and shiny shoes on
my feet
I look like a white-black man

My forefathers worked their gardens
They sang and laughed
Whilst clearing and digging
But I long for an office job
Where coffee and tea are served
At ten and three
I sit and dream in an office
to be paid

For keeping myself clean



I have forsaken my hamlet
For town
Where life is good?
I have freed myself from my
tribesmen
Who have not acquired western
magic



SOLIDARITY
by Makeu Opa

Whilst you struggle
in your paradise
for the cause of Kabisawali
I stand in solidarity
with you
Knowing fully well
that I'm part of that dream.

O, bro; don't count me out
I firmly stand
with your dreams
for the destiny
of our people.

It's only a beginning
I'm hoping that tides will turn
in our favour
I salute you for your conviction
and pray that
V I C T O R Y
shall be
O U R S
in the end.

JI BOANU
by William B. Ferea

Have you every parched in the night
In that tiny enclosure, surrounded
By trivial sights and monotonous silence
Unbearable to the ear?
Your eyes are weary from staring
at words a million times
Yet commands has it
That duties are to be
fulfilled.
Your back-bone cracks with burden
causing nausea. You
Desire to enter under
That warm blanket.
Owing to time that man created
For his destiny, your blood
Runs into a frenzy,
"YOU MUST HAND IT IN,"
the command again.
You remain silent in your contemplation
when ji boanu the morning bird
Sings in triumph.
You rise to the opening,
And there with its majestic rays
The son rises, embracing the universe.
You have conquered the world.

ABSURDITIES
by William B. Ferea

When you have thought of
Reaching the tower of moangkaf
the dream land
You will have enjoyed your weeping
When you discover your
Beginning footsteps.
Many, from Constantine to Einstein
Have pushed to its subtle end
The endeavour to perfect
Humanity.
Yet let it be known
To mankind that this
World is full of
Absurdities.

THIRD STANZA
by R.B. Soaba

To the memory of Stephen M,
the first Anuki martyr.

She combs her hair in the doorway
for passersby to see, humming
the song her grandfather
composed for her grandmother.

The young men pay attention
to her combing: each wave
of her hand speaks with the sea
in the distance. There is work
to be done, sigh the young men,
and walk on into the fields.

The music that her comb makes
is the third stanza of her
grandfather's song. Her
grandfather died under laws
she cannot understand.

WEITMAN
by R.B. Soaba

You pull out the bushknife
and go for my head. I
reverse your definitions
of heaven and hell and trace
your snowprints into the forests
of Babylon. And
leave you there.

ECLIPSE: THE NEW BLUES
by R.B. Soaba

I

A child learning to fly
falls at our feet. We pick
him up, send him along;
on his feet. We look on,
humming the Blues.

II

They have their dreams.
We have our myths
and legends.

III

A black student introduces
a white colleague at Harvard:
"This is my friend Sambo;
he studies my behaviour."

IV

Have we been speaking in tongues?

V

This is how it really is:
one either arrives up, or down;
the world's either Wanpis
or Lusman.

The new Blues.
The new Blues.

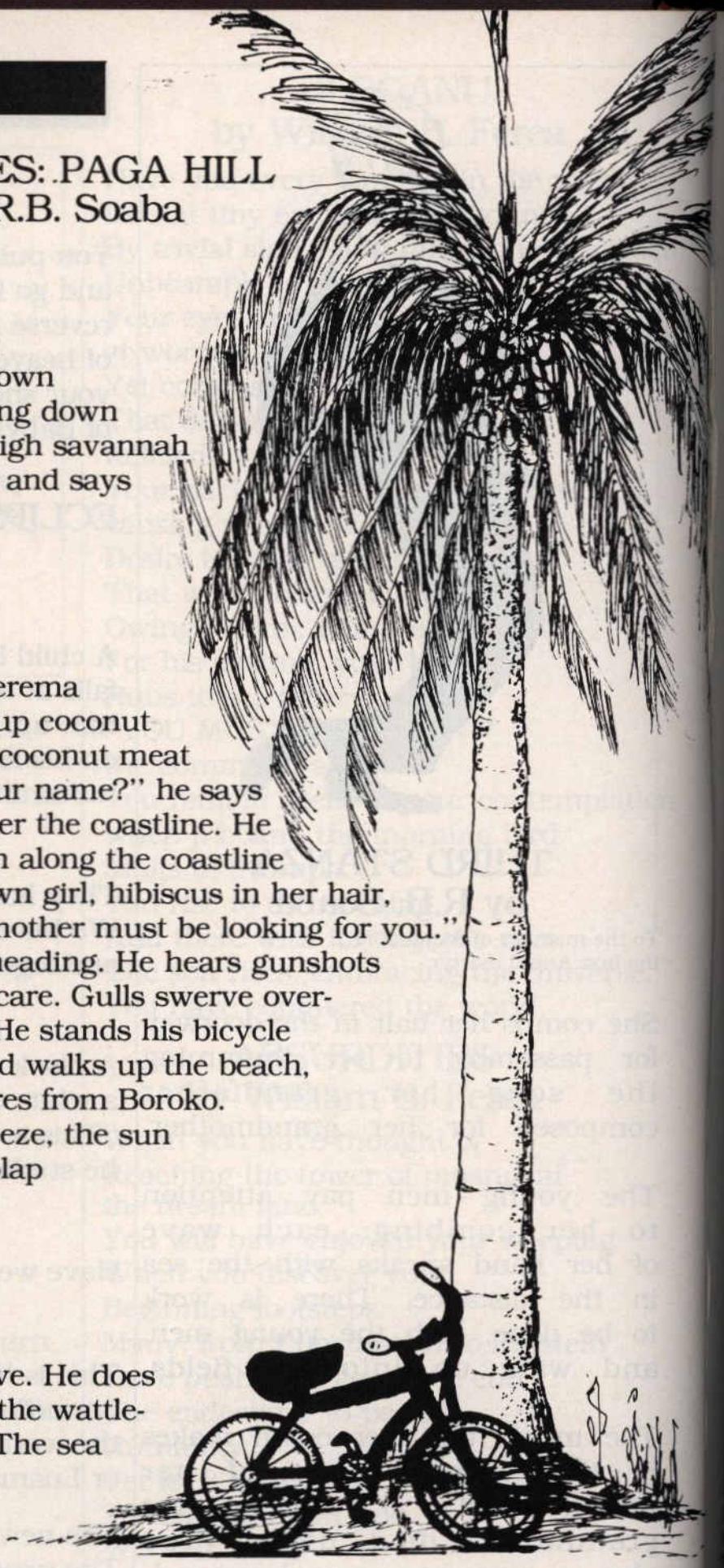
WATTLES: PAGA HILL
by R.B. Soaba

To MGSB Gaesasara

The wattles
in their season shed
their petals around their own
feet. The young man riding down
to this sanctuary of the high savannah
on a bicycle jumps down and says
"Hi!" He has just turned
nineteen and does
not care.

Over in the distance
along the beach, some Kerema
youngsters are climbing up coconut
trees. He thinks of green coconut meat
in his throat. "What's your name?" he says
to the white heat-haze over the coastline. He
waits for the flash of teeth along the coastline
and does not care. A brown girl, hibiscus in her hair,
walks by saying, "Your mother must be looking for you."
He is not here for the beheading. He hears gunshots
in his head. He does not care. Gulls swerve over-
head, turn for the coast. He stands his bicycle
against a coconut tree and walks up the beach,
his head full of bad lectures from Boroko.
He walks up with the breeze, the sun
strong in his face. His laplap
flutters with the song
of the ocean.

He does not care.
His head is full of bad
sermons from Angau Drive. He does
not care. He walks up to the wattle-
caped nape of Paga Hill. The sea
is monotonous and long
He cares. Dances.



Caught in Between by William Wal

CHARACTERS:

Nikent	a young man working in town
Wattiga	his friend and workmate
Kuibik	a town girl with her eye on Nikent
Maiah	another town girl, friend of Kuibik
Koika	a village girl, traditional wife of Nikent
Kepa	Nikent's sister, a student at Sogeri N.H.S.
Narrator	(could also be done by Wattiga)

SCENE: Port Moresby. The living room of Nikent's flat, well-equipped with modern things; there is a telephone, stereo music player, electric stove, electric clock and comfortable modern furniture to sit on. There is a dining table and chairs and the room has been given an attractive atmosphere by the use of curtains and coloured lighting.

NARRATION: Nikent, a young Highlands' man, has done well. He now has a well-paid job with the Prime Minister's Department and is able to afford a good flat in the central part of Boroko. His sister, Kepa, too has done well and is now a student at Sogeri National High School. When she returns from a holiday spent back in the village in the Highlands, Kepa will bring her brother some news he doesn't expect. Let us see what happens.

SCENE ONE: In the living room of the flat. Evening. The lights are on and the stereo is playing. Wattiga is stretched on the sofa, reading a magazine. (The lights in the living room are gradually brought up to full strength during the Narration. The sound of the stereo carries softly under the Narrator's voice and then full strength at the end of the Narration.)

Nikent enters. He has just had a shower and has the towel wrapped around his waist. He is applying after-shave lotion. He will complete his dressing during the first conversation with Wattiga, moving in and out to the bedroom and calling replies from wherever he happens to be. He turns down the volume on the stereo to speak.

Nikent: Did you like the film last night, Wattiga?

Wattiga: *(lowering the magazine, and with a very wide grin)* Oh yes, man, yes! With Maiah beside me I really enjoyed it! *(They laugh together.)* You had Kuibik beside you. Did she have a nice time? *(Nikent goes out and comes back with his trousers on.)*

Nikent: When the man fell out of the window on the floor *(walking towards Wattiga, squeezing in beside him on the sofa)* she grabbed me and held me tight against her *(doing it)*. Like this.

Wattiga: *(Pulling Nikent's arms from around his neck.)* You must have enjoyed being choked to death, but I want to live a bit longer. Go and put a shirt on. You're still wet from the shower.

Nikent: *(As he goes for his shirt.)* I thought she might hold me for a while longer, but when the man hit the ground she let me go. *(The telephone rings.)*

Nikent: *(Calling from inside.)* Answer that for me, Wattiga.

(The door bell rings. Wattiga stands in the middle of the room, wondering which has priority. He takes a coin from his pocket, flips it, catches it and opens the front door first.)

Wattiga: Hello, you two. Come on in. Excuse me, my 'phone is ringing. It's probably the Prime Minister.

(Wattiga hurries to the 'phone and picks it up. Kuibik and Maiah sway in. They wear flashy town clothes. Nikent comes from the bedroom buttoning up his shirt.)

Nikent: How did you know the way here?

Kuibik: A friend of mine told me where you lived, so we followed his directions.

Wattiga: *(Holding his hand over the mouth-piece and with a sharp wink to Nikent which the girls don't see.)* A very important call for you ..... too secret .....!

Nikent: Oh! Yes. Er — please take the two lovely ladies into the kitchen and get them a nice, cool drink from the refrigerator! *(He nudges Wattiga in the ribs as he takes the 'phone.)* Turn off the music. And behave yourselves out there!

(The girls giggle and go around the room divider into the kitchen area. Wattiga clicks off the music and gives Maiah a friendly tickle as she passes. The group in the kitchen area freeze their actions during the telephone conversation.)

