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A JOURNAL OF
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
AFFAIRS, IDEAS
AND THE ARTS

SEPTEMBER 1985
VOL. VI NO. 3

BIKMAUS

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by Loujaya — Moji Kouza

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Vol. VI, No. 3, September 1985.

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Editorial Board : Andrew Strathern
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Subscription charges: (All including airmail):

Papua New Guinea : Single copies K2.50

Four issues per year : K10.00 per annum

Overseas : Single copies K5.00

Four issues per year : K20.00 per annum

Contributor's rates : K5.00 per printed page

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K3.00 per photo* or illustration accompanying an article (Black and white only).

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Enquiries to : Editor, BIKMAUS, Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, P.O. Box 1432, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

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YOUR WAY OR MINE?

By Loujaya-Mojji Kouza

She sat in the mess picking at the plate of chips, her mind distant from her action. The chips had turned cold and the fish looked like a greasy lump of flour. Around her a snakey line of students wound round wooden benches leading to the kitchen windows where the cooks stood serving plates of fish and chips. Pushing her plate aside she stared out the fly screened window near the table, rose without excusing herself and walked out of the mess.

Outside she found a smooth white boulder and sat on it, while chewing disdainfully on a stem of grass, head lowered away from pettiness.

"Are you all right?" came a friendly, concerned query from inside the girls dormitory B that rose a few metres away from where she sat, its walls white washed drainpipes faded blue.

"I'm all right", she said. "Just thinking", she added then shrugging she lifted her bilum and walked towards the open door of dormitory B. Dragging herself up a flight of stairs she threw herself onto her bed, a bedraggled heap.

The approaching dusk enveloped her strained features and a stifled sob in its shroud.

It had rained the day she arrived at Aiyura. The day before her aunt had kissed her and fondly told her to write every day she could. Her uncle hugged her close before pushing her gently through the departure lounge doors at Jackson's airport Port Moresby.

After arriving at Goroka, she could see them again for a moment as she bent to lift her suitcase and carry it towards the education department bus that had been hired

by the school to pick arriving students up.

The journey from Goroka airport to Aiyura where the national high school was situated was a good 54 kilometre drive. Sitting near the window she glanced at passing grass huts and gardens clinging to mountain slopes. This was all new to her.

The bus ascended, descended, turned and straightened its route every now and then. It began to drizzle slightly and for a brief moment she felt an emptiness, a sudden pang of unwarranted fear that made her stomach screw itself up. She remembered that toast and vegemite was all she had stomachied before boarding her flight from Moresby to Goroka. No wonder her stomach wasn't accepting the treatment given.

After what seemed an eternity all her anxiety and uneasiness vanished as the bus seemingly swerved round the last announced bend and hurtled down a mild slope to the school below.

There lay Aiyura amid clusters of pine forest and gentle green slopes. It looked heavenly. So this was to be her home for two years . . . Aiyura.

Tracing her finger along the sheet of names placed high on the bulletin board she came across hers underlined in red. Block C she noted, form room 11E.

She trudged along the cement path leading to block of classrooms built in four sections on top of each other. Peering around the location she spotted it, 11E in large bold black letters on a light green door.

On opening it she was greeted by twelve sets of eyes that stared curiously back at her, the way new kids do on their first day at school. She leaned against the door, eyelids lowered as she eased the door shut and sidled towards a vacant desk two seats away from the front.

My name is Mr Volker he chalked on the board then turned to address the class. "I'm going to hand out a sheet of paper and I'd like you all to write your name on the top right hand corner and then what you hope to achieve by the end of your two years here."

She fiddled with her ring and stared blankly back at Mr Volker. She hated essays

especially ones where you had to talk about yourself.

As if reading her thoughts he announced, "I don't mean writing an essay, just one or two 'pars' will do."

So went her first day, she hated first days at school and all its formalities, kids asking where you came from as if they were going to do anything about it.

Sixth period Friday. Thank goodness there was only 10 more minutes before freedom. Old Devasahayam the History teacher from remote India or was it Bengal, had lectured long enough and she was getting capital letter BORED.