SCENE TWO: Two weeks latėr. Saturday morning. The stereo is again playing loudly. The room lights are off. Daylight comes through the window. There is a crash off in the bedroom, then silence. Nikent comes in carrying a number of pin-up pictures, which he has taken down from his bedroom wall. He is now in casual weekend clothes. He admires the pictures a moment, then starts to screw them up. Then he stops, smooths them out and then slides them under the cushion on the sofa.

Nikent: *(Talking aloud to himself in his anger.)* I won't have her! I won't even let her in the door! How could they do it to me? Marry me off to a girl from the bush! All she knows about is pigs! *(Suddenly crosses to the door and looks out. Seeing nothing, he shuts it again.)* When are they going to come, damn it!! I know they've saved all their money to buy me the best girl they could. Maybe she's pretty ..... maybe she's got a nice nature ..... maybe she works hard ..... what am I going to do?

(The phone rings. Nikent picks up the receiver.)

Nikent: Hello?

Wattiga's Voice: *(Singing it)* A couple of nice ladies we know are ready and roaring to go!

Nikent: Wattiga, I told you, I can't do anything this weekend! She ..... she might be here any minute. I'll see you Monday. *(Nikent slams down the phone.)*

Nikent: *(aloud)* My parents love me. I don't want to shame them. Perhaps I'll keep her in the village. But I'll need another one for the town!

(The doorbell rings. Nikent jumps. He does a quick run around the flat to make sure everything is straight before opening the door. Kepa comes in.)

Kepa: Are you on your own?

Nikent: Yes.

(Kepa goes out and leads Koika in. She is a very pretty girl, but painfully shy in these strange surroundings. She has a bright new bilum on her head and a bundle of pretty scarves tied to it on top of her head. She has on a very colourful new laplap. Her feet are bare. She lugs another old bilum, full of vegetables from her garden, for Nikent. Nikent stands looking at her, not knowing what he should say or do. Kepa quietly closes the door. Koika's hands come shyly up to cover her mouth, but her eyes steadily examine Nikent. Clearly she finds him more wonderful than she had expected. A little uncertainly, Koika lowers her hands from her face. Then her face breaks into a beautiful smile.)

Koika: Mi kam.

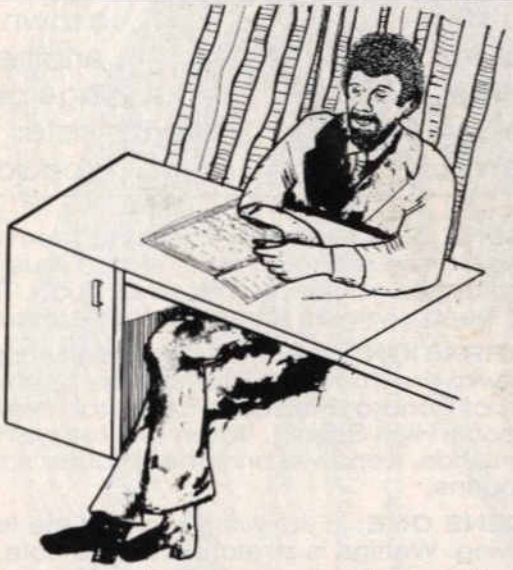
Kepa: Nikent ..... this is Koika.

(Nikent shakes her hand. The two girls wait for him to speak.)

Nikent: Koika ... Koika, mi amamas tru long lukim yu .....

(Nikent gives an uncertain look to his sister, but Kepa's face gives nothing away.)

Nikent: *(stumbling on)* Traipela apinum bilong mi i pundaun long yu ..... Olsem ...



nau wanem long ... long tupela lapun? Tupela i painim sik tu ... o nogat?

Koika: *(happy to bring good news, chatting away with increasing confidence)* Nogat tru! Na klostu tru mi brukim lewa bilong mi!

Nikent: Mi sori tru long tupela. Er ... *(to Kepa)* how did she get here? *(To Koika)* Na yu painim susa olsem wanem?

Koika: *(running on)* Mi bin tokim em taim em kam bek long olide. Mi bin tokim brata bilong me ... em i gutpela tru ... long helpim mi. Mi tokim em long kam wetim mi long liklik han rot klostu long skul bilong ol. Na mitupela bin kamap long ples balus. Mi bin go antap wanpela tasol long balus! Na susa bilong yu, em i wetim mi long Mosbi!

Kepa: She's brought you kaukau and vegetables that she grew herself. *(To Koika)* Soim em kaukau, na bin, na kabis .....

(Koika kneels to bring from her bilum the gifts from her garden. Proudly she lays them out.)

Koika: Ol i kamap long gaden bilong mi!

Kepa: I have some Saturday morning shopping to do. I have to hurry.

(Quickly, Kepa lets herself out at the door.)

Nikent: I'll show you where the vegetables go. *(Realising that she hasn't understood)* Kisim ol vesetabel i kam .....

(Nikent assists Koika to carry the vegetables into the kitchen, showing her where to put them in the cupboard, or into the refrigerator. Koika now begins to look at all the strange new things in the flat. She stands there, marvelling, her little hands flapping strangely in front of her.)

SCENE THREE: Monday morning. Koika is sitting in the middle of the floor. She wears the same laplap, but she has taken off her bilum and bright scarves. All her good spirits have gone. She is now frightened and upset. She is trying not to cry. She wipes an eye with the corner of her laplap and sniffs loudly. She gets up and wanders around. She stops at the sofa and pushes it with her fist, testing its softness. She tries sitting on it. But she feels uncomfortable and returns to sit on the floor. Then Nikent rushes in, dressed for his day at the office. He sits on the sofa to put on his shoes.)

Nikent: Mi mas go hariap long opis bilong mi. Taim yu laik kuk, yu putim pawa *(stomping into the kitchen with one shoe on and one shoe still in his hand.)* Kam, Koika! Mi bai soim yu!

(Koika nervously follows him into the kitchen. Clearly it is all too much for her.)

Nikent: Dispela save givim pawa *(indicating)* na bihain yu tanim tanim dispela samting ..... na dispela aian i kamap ret. Orait. Putim sospen rais i go antap, a? Yu save?

Koika: *(Trying to please)* Mi save ..... mi save pinis. Sospen i go antap.

Nikent: I no ken hariap tumas long kukim kaikai. Nogut kaikai i kol. Wet tasol.

(Nikent stomps back into the main room to point at the electric clock. Koika follows.)

Nikent: Nau. Yu lukim dispela klok .... na taim em i tok belo ..... yu kukim kaikai! *(Exploding)* Look at the time!

(Nikent hurries back to the sofa to put his other shoe on. With the shoe half on, he snatches up his briefcase and is out of the door.)

Nikent: *(As he goes)* Lukim yu long belo.

(Koika is left along. She looks around her, afraid of all the new things. She goes over to the clock and examines it. She leans in and listens to it.)

Koika: *(Softly to the clock)* Taim bilong kaikai ..... bai yu tokim mi, a?

(She wanders into the kitchen, takes the saucepan and a packet of rice, brings them back to sit in the middle of the floor. She tears open the packet with her teeth and tips the contents into the saucepan. She tosses the packet to one side. Then she fixes her gaze on the clock, waiting for it to signal her.)

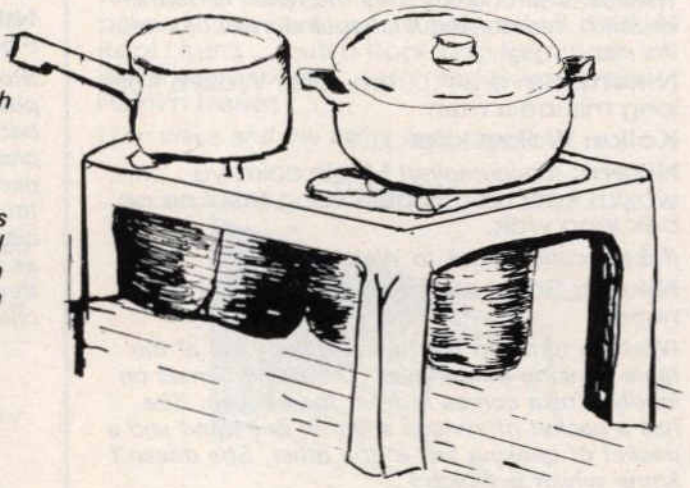
SCENE FOUR: Monday, near midday. The saucepan of rice and the discarded rice packet are still in the middle of the floor. Koika hs gone to sleep on the floor, waiting for the clock to speak. Suddenly the telephone rings. Koika leaps up in terror and runs off into the bedroom. The 'phone rings a number of times and then finally stops. It is some moments before Koika cautiously emerges from hiding. She wanders around, keeping a safe distance from the telephone. Then she comes back to the clock and leans in to listen closely to it.)

Koika: *(Aloud to herself)* Wanem taim bai dispela samting tokim mi long kuk?

(But there is no response from the clock. Something at the sofa catches her eye. She pulls out the pin-ups and examines them in amazement. Then she makes strange little hissing sounds of disapproval. She drops the pictures on the floor and stamps on them with her feet.

Koika: Ol meri nogut .....

(Suddenly she is afraid. She picks up the pictures and smooths them out as carefully as she can and puts them back where she found them. Looking very guilty, she sits hard down on the sofa and continues to wait, her eye on the clock.



SCENE FIVE: A little later. Koika is making a new bilum. She sits by the saucepan in the centre of the floor. A key is put in the lock of the door and the door opens from outside. Koika jumps up. Nikent comes in, followed by Wattiga.

Nikent: Wattiga, this is my wife, Koika. *(To Koika)* Pren bilong mi. Nem bilong em, Wattiga. Sekanim em .....

(When Wattiga comes forward to shake hands, Koika turns suddenly and pours out a torrent of words to Nikent.)

Koika: Plis, taim mi stap dispela samtin *(pointing to the telephone)* em ya .... em kirap karai karai na mi pret nogut tru. Man! Man! Ating em angre, samting. Em i kros long mi, o nogat? *(Close to tears)* Mi pret nogut tru, na mi hait.

Nikent: *(Patient and soothing)* Yu no ken wari. Mi stap long opis, na mi laik toktok wantaim yu ..... em tasol .....

Wattiga mostly manages to hide his smiles. He decides to demonstrate how the telephone works. Without dialling, he lifts the handpiece for an imaginary call.)

Wattiga: *(Into the 'phone)* Hello ... is that you darling? You want me to take you to the pictures tonight .... well .... I might think about it, sweetheart .....

Nikent: *(Sharply)* Try another number, will you?

Wattiga: *(A change of voice and manner, into the 'phone)* Is that the Prime Minister? Ah, Prime Minister, I'll be a little late back to the office this afternoon .... I'm having lunch with friends .....

(Nikent has found the saucepan of dry rice in the centre of the floor. He turns to Koika. Wattiga quietly puts down the 'phone.)

Nikent: Yu kukim sampela kaikai tu o nogat?

Koika: *(Pointing at the clock)* Samting i no tokim mi long kuk olsem na mi no kukim sampela kaikai.

(She is about to break down. Nikent looks at Wattiga. Then, very gently, he takes her arm. He leads her into the kitchen and switches on the electric jug.)

Nikent: Em orait .... em orait. Wokim kopi long mitupela man.

Koika: Wokim kopi .....?

Nikent: *(Encouraging)* Mi bin soim yu ..... wokim kopi na mitupela dring tasol na go bek long wok.

(Nikent comes back to Wattiga.)

Nikent: Sorry about lunch. Switch on the news.

(Wattiga turns on the news. Nikent sits at the table thinking things over. The news comes on loudly. Koika comes in from the kitchen. She has a packet of switkai sugar in one hand and a packet of cooking salt in the other. She doesn't know which is which.)

Nikent: *(Jumpy and angry)* Turn that silly bastard off! Who cares what the news is!Wattiga .... it won't work, will it?

(When he shouts at Wattiga, Koika slips back into kitchen. She chooses the salt as the sugar and tears off the corner of the packet with her teeth. She carries the packet and two cups, with one spoon and the bottle of coffee and puts them on the table. Wattiga comes to sit silently beside Nikent. Both stare into space. Without really looking at what he is doing, Nikent spoons coffee into the two cups and then three spoons of salt into each cup. Then he pushes the coffee and salt away and waits for the hot water. The boiling jug frightens Koika but, bravely, she switches off the power and carries the jug in and sets it on the table. Then she sits down on the floor. Nikent pours the hot water into the cups and the two men prepare to drink, after stirring their cups in turn with the spoon. Wattiga is the first to drink. At the taste of the salt he freezes, waiting to see Nikent's reaction. When Nikent tastes the salt, he also freezes and then, slowly, he lowers his cup, trying to control the anger he feels.)

Wattiga: *(With a nice smile to Koika, who is anxiously watching their reactions)* Man! Kopi ya, em swit moa!

Nikent: *(On his feet, shaking with anger)* Wattiga, get back to the office! Don't wait for me!

(Wattiga leaves at once, quietly closing the door after him.)

Koika: *(Gently)* Wanem samting rong na yu luk luk strong long mi .....?

Nikent: Go to hell! Get your bilums and go back where you belong!

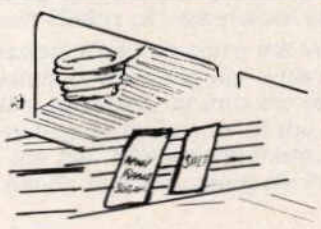
Koika: Wanem .....?

Nikent: *(Stupidly shouting at her)* Raus! Raus! Bai yu go bek long ples! Meri bus nogat! Painim pik bilong yu!

Koika: *(Trying not to cry)* Nogat ... nogat ... mi laik stap wantaim yu .....!

Nikent: *(Now crying himself)* Get out .....! For Christ's sake ..... Go!

(Roughly, he takes her arm, opens the door, pushes her out and slams the door. Turning back into the room, he sees her bilum and he picks it up and crosses to the door. The salt packet catches his eye and he picks that up too. He opens the door and tosses out the bilum and then throws the salt packet as hard as he can after it and slams the door. Then he throws himself face down on the sofa and cries.)



SCENE SIX: The following Friday evening. The lights are on, the music is playing. There is a sudden burst of laughter and Wattiga backs into the room from the bedroom, with Maiah and Kuibik pursuing him, trying to spray him with their perfume. The girls shriek with laughter as Wattiga tries to wipe the strong smell off with the corner of his shirt. Wattiga goes towards the bathroom.

Wattiga: *(Calling off)* Nikent, hurry up in that bathroom, will you? Or hand me out a towel, so that I can wipe off these stinks.

(Wattiga goes off into the bathroom. The girls stop laughing and look at each other.)

Kuibik: It'll take more than a squirt of perfume to get Nikent going tonight. He's changed. What's wrong with him?

Maiah: How should I know?

(Wattiga returns)

Kuibik: *(In a loud whisper to Wattiga)* What's wrong with Nikent? What happened last weekend?

Wattiga: Something you wouldn't understand. He'll be over it in a few days.

(The doorbell rings. Wattiga opens the door. Kepa stands there. She crosses straight to the other girls and shakes their hands.)

Kepa: I met you last Friday night. Exactly a week ago. *(Kepa looks at Wattiga.)*

Kepa: Hello, Wattiga. Where's Nikent?

(Wattiga jerks his thumb in the direction of the bathroom. Kepa thinks a moment, then goes out again and returns, leading in a very nervous Koika. She is again carrying her bilum with scarves.)

Kepa: Wattiga, you've met Koika, haven't you? *(Turning to Kuibik and Maiah)* I want you to meet my brother's wife, Koika. *(To Koika)* Sekan wantaim tupela ....

(Koika crosses to shake the hands of Kuibik and Maiah. But they turn away from her and edge away towards Wattiga. Koika stands with her hand out, uncertain what to do. Kepa crosses and puts an assuring arm around her shoulders.)

Kepa: Our parents had to pay a great deal to get Koika as a bride for Nikent.

Kuibik: *(Exploding at Wattiga)* A bride for Nikent! She comes from the bush. Just look at her! *(To Kepa)* Does she talk English?

Kepa: No.

Kuibik: It's impossible! Stupid!

(Nikent has come into the room. Kuibik turns on him.)

Kuibik: You're going to marry a thing like that? An educated man, with the job you've got! I can smell her from here!

(Koika knows she is being talked about. She breaks away from Kepa and kneels on the floor at Nikent's feet.)

Koika: Plis .... man bilong me .... bel isi long samting nogut mi bin wokim ....? Mi sori tru ....! Sapos yu skulim mi nau bai mi no inap long wokim wanpela rong ....? Tru mi tok .... mi no giaman ....!

(Kuibik and Maiah begin to snigger at the begging young wife.)

Kuibik: *(Pointing at the kneeling Koika)* To tell you the truth, Nikent, I was after you for myself. But you won't catch me doing that!

Kepa: Nikent, she wants to learn .... give her a chance .....

Kuibik: *(Hands on hips)* Yes, give her a chance, Nikent darling! And we'll be back next weekend to see how you're getting on .....!

(Nikent shoots a quick look at Wattiga. Wattiga almost pushes Kuibik and Maiah out the door. Kepa closes the door after them and stands near Wattiga.)

(Koika remains kneeling and looking up at Nikent, silent tears in her eyes. It is some time before Nikent can turn and look at her. He gently reaches down and pulls her to her feet.)

Nikent: Okei meri. Bai mi skulim yu gen long mekim kopi .....

(Nikent leads Koika into the kitchen.)

Kepa: *(Gently calling after them, unconcerned that they aren't listening)* Tupela kap tasol .....

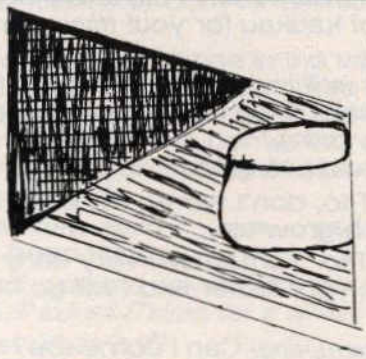
(Kepa lets herself out of the front door and goes.)

(Nikent takes the lesson step by step. Koika concentrates, anxiously glancing at him to make sure that she is getting it right. Her confidence comes back and gradually her beautiful smile lights up her pretty face. Nikent keeps his face turned away, trying to conceal his emotional struggle, his feelings as he resigns himself to the life ahead.)

Nikent: *(Pointing to each thing in turn)* Putim pawa ... tupela kap ... tupela spun ... kisim kopi i kam ... putim kopi long kap ... isi ... kisim suga i kam ... em nau! Suga stret! Painim bisket .....

(The voice and the lights fade together.

THE END



Plays
Manggi Masalai by Mary Toliman

CHARACTERS:

Rivan	
Goala	his wife
Tito	1st son
Paulus	2nd son
4	to make birds, rooster and frog noises

SCENE: A village near a thick forest, frogs and birds, plus other forest noises

SCENE ONE: At the back of the stage there are mats put up against the wall. Some ropes are tied to the roof and are hanging down. There's a door at the left and another one on the right. The noise makers are hidden behind the woven mats. A few branches of trees are propped up in the middle.
Rivan, in bright red laplap, Goala in meri blouse and laplap are seated in the middle of the stage on a mat. Paulus, also in red laplap, is sleeping on Goala's lap. A piece of log, serving as fire is in front of Rivan. A black pot is close to Rivan. It is dark and so the light is dim.

Goala: *(calls)* Tito! *(No answer. Looks over her shoulder and calls again)* Tito!

Tito: *(off stage)* Oi, Mama! *(Comes running in from the left, puffing. He falls as he enters, but quickly gets up.)* Here I am.

Goala: You Tambaran! Where have you been? Didn't you hear me calling you? *(Tito scratches his head. Goala calms down.)* Anyway, get me my bilum from the room. *(pause)* Next time answer when you are being called, laka.

Tito: *(runs off the same direction he came in)* Yes mama.

Goala: *(calls after him)* Tito! *(Tito stops abruptly)* And don't forget the time. The bilum's on the table. *(Tito comes in with the bilum and gives it to Goala. He then sits down between Rivan and Goala. Goala starts searching in her bilum. Tito's hands are also in the bilum.)*

Paulus: *(Stretches and yawns. He then sits up.)* Tito, is there any food left for me? I haven't eaten anything since this morning.

Tito: *(pointing to the pot)* Look there!

Paulus: *(Gets up and opens the pot. Finding there's nothing inside, he throws the lid on the floor.)* You are a liar! *(He runs and punches Tito on the back.)* You are a liar. There's nothing left. *(he cries)* Hiiiiiiiii! Hiiiiiiiii!

Tito: *(surprise)* What? I did leave some pieces of kaukau for you! *(their parents are startled)*

Paulus: *(still crying)* This is not the first time. *(Kicks Tito on the back and dashes off the stage, crying.)*

Tito: *(screams)* Mama!

Rivan: Tito, don't worry. He is still a child. He'll soon grow up.

Goala: Tito. Tomorrow, very early in the morning, your father and I will go hunting, and . . .

Tito: *(interrupting)* Can I come too?

Goala: No, you and Paulus will stay.

Tito: *(upset)* Why?

Rivan: Because it's too far and we never know whether we will be on the right track back . . .

Tito: *(almost crying)* Oh, no, papa. Come back quickly, Paulus and myself will stay of course and wait. *(pause)* And . . . will you bring back plenty . . . meat for us.

Rivan: *(confused)* It all depends whether we have luck or not. But if . . . *(Cry of a rooster is heard off stage.)*

Goala: It's getting late. Tito, you better have some sleep. It's not good that a boy of your age should be staying up this late. Rivan, we better have some rest too, before the sun rises.

Rivan: Okay Tito. You better leave. It's already late.

Tito: *(stretches and yawns as he stands up)* Good night mama and papa.

Goala: Good night, Tito.

Rivan: Go well. *(Tito walks off to the left. Goala and Rivan walk towards the right, taking with them the pot and the piece of log. When they are out of sight, morning birds plus rooster voices can be heard. The main light is on to mark daylight. Rivan and Goala enter from right. Tito with a spear in one hand a knife in the other is leading the way. They then come to a resting place in the middle of the stage.)*

Goala: *(throwing the bilum on the floor)* Wau! *(pause)* Here we are. *(pause as she looks around)* This place is nice, isn't it?

Rivan: Yes, *(pause)* except that I don't like my arse to be wet on this grass.

Goala: *(laughs)* Haha! Wet on an evening like this! *(She takes the meat out of her bilum as Rivan lies down to straighten his back. She tries cutting the meat up, but it's too tough.)*

Goala: Oh my god, this meat is too tough *(pause)* Rivan, can you cut this up please?

Rivan: *(sternly)* Come on, woman. Haven't you got any strength?