The long awaited bell finally rang saving her from a sticky situation where 'Devah' had caught her staring out the window. He was about to direct a question at her when . . . "Whew, he can save his breath for next time," she whispered as she bounded out of the classroom and down the stairs with the rest of the class hot on her heels.

It was Friday and tonight would be the welcome dance put on by the SRC in the mess. She wouldn't miss that for anything.

Have you got a boyfriend?

No.

Why don't you go out and get acquainted? (she shrugs)

I'm not into that kind of thing, boyfriends and all.

Oh, well there's a dance on in the mess . . . are you interested in that?

Yes, but I'd rather not . . . I mean.

Listen if you want to dance say so, if you don't well I'm going in anyway.

Hey please wait, you didn't tell me your name.

She called after him but he had disappeared into the mess and she was left standing alone.

She had only met him for that brief moment and yet there was a crazy feeling in her stomach, like Butterflies doing a dance. Her heart did a double flop as she ran towards dormitory B. She had to sort herself out. Not that she was in a mess but her stomach and heart seemed to have flipped; more than once she was sure it would have

jumped right out of her mouth.

"I think I like him," she whispered to herself. "No, no I shouldn't say that, why I hardly even know him."

"But you do like him, don't you", a tiny voice seemed to insist at the corner of her mind.

"Go and tell him, it went further."

Without a second thought she rushed out of dormitory B in her nightie, for she had changed after talking to him, and urgently beckoned to one of her class-mates.

"Hey . . . Eric could you pass a message?"

Sure.

"Do you see that guy in the mess with the green shirt and white shorts?"

"Which one?"

"The one dancing with that fat girl".

"Oh, yeah".

"Could you tell him I'd like to meet him."

"Where?"

"Just say behind the coffee shop".

There it was out, she had told someone . . . but hell her knees were knocking together and she was afraid someone passing would hear.

Three minutes seemed almost deafening, she felt sure courting couples passing must have heard the way her heart thumped, rolled and pounded in her ears.

"You sent a message?"

"I . . . I like you", she burst out.

"Hey now hold on . . . a minute, you can't mean that?"

She nodded trying to keep her teeth from chattering.

"Now look, I only just met you and to say you like me, well . . . don't you think that's too soon?"

"But I do," she defended lamely.

The sum Mr Sanderson placed on the board sure was difficult. It just wasn't her day. Fancy running to a guy she hardly knew and telling him that she liked him. She was becoming as bad as the girls in 11A who practically flirted with anything in a pair of trousers and shirt without breasts.

She checked the clock. It was almost recess time and she still hadn't finished the sum.

"What's the answer?" she whispered across the room to a friend, two seats in front of

where she sat.

"All right, electrifying voice sometimes carries over the cow paddock or

"Blow it", she unfinished Math

She had managed in the mess at the Monday she stumbled.

"Ooh, I could she took a short building leading dormitory B.

The guy seemed till he offered to tried to kiss her off shaking.

What a fool boyfriends. If he little "Bush-meri the whole year to

She was so ab didn't notice the a hand drop a slip Looking up brief strike twelve, she pencil that read ' nothing to do, ne

It was a month here was a note wasn't sure whether not, but she wanted

The walk up him all right and guy who wanted seemed more rela

"It's quiet here "Yeh."

"You know you "Oh?"

"I mean why wanted to kiss you

"I'm sorry but "Don't start spirit but what i

was going to do "Well I've . . .

anyone before, y

where she sat.

"All right, pens down", came the electrifying voice of Mr Sanderson, that sometimes carried over the Kaukau field and cow paddock on clear days.

"Blow it", she muttered as she handed the unfinished Math sheet in.

She had managed to avoid the long queue in the mess at the weekend and today being Monday she still couldn't get over her blunder.

"Ooh, I could kick myself", she muttered as she took a short cut behind the expressive arts building leading to the laundry area of dormitory B.

The guy seemed so nice and understanding till he offered to take her for a walk. When he tried to kiss her she burst out crying and ran off shaking.