Goala: I said it's too tough *(pause.)* If you can't cut it up, then we are not going to eat anything.

Rivan: *(grabs the knife from her.)* You women talk too much. All you want is to eat and eat and eat . . .

Goala: *(very calmly.)* Well, God made woman by taking part of a man's rib. Doesn't that explain everything?

Rivan: *(angrily.)* Uggh! I don't want any more of that. I am hungry.

Goala: *(starts eating.)* Mmmmm! Isn't this nice?

Rivan: *(gobbling up.)* Man, I haven't had anything since this morning. Now I am going to finish everything *(pause).* It's enjoyable hunting in the bush. When it comes to getting lost, it's a different story.

Goala: I'm scared.

Rivan: Do you ever feel frightened at the cry of the birds in the forest?

Goala: *(sternly)* I don't.

Rivan: *(softly as he touches Goala)* Wiu Wiu!

Goala: *(jumps with fright)* Nana! *(Pause as she stares at Rivan)* Stop it.

Rivan: *(teasingly)* So you do! And so do I.

Goala: Rivan!

Rivan: Yes, my dear?

Goala: The children. They have nothing to eat.

Rivan: *(very softly)* It is a virtue, that if one is so hungry, he can eat anything to fill his empty stomach.

Goala: But the children. They'll be very, very hungry.

Rivan: *(becoming angry)* I can't go hunting for lazy children. They stay home and do nothing . . . that's all *(pause)* You can give them your share if you want to.

Goala: My share! *(pause)* My share! But what will I eat?

Rivan: *(softly)* Your problem. So-called concerned mothers.

Goala: *(thinking very hard)* No . . . I know what! *(Picks up a little bit of meat and wraps it up.)* This will do. A little bit is better than nothing at all *(pause)* But what will we say if the children ask?

Rivan: *(angrily)* Just say we had no luck. Simple as that. *(Bird and frog noises can be heard. The light is dim. It's getting dark.)*

Goala: Hey! We better get moving. It's getting dark. *(They get up, Rivan leading the way to the right.)*

SCENE II *(From the left, enter Paulus and Tito. They look very, very tired. They walk to the middle at the front of the stage with a mat and sit down on it.)*

Paulus: When will mama and papa come back? It's getting dark.

Tito: Don't worry. Soon they'll be home with lots of meat.

Paulus: *(yawns as he sleeps on the mat)* Are you sure? When will they come? *(starts crying)* Hiiiiii! Hiiiiii! I am hungry!

Tito: *(comforting him)* Paulus, I am sure . . .

Paulus: *(crying)* Hiiiiii! Hiiiiii! When will . . . they . . . come! I am so hungry. Hiiiiii! Hiiiiii!

Tito: *(softly)* Hey, don't cry. The masalai is always around at this time searching for children crying. *(The sound of a bird is heard.)* There!

Paulus: *(cries louder)* Hiiiiii! Hiiiiii! iiii! Mama!

Tito: *(angry)* Stop it. It's coming nearer! *(The bird cries again.)* There! It's coming! *(Paulus cries even louder.)* Stop crying before it takes you away. *(Bird cries again.)*

Tito: There!

Paulus: *(Cries so loud that Goala shouts from off stage.)*

Goala: Uuaa!

Tito: *(ears pricked)* Listen! *(Paulus is still crying.)* There! Paulus, sounds like . . . mama!

Paulus: *(quickly getting up)* Mama! *(Seeing them.)* Mama . . . papa!

Tito: *(runs forward)* Mama!

Paulus: *(puts his hand into Goala's bilum)* Where's my meat?

Tito: We are so hungry.

Paulus: *(pulls out the parcel and starts opening it)* Will this be enough for the two of us?

Goala: Your father and I were unlucky today. That's all we have. Nothing much.

Paulus: But . . . This won't be enough.

Tito: *(to Paulus)* Anyway, you can have it. I am big and can go without it. *(Paulus gobbles the meat up.)*

Rivan: Well boys, we must have some rest.

Goala: In the morning, we'll tell you more about the hunt.

Tito and Paulus: *(at the same time)* Okay Mama. *(Rivan and Goala walk off the stage to the left. The boys remain.)* Paulus!

Paulus: *(walks nearer)* Yes!

Tito: I want to tell you something.

Paulus: *(very anxious)* What is it? Tell me.

Tito: Well . . . our own parents of course.

Paulus: *(confused)* Our PARENTS? But Why?

Tito: You see, everyone in the village who goes hunting always comes back with plenty of meat. But our parents, everytime they come home, there's either very little or nothing at all for us, their children.

Paulus: *(now clear)* Y . . ye . . es!! We've always been hungry.

Tito: Our parents never think of us *(pause)* Oh yes, Paulus! *(Thinks for a while.)*

Paulus: What is it?

Tito: You know something?

Paulus: What is it?

Tito: *(very softly)* Let's play a trick on them.

Paulus: *(puzzled)* A TRICK? But HOW?

Tito: We'll paint ourselves up with mud like mudmen, wear masks, have long finger nails, and then . . . follow stealthily at the back of them.

Paulus: *(excited)* That's a good idea.

Tito: Yes, and we'll look like Masalais.

Paulus: Wau! That's good. But *(confused)* we must be careful.

Tito: No worries. I have it all planned.

Paulus: I know. You are always having bright ideas.

Tito: Well, we'll see to it tomorrow. *(The two boys walk off to the left, very, very delighted.)*

SCENE III: *(Rivan and Goala again enter from the right; Rivan with a spear and knife, Goala with her bilum. They stop in the middle of the stage.)*

Rivan: *(very tired)* Oh, it's a tiring job. *(sits down)* It's bloody hot.

Goala: *(puts bilum down)* The bilum is so heavy. I cannot go on. Let's rest for a while. *(sits down beside Rivan)*

Rivan: I just hope the sun cools down. *(lies down)* Ach!!

Goala: I wonder how the children are feeling now?

Rivan: *(getting angry)* You say one more thing of that and soon you'll be chewing betelnuts.

Goala: Oh well, I think I better sleep too. *(She lies down beside Rivan. The two boys enter from the back of the stage. Paulus from the left, Tito from the right. Their bodies are painted with mud, masks on their heads and with long fingernails. They come creeping up. They stop and then make the cry of a bird. Goala wakes up, looks around and goes off to sleep again. The noise is heard again. Goala is frightened. She touches Rivan.)*

Goala: Rivan, wake up! Can you hear that? *(Sound is heard again, but coming nearer.)* Rivan, for heaven's sake, can't you hear that? Something peculiar.

Rivan: *(sternly)* Look woman, let a man have some sleep. *(sound is heard)*

Goala: *(almost screaming as she shakes Rivan)* Rivan, it's coming nearer. Get up!

Rivan: *(furiously)* Any more of that and I'll kick your arse. *(the sound is heard very close)*

Goala: *(shivering)* Rivan, it's almost here . . . *(She looks around. The two boys are just at the back of them.)* It sounds like . . . like . . . *(turns and screams very loudly when she sees the objects)* MASALAI!! *(She dashes off to the left. Rivan also jumps up and, seeing the objects, screams also.)*

Rivan: MASALAI!! *(Dashes after Goala. The two boys pull their masks off and laugh and laugh, rolling all over the place.)*

Paulus: *(sitting up)* We've done it!! We've done it!!

Tito: I told you.

Paulus: *(laughing)* The way . . . the way papa ran . . .

Tito: Can you believe it?

Paulus: I can't . . . I can't believe it. What a shock to them.

Tito: *(sighting the food)* Ako. O . . o! What are we waiting for?

Paulus: *(puzzled)* What?

Tito: *(pointing to the food)* Bread of life!!

Paulus: *(grabs a piece of meat and puts it into his mouth)* Oh, gees!

Tito: *(eating)* Mmmm! Delicious.

Paulus: *(teasingly)* Papa and mama must have had a hard day. *(chuckles)* Just see these *(pointing to the meat)* but anyway, serves them right for storing everything in their bilums. *(Tito is gobbling up)*

Paulus: Just look at this again . . . could've been theirs . . . all of it, *(pointing to a little piece)* but this is for us.

Tito: *(softly)* I hope they've learnt their lesson.

Paulus: Oh yes, I am just hoping they did. But who knows, such parents as they are pretty hard to change. Mama is a bit 'okay', but to talk to papa, I find it very hard sometimes. Especially when I am hungry. Once I was talking to papa, but he gave me a fiery thump. I shut up. Don't you think they are cruel? *(Tito is still eating)* Eee Tito? *(Looks to Tito)* Hei, what's wrong with you? *(teasingly)* Meditating? You haven't said very much.

Tito: I was just thinking . . .

Paulus: *(interrupting)* Another trick!

Tito: Not this time! See . . . what if our parents find we are not home? They might suspect us on this matter.

Paulus: But how can they? We were dressed like Masalais, not human beings.

Tito: I know that . . . but . . . if they find us at this time of the day . . . not home, I should think they'll be having funny ideas.

Paulus: That's their problem. I am not going away until I finish these pieces of meat.

Tito: I know it's their problem, but I am quite concerned as I do not want them to find out. *(Pause.)* Hey Paulus, we go now ei . . . then they won't find out?

Paulus: I said, I am not going away until I finish these pieces of meat.

Tito: *(sternly)* We go now.

Paulus: No! *(Rivan and Goala enter stealthily from the right at the back of the stage. They are searching for the meat and their belongings.)*

Rivan: *(sternly)* You stupid, irresponsible woman.

Goala: But I was scared.

Rivan: What scared! You bun kakaruk! All you want is to scream and shout.

Goala: Yea, and all you want is to sleep, eat and give orders.

Rivan: Of course I've got every right to eat my catch. *(They are now only a few steps away from the boys.)*

Rivan: If I don't find this meat . . . I don't know what I'll do. *(The two boys are now arguing.)*

Tito: *(louder)* Listen Paulus, we have to go. Leave the stupid meat behind.

Rivan: *(stops abruptly)* Hei, listen to that!

Goala: *(frightened)* Not again . . .

Rivan: No, it's not, Listen to that!

Paulus: No, I don't want to.

Goala: *(puzzled)* What is it?

Rivan: Sounds like . . . human voices. But . . . how can human beings be found around here.

Goala: *(softly)* I hope the same thing is not happening again. *(They come a bit closer to the boys.)*

Tito: Hei . . . what's that! Paulus, can you hear that!

Paulus: *(stops eating)* You bluff. Tricking me just to get out of here. I am not getting . . . .

Tito: *(interrupting)* Stop it! Can you hear that? *(Sounds of footsteps are heard.)* Please, *(stands up)* let's get moving.

Paulus: What is it? Are you scared?

Tito: *(softly)* Don't ask, but please. just . . . get . . . up.

Rivan: *(stops)* There! Did you hear that? A human voice!

Goala: But . . . how could a human being be found here?

Rivan: I don't know. *(confused)* No one else knows this place except us. Not even the children. *(they come a bit closer)*

Tito: Heii . . . *(looks around)* Come . . . just . . . watch . . . *(Crouches behind Paulus. They listen to the footsteps coming nearer and nearer.)* There! *(murmuring)* Over there! See! The tree and grasses are swaying.

Paulus: *(almost crying)* I am scared.

Tito: *(shocked)* Paulus, look!

Paulus: *(screams, but Tito covers his mouth with his hand)* Mama! Ma . . .

Goala: *(very surprised)* The children! Sounds like . . . Paulus!

Rivan: What are they doing here? *(they walk closer)*

Tito: *(murmuring)* Hei, for sure they don't know it's us. *(pause)* Let's run away.

Paulus: No . . .

Tito: *(pulls him)* Come here! Let's get out! Quick! *(The two boys run off, but Paulus is sighted and recognised by the parents.)*

Goala: *(screams)* Paulus! Stop!

Rivan: *(already suspicious)* Why are they running away?

Goala: I hope they are human beings.

Rivan: What do you mean?

Goala: Well, Paulus seemed to be covered in mud. *(They walk to the place where the boys were sitting. They see that the meat in eaten.)* Oh my god!

Rivan: What is it? *(also sees the meat is eaten)* The bastards! So they tricked us. *(takes a bone and throws it on the ground)* I wish they were here. I'd wring their necks.

Goala: *(head down)* It's a shame! Our own children finding out for themselves.

Curtains Close

THE END

Novel Excerpt
Kallan a novel by Toby Kagl Waim

The early morning breeze sent shivers down Manda's spine. He accumulated all the strength from his old battered-down body and walked in slow paces back to the men's house, which he had left a minute ago, to take refuge from the cold morning mist. It was closing on him fast.

Earlier in the morning, he had felt sick. In fact he had not slept last night. He had coughed all night long. He had disturbed the men and their discourse. Instinctively he knew that his condition was going to worsen and, whatever the circumstance, he was going to come out a loser in the end. The very thought frightened him as he walked slowly back.

As he entered, he heard one of the elders in the tribe saying, "..... lazy these days. You should not get married. Just because you have balls you reckon you are entitled to a wife. You got to work," he continued, "and look after a family and your old parents but, if you are lazy, don't give us a hell of a headache in trying to find and secure you a wife."

From the tone of the voice, Manda recognised it to be that of his *dimonem**. One or two of the elders in the smoke-filled room murmured their approval. Obviously, the lecture was aimed to make the younger men of the tribe strive for excellence in all respects in the various activities the village undertook. In a monotone, his *dimonem* continued, "As you all know and can see, a man who has plenty of pigs is a real man. A man who works hard in the garden and has plenty of food is a real man. Those of you," and this time the tone was raised, "who are lazy, instead of sharing the women, should give your wives to people who work hard," and he laughed at his own words. The men applauded their approval and shortly dispersed from the house to tend to their different chores for the day.

Manda moved closer to the fire to warm his body. He stirred the remains of the huge logs the men had brought and which had burnt themselves out to ashes. He coughed again. Realising that he was the only occupant of the room now, he made a deliberate effort to cough a little louder. He was so preoccupied doing this that he did not see a figure emerging from the interior of the room and he was still unaware of its presence when the man walked out of the door. Only then did he realise that it was his last born son — Kallan.

Kallan was not yet eighteen. Nevertheless, he had fully acquired some of his father's physical characteristics. He was well-built with big, muscular legs and broad shoulders. He was neither short nor tall, only the average height of a typical Highlander. He was very handsome and oiled his skin, which made it shine. Girls in the neighbouring hamlets had fought to date him. Now he was the only bachelor in the family. Two of his brothers were married with families of their own and his only sister was married to a man from down the Simbu River. His third brother had died of an unknown cause and the death had been regularly questioned by his father, who had loved each of his children just as much as the next. And that was four years ago.

When Kallan re-entered the house, his father had crouched near the fireplace. He flicked his eyes open to see the intruder and, when he saw who he was, said, "Kallan."

When Kallan did not reply, he continued, "I don't know what's going to happen to me. I have been coughing all night long, which is unusual for me. Now I feel weak in my body and can't move around." Dropping his voice into little more than a whisper, he said, "I feel that this is not an ordinary sickness. Somebody wants to kill me. Go and bring the medicine man from Govan. He should shed some light on my condition."

"But Yalkindal, it's nothing," cried Kallan for the first time. "Old people usually get coughs," knowing that to get to Govan to bring the medicine man meant risking his neck by going past enemy tribes to get there. "Could I ask Guagl to go? He's been there before," he added, referring to his elder brother.

With an extra effort, Manda stood up and looked Kallan straight in the face. "Son," he said in a louder voice, "I know old people are apt to die unexpectedly. But I'm not that old. I still have my health. Moreover, who's going to get you a wife when I die? No one, you hear me! No one! Now go and do as I told you."

Kallan had realised that he had made a grave mistake in opposing his father. That was the last thing that was expected of any son, to refuse a father's directives. He thought himself lucky that no one was in the house. He was ready to go when his father, who was watching him to see if his message had sunk into his head, added quietly, "Somebody in our own line wants to kill me. Go and come back with the man. He should tell us who the person is, so that you will be aware of him." When Kallan had gone, Manda dusted off his feet and crept into his bed. In a little while, he was snoring away.

Kallan walked out of the men's house and headed in the direction of the women's house, which was further up the hill. He walked around the village square as he went, to see if any of his peers were around so that he could ask them for company, especially Awagl. Finding no one, he continued walking. Presently, he came to his mother's house. The door was open and he could see his mother inside, near the fireplace.

Kallan looked up at the sun and then judged the time from his shadow. It was still early. He could go to Govan and be back before sunset. That was, provided he did not meet Ninmongo on the way. She was one of the many girls he knew. In fact, it was she who had dated him some months ago. Kallan just affected an interest in her. She was, to him, just another stroke to his tally of girls.

Ninmongo was not pretty in the real sense of the word. Nevertheless, she had a lot of other very notable qualities that were adequate compensation. She was well-built — a genealogical characteristic of her parents — like any Highland girl — with smooth, firm buttocks, slender but muscular legs and big arms. She was a very proud person, due to her father's affluence which, in fact, prompted old Druakindal to warn her son. However, she was a shade older than Kallan — probably by two years — and he had his own reservations about marrying her. Furthermore, he was still too young to marry Ninmongo or indeed any girl. On the other hand, custom strictly forbade especially sons of village elders and big men to marry the first girl that ever came to their house. In doing so, which was in remote cases, they were turning down and away potential wives who might be just around the corner. And Kallan had not brought any girl home yet. Probably, Ninmongo might be the first to come to his house and in doing so would lift his name up in the whole tribe. One or two of his peers had done that and had been praised for their courageousness and endeavour. He would be the next. That was if Ninmongo was keen on the prospect of collecting some personal wealth if she went to Kallan's house and came back. It was a way of life embedded in the life of the people and was understood. Any girl who went to a lover's house was adequately compensated with valuables for going there.

Kallan came to Kin River, a tributary of the famous Simbu River. He quenched his thirst from an underground stream — a popular drinking hole because of the ice-like spring — and bathed his feet and face from the main stream. After his body had cooled down and was ready to take in the next stage of the journey, he started the steep ascent towards his destination.

Genayagl or, as he was known in public circles, Gaglu, was a powerfully-built man. He was in his mid-forties but looked much younger. He was one of the few respected leaders in his tribe. Having established himself in this position, he consolidated it further by having ten wives, the oldest one being around the same age as Gaglu and barren, while the youngest one was now with child. He had married her a year ago at the age of eighteen. Gaglu's other wives were middle-aged or in their early thirties. Gaglu had kept the whole lot, warning them firmly that anyone who was a trouble maker had no chance against him but to pack up and go with her children and all. Thus, family and domestic confrontation was kept to a minimum. Being the big man's wives, they enjoyed certain respects and privileges and no one wanted to risk the chance of going away because she had offended Gaglu.

There was also another factor that contributed immensely to Gaglu's standing in the community. He was the only man for miles around to practise medicine, the art of curing. Where he had learnt the art nobody knew. Nevertheless, those who did business with him had to concede that he was the best practitioner of the day. Thus, word got around from one village to another and business had progressed ten-fold. Now he was a very wealthy man and a powerful force in the Koralku tribe.

Since demand was high, extremely high, and all cases were important, he worked to a strict routine. His motto was, "First come, first served." However, there was one shortcoming: he overcharged clients for his services. But to complain would mean getting second-class service from incompetent practitioners from further out. So Gaglu usually had his way. Otherwise, he would not give his services.

By midday, Kallan had reached the crest of Govanmulo. He rested under one of the *yalbane* trees while looking down to where he had just walked up. The sun was almost directly overhead. He was wondeing whether or not Gaglu would be at home when an old man suddenly passed by in a hurry. He sprang to his feet and called loudly after the old man. He was sure his shout was audible but if the old man did hear, he pretended not to hear and was soon out of sight, before Kallan could say anything else. "He must be deaf," Kallan muttered to himself angrily.

Suddenly, he heard the sound of running feet. He turned around just in time to avoid being run down by an old woman, who was also in a hurry. She was nearly exhausted from whatever she had been doing. It was obvious that she was in a rage and blood dripped from one side of her head. The old woman confronted Kallan and, still panting, cried aloud. "Have you seen anyone coming this way?"

Kallan felt sorry for the old woman. He presumed that the old couple had had a domestic argument, that the case had become too argumentative and that they must have decided to end it in blows. From her physical appearance, the old woman must have come out the loser. It reminded him of his own parents, who used to have such quarrels, and he felt like laughing, but kept it back.

"I saw an old man hurrying past, but he was in such a hurry," he said affably, "that he didn't hear my shout."

His assump;tion was proved right. The old woman gave the details as she muttered curses

upon her spouse and said that it must have been he who had hurried past. Kallan waited until her temper had subsided before asking.

"Ambkindal, could you tell me where I can find Gaglu's house?"

When she heard Gaglu's name, she collected herself and looked up at Kallan. For a moment, he thought she was going to run away. Then she whispered.

"Gaglu's house?"

"Mm," said Kallan, nodding his head in agreement. He noted with suspicion that something had got hold of the old woman as soon as he had asked about Gaglu. Was she frightened of him? If she was frightened of something, she kept it hidden as she spoke.

"You won't have trouble in finding it, my son," she whispered again. "It's the one ....."

She did not finish what she was trying to say — painfully. Two women came into view and, from the old woman's actions, Kallan concluded that she must have known them. One of the women was obviously much younger than the other. They must be kin, daughter and mother, he told himself. When the two women were close, the old woman introduced Kallan to them cordially, but keeping her distance from the two women.

"What a coincidence! This young man was coming to see Mogl's father and I was going to show him the road when you turned up. Could you go with them?" said the old woman, turning to Kallan.

The mother, who must have been one of Gaglu's ten wives, thanked the old woman and later shook hands with Kallan. Her daughter shyly gave her hand to him, after her mother scolded her for being hesitant. He felt the small, soft hand in his. She shyly followed her mother with a smile, from the corner of her mouth. He followed wilingly after her but at a measured distance. His father had told him all the tricks mothers and daughters play on young bachelors like Kallan, especially if the prospective suitor was from a relatively high standing family in the village. However, he was not a suitor now — not really. He had come for a defined business purpose and he must see to it at all costs that the journey was successful.

Attempts made by the mother to establish a favourable dialogue with Kallan only resulted in one word answers or a "mm" indication. Presently they came to the house. The wooden fence creaked very loudly, as if somebody was out to cut its neck, when the three climbed over it. Mogl's mother disposed of her string bag full of kaukau and other garden produce in front of the house. Her daughter did the same, while Kallan went and sat under one of the trees in the big compound. They did not wait for long.

Gaglu suddenly appeared from behind one of the houses. He expressed surprise at seeing Kallan but did not directly show it, when his wife answered for Kallan's presence.

"He was coming to see you when we met him at Govanmulo."

"Okay! Okay, my son," he said in his gruff voice. "What can I do for you?"

He was used to receiving visitors and made the most of the opportunity. Their conversation drifted on to other, minor matters that concerned Kallan and his family. Gaglu enquired about his father's health and that of his mother too. Kallan answered what he thought he should, while keeping back what was inappropriate. When Gaglu asked of his parents, he thought the time was ripe to disclose his reason for coming to see him. Up till then, he had kept it back.

"Yalkindal," he began, referring to his father, "is sick. He coughed all night long yesterday and has sent me to come here," he continued. "I want us to go back to Barengigl now."

"Mm," Gaglu said, holding on to his breath. "Yes! Yes! I'll be free this afternoon, so I'll come then. Now, you'll have to go back before me — young fellow," he said. "Yes, I'll come in the afternoon."

Gaglu's assurance still rang in his ears as Kallan left the huge house and headed in the direction from which they had come earlier. He met Mogl on the way. She only smiled at him. He quickened his pace in the direction of Barengigl. It would be all down hill, he told himself, as he crested Gouanmulo. It was mid-afternoon and a cold afternoon breeze blew against his face as he descended the steep gradient. The day was getting cooler already and the breeze began to blow a little harder.

It was a typical Highlands afternoon: Kallan's only thought now was to get home as fast as he could, to have Manda brought to Guagl's house and to tell the rest of the family that Gaglu would be coming. They must prepare for Gaglu's arrival. He quickened his pace in the direction of Barengigl. The afternoon was going to be a busy one.

Druakindal was an old woman. She had a wrinkled face with a small, but visible scar on one cheek. However, she had a very sharp tongue and jealously looked after what she owned and cared for. No wonder her two daughters-in-law had gone away to live separately with their husbands after staying in her house for less than a month. With the exception of the wife who had died before she came to Manda's house, she had chased all of Manda's girlfriends away, and so successfully had she kept them at bay that not even one had shown any desire to come back to Manda's house. Now, she had firmly established herself in the family tree and had proved her worth by giving the Kombri tribe three sons — powerfully-built men — to expand and strengthen the tribe. Now she was a collection of bones, with a bit of flesh here and there, due to the

bearing of Manda's five children, and doing her womanly duties. She cooked for the children. She looked after them and did all that she could to avoid any harm to them. She also looked after the pigs which filled up two large houses. With plenty of pigs, Manda automatically became a prominent figure in the village and this brought him corresponding power and influence. Now he was one of the most respected leaders in the whole tribe.

"Druakindal," called Kallan from the back of the house where he had gone to cut sugar cane.

"Yes? What's the matter?" replied his mother.

"Yalkindal sent me to go and fetch him the medicine man from Govan. He told me," as he broke the sugar cane and peeled the skin with his teeth, "he's sick. Right now he's sleeping in the men's house," added Kallan.

"That sounds very bad!"

"I'm not sure it's that bad. However, make sure that he's brought here and tell the others that there will be a formal meeting here tonight."

"I'll tell them to assemble in Guagl's house. It's spacious and roomy inside. And Guagl's wife," she continued, "will be able to look after him better if his condition deteriorates. She's young and able."

"And here's your breakfast," said his mother, changing the subject. Without any word, Kallan took the three roasted kaukau his mother passed to him. He sat on top of the cooking stones to consume them. He was already on the second piece when his mother interrupted him.

"Look out! These pieces of kaukau are hot. I just got them out of the charcoal."

"I'm not an old man," retorted Kallan. After finishing the last piece, he washed it down with cold water from the bamboo container nearby. Having satisfied his thirst, he picked up the remains of the sugar cane and was about to go when his mother again interrupted. She had been watching all his movements from inside the house and warned him sternly.

"Be careful how you carry yourself."

"What do you mean?" questioned her son, while turning back slowly.

"There're plenty of girls where you're going. Don't let them seduce you, son."

"Look! I'm not going to chase around after anybody," replied Kallan jokingly, but with a serious tone. "This errand is for a special purpose and I'd be foolish to associate myself with any of these Gandin-Koralku lasses."

"Oh, I was referring to Ninmongo. I've heard rumours that she's after your heels, so be careful where you land your feet. You know very well that I don't like her type. Anyway, it's just motherly advice, so you'd better be off." She laughed and concluded the conversation.

When her son had gone, Druakindal came out to go and unfasten the pigs, pass the word around about the gathering and, ultimately, to go and get some food from the garden to cook for the whole extended family. The sun was shining brightly and there were no clouds, which was an indication of a fine day.

Book Review
Albert Wendt, Existential Writer by Russel Soaba

In this review I am going to talk about a great writer from amongst us called Albert Wendt. I need not go into extra detail about the man, where he comes from, what he is, etc, as we should all know by now what the name Albert Wendt means on this side of the water that carries us. Thus, this evening, I will not be looking at Albert Wendt as a socio-political/anthropological or whatever writer, which to some degree he is; I will not be looking at him as a poet, which he is; I will not be looking at him as an advocate of the Samoan way of life (*faa Samoa*) which he is; and I will not be looking at him as a scholar or an academic, which he is. I will try, rather, to look at least two of his novels in the way that he himself would perhaps like me to, so that in so doing I may attempt to understand the man, both as a writer and as a titled leader or *matai* of a yet separate *aiga* known as Pacific Literature. In other words, I will be talking about his literature, existentially.

I have chosen to discuss briefly about two of his novels, **Pouliuli** (1979) and **Leaves of the Banyan Tree** (1981) for two reasons:

1. both these novels are representative of the sentiments of existentialism already foreshadowed in that earlier novel, **Sons for the Return Home**. When reading **Sons**, for example, we could not help suspecting, and we were right in doing so, that what the Samoan writer was doing was writing an existential novel. But more of that later.
2. one of these novels, **Pouliuli**, is often used as a course textbook for literature students here.

Existentialism

A word or two about what existentialism, or what an existentialist, is. Existentialism deals with nothing but existence, or being. The people who preach existentialism talk about nothing else but being, existence; they may even spend 25 centuries telling a story about being; and if you introduce a new topic to them they will probably insist that there is no greater story in the entire universe for man to preoccupy his mind with than the story of being, existence; and 25 centuries of it, possibly more. Existence (1) becomes of itself the core around which revolve human sensibilities, human possibilities.

The Existentialist

How do we define an existentialist, or an existential individual? The existentialist is obviously an individual found as a stranger in or to his own society. He is someone who believes in himself, or more precisely, someone who believes in the Self. He is someone who stands on his own two feet and faces the world as it is. He is also someone who, against the advice of the society perhaps, or against the advice of God for that matter, is free to take his own life whenever he wishes; and at times, the lives of others. Above all, he is someone who remains self-sufficient at all times.

The Lusman

There are, in my opinion, usually two types of existential individuals. We'll look at each one of these in turn. The first type is someone who believes that he is born free; that he alone, and no one else, is responsible for his life; that he lives with no other purpose in mind than to enjoy this life on earth; that naturally, and being in such a position, he can use this sense of freedom to do whatever he wishes — he can even become a saint without God (according to Camus); that he has little or no sense of responsibility whatsoever, and does not usually wish to be tied down by any set rules, moral or religious values, dogmas, etc. In short, he is happy as he is. We could describe such an existential individual as a *lusman*. That's the first type.

Wanpis

The second type is not at all a happy one. Indeed he is free; but he is worried that he is free. He is worried because he is no longer just free; he is, as the French philosopher Jean-Paul Satre puts it, *condemned* to be free. Because he is condemned to be free, he must remain responsible for his actions at all times. He thus questions his sense of freedom, his sense of being or existence. Whatever he does as a free man must be peppered or seasoned with a certain amount of rationalization which will in turn enable him to prove his worth as a responsible human being. He is no longer free of the society, nor society free of him. He no longer rejects the society, nor *allows* the society to reject him. The society is *a* part of him; the society constitutes him. He must thus, as far as the society is concerned, remain as accommodating as possible at all times. This particular individual is a committed existentialist. We could describe him as *wanpis*.

Wendt's Protagonists

These two types of existential individuals are to be found in Albert Wendt's literature. None of his novels, short stories and poems is free of these characters. A protagonist in Wendt's novel, for example, can appear firstly as a *lusman* then slowly develop into a *wanpis* towards the end of the book, and vice versa. At the opening pages of **Sons for the Return Home** we are introduced to a

lusman. He is bored with a lecture. He makes for the nearest cafeteria for a cup of coffee where he meets the girl and behaves like a *lusman.* Towards the end of that same novel we see the protagonist as *wanpis.* He is alone, up in the skies, in the plane, trying that way to *balance* the two worlds — the pakeha or papalagi and the Samoan one — the two worlds which he has previously been attempting to escape from.

Is Wendt and Existentialist or an Existential novelist?

The question that comes to mind now is how existential Wendt is as a novelist. The answer is simple. He is very existential. So much so that we begin to worry about his condition as a South Pacific islander. But we'll talk about that some other time, elsewhere. Being an existential writer, then, much of the literature that he produces is fully committed to the society that he chooses to write about and in. This is, in essence, what Sartre means by the "literature of commitment".

Because man is a product of his society or culture, Sartre argues — and this is a Marxist argument — the type of literature that he produces must have something to do with man in society. The writer must remain responsible for every work that he has had printed under his own name; he must maintain that sense of responsibility for the "Self" as well as the "Self-in-Others" and "Self-for-Others".

Wendt and the Western Existentialists

There are, of course, numerous names to learn about in the realms of Western existential literature and philosophy who could pose as possible "influences" on the works of Albert Wendt. But the three names to remember when it comes to reading Wendt's novels, short stories and verse are:

1. Martin Heideggar, the German philosopher and quite possibly the major name in Western Existentialism, who died in 1976;
2. Albert Camus, the French existentialist, who died in a car accident in 1960; and
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher, who died barely a couple of years ago, in April 1980, I think.

These are the three names to keep in mind when reading Albert Wendt. Camus in particular is quoted occasionally in **Leaves of the Banyan Tree.**

Pouliuli

Now the novels themselves. Firstly, **Pouliuli.**

An old man, seventy-six years old, wakes up early one Saturday morning vomiting uncontrollably. "He sniffs back the mucus in his nose, catches it at the back of his throat, pulls up the side of the mosquito net, and spits it out on the paepae." Shows how rebellious Wendt it as a prose writer. We must understand that, existentially.

Speaking of this novel in 1978 Albert Wendt said: "it's about this man who wakes up one morning — in a traditional Samoan village — and decides he's wasted his whole life, 76 years of it. He wants to be free for a while, so he pretends he's mad . . . . Then there's the relationship with his best friend, they grew up together . . . . The whole novel's built around the limitations of freedom, individual freedom, how far you can go in a communal situation: it's quite existential, and short — 250 pages. A mystical figure appears in the book, one of the best people I've ever found: he haunts me even now, the old man. I don't know what the reaction is going to be. You see I thought the individual must be supreme when I wrote **Flying Fox:** now I'm sold on that idea, I'm changing." Thus, Albert Wendt in an interview conducted by **Meanjin Quarterly** in 1978.

So the old man suddenly feels that for the last seventy-six years he has been living what he now understands as a wasted life, a lie, a kind of self-deception in fact — a life which gives him that gruesome feeling of revulsion. He despises everything he has been, has become, has achieved. Suddenly, on this fine Saturday morning, he is not happy. Why? Albert Wendt tells us that the old man Faleasa Osovae, must now renounce all his domestic, social, national, political and other responsibilities in order to enter the Void, the great darkness within or *pouliuli.* Again we ask, why? Why such a choice for an old man, all of a sudden and after 76 years of material comfort and prosperity?

We are introduced once again to this idea of aloneness, existential alienation or dislocation of the individual from his *fale,* and *aiga,* his people and society in favour of freedom. Good old freedom! But after having found that freedom, which Osovae thought he did by pretending to go insane, where does the individual turn to next for ultimate bliss or happiness, so-called? Camus describes such a condition of man as "properly the feeling of absurdity." One moment you want to be this; the next you feel you are not what you wanted to be, what you wanted to achieve, what you wanted to become. Camus explains further:

> The contradiction is this: man rejects the world as it is, without accepting the necessity of escaping it. In fact, men cling to the world and by far the greater majority do not want to abandon it. Far from always wanting to forget it, they suffer, on the contrary, from not being able to possess it completely enough, strangers to the world which they live in, and exiled from their own country. Except for vivid moments of fulfilment, all reality for them

> is incomplete. Their actions escape them in the form of other actions, return in unexpected guises, to judge them and disappear like the water Tantalus longed to drink, into some still undiscoverd orifice. To know the whereabouts of the orifice, to control the course of the river, to understand life, at last, as destiny — these are their true aspirations. But this vision which in the realm of consciousness at least, will reconcile them with themselves, can only appear, if it ever does appear, at the fugitive moment which is death, and in which everything is consummated. In order to exist just once in the world, it is necessary never again to exist. (2)

Thus, the ultimate condition of Faleasa Osovae; having rejected his "successful" past in favour of existential freedom, he has discovered to his disappointment, and perhaps horror, that this new-found freedom simply means more suffering for him. He is no longer just free; he has "condemned" himself to be free. He has become of himself a "piece of cannibal meat" — and interesting choice of words made by Albert Wendt here, considering that since this is a South Pacific novel, we, the Melanesian readers, ought to start seriously wondering why Wendt decided to use those words:

"piece of cannibal meat." By way of a clue, regarding those words, let us not forget that among us, many years ago, a lot of Samoan missionaries died here.

So the old man dies finally, certainly not a happy man, leaving only one friend in the whole world, the cripple, Lemigao. "Sleep on, my friend," says Lemigao, Osovae's double, "sleep on, my friend, while the world dreams of terror . . ."

Leaves of the Banyan Tree

Speaking of the novel **Leaves of the Banyan Tree,** Alblert Wendt said in 1978: "It's made up of three novels, three books — the middle book is **Flying Fox,** a novella, but in a longer form than usual. The first book is called 'God, Money and Success,' and the last book is called 'Funerals and Heirs'. The book opens with the father of Flying Fox and his building up of a plantation . . . He sends his son away to school, and that's when flying fox grows up. He dies, and his body's being taken back to the village in the last book — the father, the grandson, and the illegitimate son . . . It shows a fairly traditional culture at the beginning and how it disintegrates — but it doesn't really disintegrate. I don't go for the "things fall apart" type of writing. The flying fox character would have got nowhere, anywhere. He's a completely self-destructive figure. (All my work oscillated from complete affirmation to complete destruction. I don't know why . . .) The book traces the history of his (that is, Tauilopepe's) family and his village, from 1900 through to now, and even beyond that . . . It shows a sort of decay, a shattering of old ways, but there's change as well, a taking on of new forms at the end. So even though it is depressing, at that point there is still hope . . ." This was in the same interview conducted by **Meanjin.**

Apart from the way Albert Wendt himself describes this novel, **Leaves of the Banyan Tree** can be read in three ways:

- firstly, it tells of a Samoan village, and not necessarily a Samoan community alone but of any other community within this region of the Pacific, and its progress in development from even the pre-contact period to the present;
- secondly, the book poses as a review, and a critically analytical one at that, of all the literatures that have been produced within the South Pacific region, including Papua New Guinea, from 1967, '68 or thereabouts to the present. For proof, regarding this second point, it would be helpful if the first and third books of **Leaves of the Banyan Tree** were read together with Albert Wendt's other publication which came out in 1980, called **Lali: A Pacific Anthology.**
- thirdly, and this is an obvious point, the book is predominantly an existential one; far more so, I think, than **Sons** or **Pouliuli.** This is how, in my opinion, **Leaves of the Banyan Tree** ought to be read, in order for the reader to understand thoroughly all its existential implications, shadings, or irony. The first book, 'God, Money and Success,' ought to be read together with part one of Albert Camus' **The Outsider.** The second book, 'Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree', ought to be read together with part two of Camus' **The Outsider** and, of course, Fanon's **The Wretched of the Earth.** The trial of Pepe in **Flying Fox** is almost a reworking of the trial of Marsault in Camus' **The Outsider.** The third book, 'Funerals and Heirs', ought to be read together with Albert Camus' **The Plague** and **The Myth of Sisyphus.** It is in this third book that Albert Wendt quotes passages from **The Myth of Sisyphus.**

These are merely technical suggestions which might help the reader delve deep into the existential qualities of Wendt's novels. But of course, the other alternative would be for the reader to read all of Camus, Sartre and Heidagger, even Dostoievsky, before reading **Leaves of the Banyan Tree;** that too would be very helpful indeed. So much for **Leaves.**

Characterizations

Most of these existential works that appear in the forms of novels contain little or no plots in them; they do not even appear as stories we usually read and enjoy and, of course, brand as good stories. These novels, existential novels, are in fact close studies of human beings; hence, the significance of characterization.

You may recall, in **Pouliuli,** there are three characters that are worth pondering over. Firstly, Osovae, the *aiga* leader, a devout Christian and generally a powerful man; secondly, there is Lemigao, the cripple, and a friend of Osovae's, who poses in the novel as Osovae's double, or rather an extension of Osovae's character or personality; then there is the mysterious old man who appears mysteriously, then disappears, again, mysteriously. We must try to understand why Albert Wendt has decided to invent such characters. On the one hand you have Osovae, a successful man. On the other you have Lemigao, the cripple. These two men create a single character. Both complement each other, as separate characters, and in doing so create a single entity. None of these characters is independent of the other. Both exist, and in existing accommodate each other. Thus, the idea of friendship between Osovae and Lemigao. What Osovae sees in Lemigao, the cripple, is a direct reflection of himself. Both these two men observe the principles of what true friendship means. And your friend, writes the Syrian poet-philosopher by the name of Kahlil Gibran, "your friend is your needs answered." (3) But such characterizations exceed this idea of friendship, in the sense that what these characters see in others and wish to attain are their own ideas and ideals, their own mysteries and feelings of completeness, or dislocation. Camus expresses this idea very well when towards the end of his book of essays **The Rebel** he offers the remark that we all carry within ourselves our places of exile, our crimes and ravages, our sense of avarice and cruelty etc. Our endeavour henceforth is to combat these, within ourselves, within others. Thus, what Osovae, the devout Christian, the upright man, sees in Lemigao, the cripple and to a greater degree the pagan, is merely an extension of his own personality. Thus, Albert Wendt's choice of writing about these two individuals as friends. Man is like an onion, according to some Indian ancients. He is composed of multiple personalities, which peel off one by one, like an onion, as he journeys towards what the existentialists regard as Selfhood or the Self. The moment he has reached that point of existential fulfilment, he feels 'enlightened', according to the Buddha, or has reached that long-searched-for point known as the 'clearing' (die Lichtung), or the 'feast of thinking', according to Heideggar.

Book Review

The Clearing

What precisely does a writer look for when he writes an existential novel? He is searching for that inner meaning, some finer meaning in life, which, whenever he is in the mood, he calls the 'good life'. The 'good life' is the satisfaction one receives out of whatever it is that one has achieved, be it in the form of material wealth or spiritual happiness. Do Albert Wendt's characters reach this 'clearing', which Heideggar talks about? In **Leaves of the Banyan Tree** they probably do. What does Heidegger mean by the 'clearing'? It is that which seeks to uncover what is concealed. This is best achieved through questioning; by being introduced to new ideas and thinking about them, being critical and objective about them. Above all, says Heidegger, what matters most is the journey towards that 'clearing' and not the 'clearing' itself. In a lecture given to his students many years ago, when he was a professor of philosophy, this is how Heidegger defined the idea of the search for the 'clearing', or using an alternative metaphor, the 'preparation for the feast':

> Feasts require long and painstaking preparation. This semester we want to prepare ourselves for the feast, even if we do not make it as far as the celebration, even if we only catch a glimpse of the preliminary festivities at the feast of thinking — experiencing what meditative thought is and what it means to be at home in genuine questioning. (4)

Thus, with that point in mind, we ask: what is it that Albert Wendt wants when he sits down to write a novel? Is he searching for the same 'clearing' that Heidegger has in mind, the same 'feast of thinking'? Perhaps the answer to this question is apparent in the novel, **Leaves of the Banyan Tree.** A group of men, led by the main character, Tauilopepe, and an old man, Toasa, take to the bush to clear the forest for a new plantation. Reading this particular passage we begin to feel that sense of 'concealment' and consequently wish to search for that 'clearing' that Heidegger talks about. This is how Albert Wendt describes such an existential ventrue:

> In that slow walk across the clearing he (Toasa, the old villager in the novel) had finally accepted the inevitable. He had looked at the bush, then back at Tauilopepe; he has realized he was standing between them and had decided to make way. That was why he had laughed. To Tauilopepe the past had no real meaning. He had seen that often enough in Tauilopepe's eyes after he had returned from theological college. The deck of cards had been cut years before, even before

> these men were born, and he, Toasa, had lost. Luck, as Lafo said, was either for you or against you. You either had it or you didn't. And he didn't have it, not any more the papalagi made sure of that. The world he was trying to prop up would sooner or later collapse completely. (5)

According to the passage quoted here Albert Wendt seems to be inferring that in order to search for that Heideggerian 'clearing', in order to mow the whole forest down and have people work their way towards the giant Banyan Tree which is their historical past, their geneological origins, their art of traditional oratory, their myths and legends, etc., even old villagers such as Toasa must be brushed aside as simply things obsolete. Toasa, the old villager, has lived a terrible life. (he is the leftover from the traditional past, but one who perfectly understands also the mysteries of the present.) That life seems to be composed entirely of gambling, and of the acceptance of whatever that comes his way. And who knows? This character could well be a Papua New Guinean writer. This is how Wendt describes old Toasa: "When Toasa saw Tauilopepe approaching him he straightened up and was again the old man whose sole preoccupation in life was card-playing and the acceptance of whichever way the cards fell." So even he, Toasa, the old villager, must be brushed aside, to give way for the other villagers to clear the forest and cultivate the land. But it is this old man and his condition, that I am worried about.

I would regard this passage, to be quoted shortly, as properly the great moment of the *lusman:*

"Did you know," says Toasa, addressing Tauilopepe whose idea it is that the forest must be cleared, "did you know we (meaning Toasa and Tauilopepe's father) were the only people who ever reached the top of the mountain range?" Tauilopepe shook his head. "The only two since the missionaries and traders nailed us to the sea-shore. Do you know what we found?" Paused, and looking steadily at Tauilopepe said: "We found lions and *aitu* and important memories."

And Toasa describes the journey previously undertaken by him and Tauilopepe's father:

> At first the going was easy — we knew the track well. But two hours later the track ran out and we were scared. We looked at each other and knew we couldn't break our bargain. "Come on," said your father. He always led when the going got tough. I was his shadow, tagging along because a shadow can't do anything else. We didn't take the trail we came on today: we dipped into the valley from the western side. He stumb;ed. I caught him straightened him up. "Shall we go back?" I asked. Without speaking he crawled ahead through the undergrowth down towards the valley floor and into the clearing where we rested and gnawed at our dry taro and gulped down the water.

So, that is Albert Wendt's idea of the Heideggerian 'clearing'.

By way of conclusion, Albert Wendt, since his words first started appearing, has been regarded loosely by the critics and reviewers as merely a South Pacific writer whose works reflected some existential leanings. However, bearing in mind all the points that have been expressed in this review, we can now regard the author as, indeed, an existential writer.

NOTES

1. See the articles on Albert Wendt's novels, **new literature review**, volume number 1981.

2. Camus, A., **The Rebel**, Penguin Modern Classics, London, recent reprint, p 226. See also **The Plague**, in the Modern Pengiun Classics series.

3. Gibran, K., **The Prophet**, William Heinemann Ltd., London, the 1980 edition p. 69.

4. Heidegger, M., **Nietzsche Volume 1: The Will to Power as Art**, translated by D. F. Krell, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981, p. 6. See also Professor George Steiners's study of **Heidegger**, Fontana Modern Masters series, 1981, and, of course, Heidegger's own **Being and Time** (Sein und Zeit).

5. Wendt, A., **Leaves of the Banyan Tree**, Longman Paul, New Zealand, 1981.

Other readings include Camus' **The Plague, La Chute, The Outsider, Exile and the Kingdom, The Myth of Sisyphus, Caligula,** etc; Sartre's **Existentialism is a Hemanism, Iron in the Soul, The Reprieve, The Age of Reason, L'Etre et le neant, La Nausee, Lucifer and the Lord, Words,** etc Professor Kaufmann's study of the existentialist from Dostoievsky to Sartre and Camus; Heidegger's **Was ist das — die Philosphie?**; and G. A. Schrader's **Existential Philosphers: Kierkeraard to Marleau-Ponty,** etc, etc.

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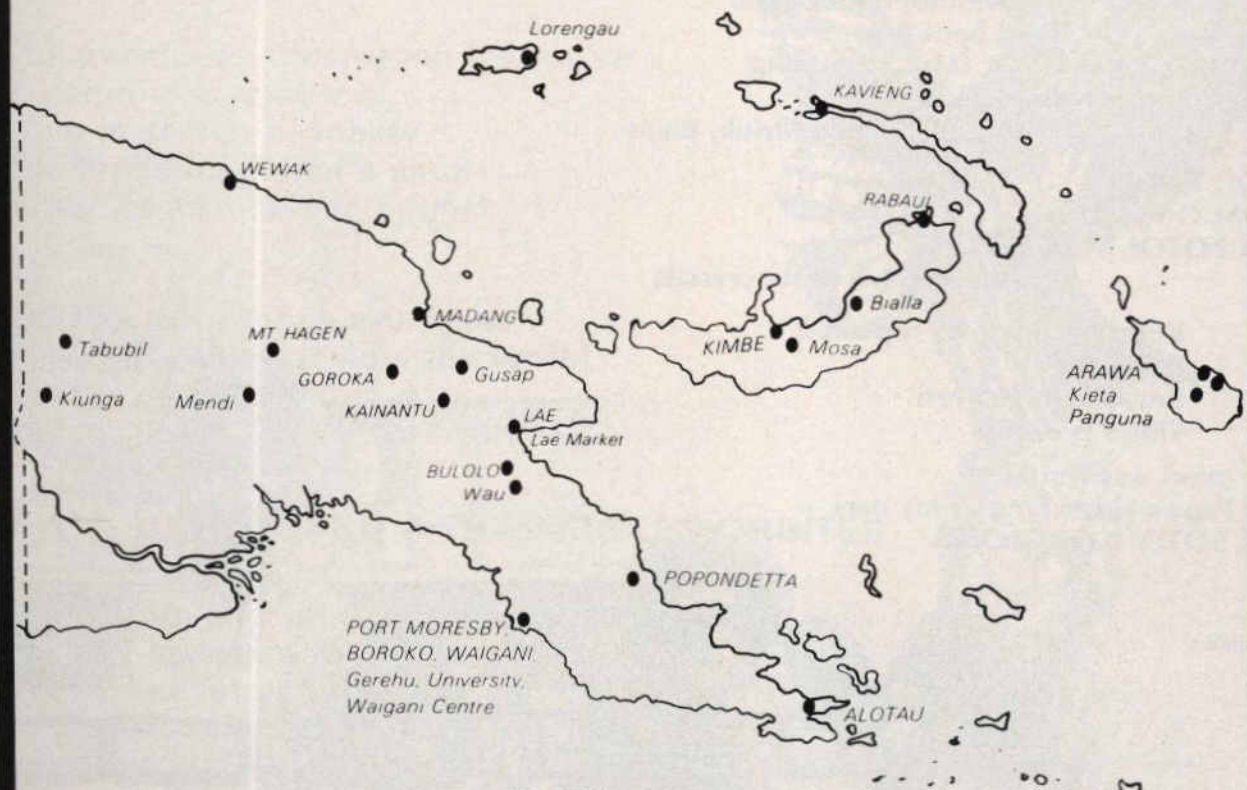

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BIA BOTOL LONGLONG

I strolled into the pub
And sat on a chair against the wall
With my friends
Surrounding me

The place was packed
Mungkas's, Morobeans, Papuans
Tolais, Sepiks, Simbus
Talking in different tongues

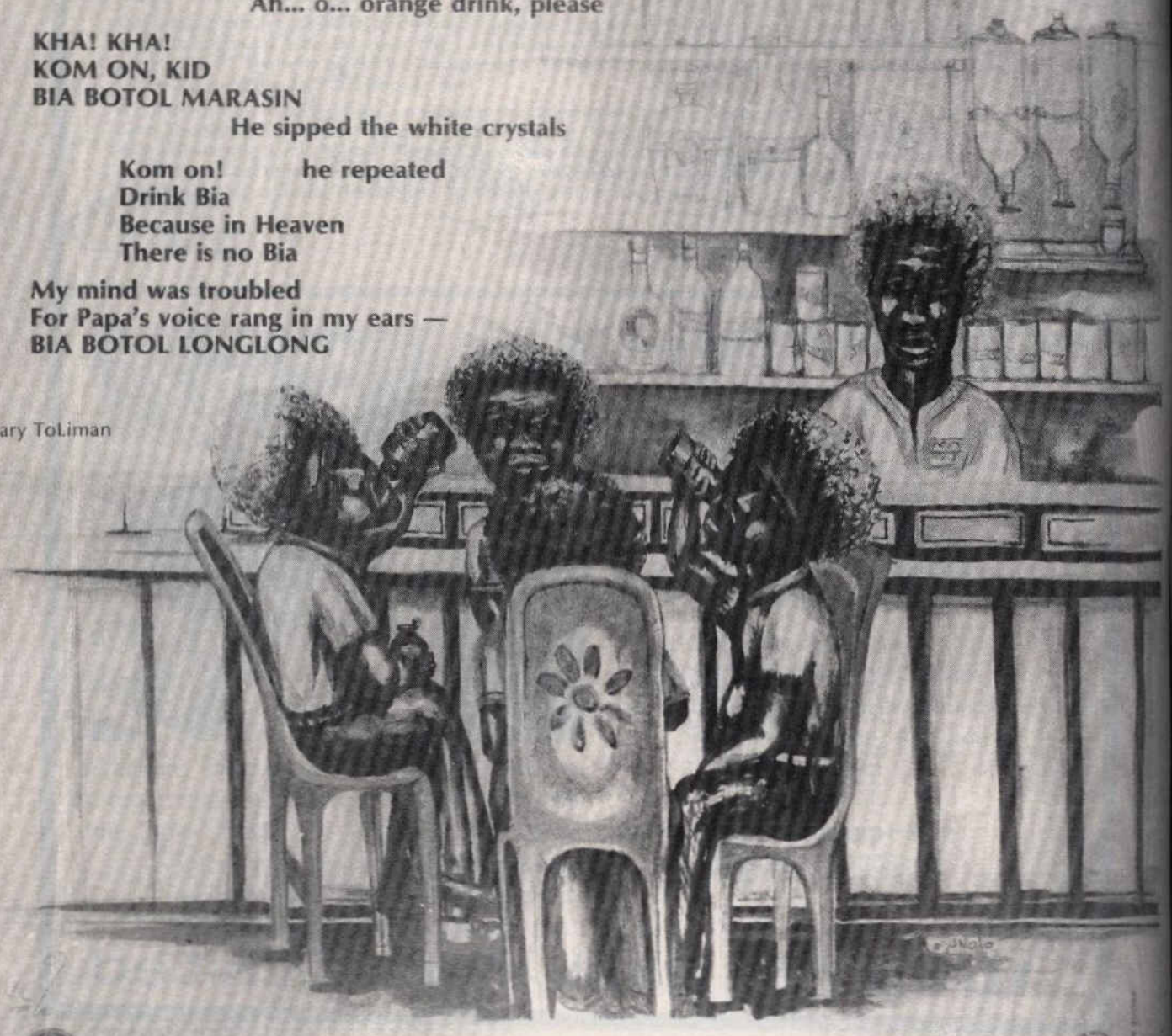
Soon a poroman came up
Al Buddie!
Two ring? No answer
Screw-driver? Shoulders shrugged
Spanner? Head bent low
Bakadi and Kok? Ah... struggling
Beer colonial work, Hey?
Ah... o... orange drink, please

KHA! KHA!
KOM ON, KID
BIA BOTOL MARASIN
He sipped the white crystals

Kom on! he repeated
Drink Bia
Because in Heaven
There is no Bia

My mind was troubled
For Papa's voice rang in my ears —
BIA BOTOL LONGLONG

Mary ToLiman



LOOKING THRU THOSE EYE HOLES

Once an artist went overseas
His father died in his absence
and was buried in the village

he followed a rainbow upon his return
and came to a cemetery
he dug in search of reality
till he broke his father's skull
to wear its fore-half as a mask

try it/look thru those eye-holes
see the old painting/view the world
in the way the dead had done.

UN REGARD A TRAVERS LES ORBITES

un jour un artiste partit outre mer
son père mourut en son absence
et fut enterré dans son village

dès son retour il suivit un arc-en-ciel
qui l'emmena à un cimetière
il creusa à la recherche de la réalité
et finit par briser le crâne de son père
dont il porta le devant en tant que masque

essaye le donc/regarde à travers ces orbites
vois l'ancien tableau/envisage le monde
tout comme les morts l'ont fait

(translation by M. Schiltz & A-M. Smith)

Russel Soaba

OndoBondo Poster Poems two August 1979 poem © Russell Soaba translation © M. Schiltz & A.M. Smith illustration © Joseph Nalo
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A mirage in the Arizona offering
hope of water
To the thirst of the unknown
traveller
You are the eternal receding playful
water
Upon a lonely sandy beach
I heard you like the quiet call of
a seagull
Singing the eternal charm of the sea
to my spirit
But now the seagull is gone
Only the eternal charm lives on

Kumalau Tawali

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