What a fool she had been, so much for boyfriends. If he thought that she was a cheap little "Bush-meri" he was wrong and she had the whole year to prove it.

She was so absorbed in her assignment, she didn't notice the curtain to her room part and a hand drop a slip of paper on her study table. Looking up briefly to catch the hand of time strike twelve, she noticed it. A thin scrawl in pencil that read "See you at two if you've got nothing to do, near the staffroom."

It was a month since her little blunder and here was a note inviting her for a walk. She wasn't sure whether it was the same guy or not, but she wanted to find out anyway.

The walk up the hill was in silence. It was him all right and he didn't look a bit like the guy who wanted to kiss her that night, no he seemed more relaxed.

"It's quiet here isn't it?" he ventured.

"Yeh."

"You know you're a funny girl."

"Oh?"

"I mean why run off like that when I only wanted to kiss you goodnight?"

"I'm sorry but I . . . her voice trailed off.

"Don't start apologising, I admire your spirit but what in the world did you think I was going to do to you?"

"Well I've . . . I've never been that close to anyone before, you see my mother was the

only person I ever loved."

She disliked answering personal questions and having to explain sticky situations about herself, her life and the things that she loved . . . but there sitting on a fence overlooking Stork creek was a guy who not only lent her his ears but his understanding features.

How she hated sympathy openly, it made her weak and wallow in self pity.

"I'm living with an Aunt and Uncle after mum died, she died two years after a divorce with dad."

"I'm sorry, he said "I sure hope things will be a lot brighter for us."

"Us" was the word and it cemented the beginning of a relationship, the relationship of Marian and Julio.

Her days were filled with smiles and hellos she found herself looking forward to the weekend walks and talks and her night study escort to classes.

Like most students on campus she took an interest in watching video shows or just lying on her stomach supporting her chin on her hands and chewing grass while he sat beside her and talked about life and his likes and dislikes.

Although he was from the North Solomons and she from the Central Province that really didn't make much difference as they were both keen on the same kind of music, dance, songs and topics of interest.

One afternoon as classes had finished earlier than usual; must have been a public holiday of some sort.

He bumped into her on the way to the boys' quarters and suggested they climb the heights overlooking the school grounds and take in the scenery as the sun sank behind the mountains. Following a path that snaked up the slope through dumps of elephant grass they scrambled onto a small clearing and paused for breath while looking down the way they had come.

"It's beautiful," she breathed.

I'd hate to leave this place.

The magic of the stillness was disturbed with . . .

What this?

Oh just a friend's belt.
It doesn't look like one.
Well it is.

Shall I throw it away?

No!

Why?

Well, because it isn't mine.

But I can still throw it away if I want to.
I know you can, but I trust you will not
because I told you it isn't mine.

She was beginning to lose her cool and was
exasperated at this sudden turn of events why
argue over some piddly little belt that didn't
belong to her.

He was irritated. No women had ever
questioned his actions with such confidence
without further questions. He swung the belt
into the bush and stood watching her.

All right, Mr. Smartarse.

You didn't have to throw it into the bush
you can start walking down all alone for all I
care.

She was stung. Fighting back the tears, she
parted the bushes and retrieved the ill-fated
belt. He was well on his way downhill and
almost on the main road that led over the
slope towards the staff housing area. She
made her way down the hill and lagged
behind him on the long white road.

The afternoon had lost its glow for her.
She didn't bother to look around her but ran
to dormitory B and once in her room she
flung herself on her bed fighting the sting in
her eyes and vowing that she was finished
with him for good.

The dinner bell rang while she was turning
into the path leading to dormitory B. The
events of the afternoon had made her lose her
appetite, beside the food seemed to taste like
cardboard; she couldn't even swallow.

Boyfriends she muttered. I wish I'd never
set eyes on him. Just then one of his friends
came alone, hey why did you go and blow
your top off for? None of your business, she
retorted.

Oh yeh?

Well, what if I tell him to be through with
you?

All right go ahead tell him but finished and
thanks for nothing, she yelled back. She was

humiliated, hurt, and stung. Stumbling out of
the mess she fought to hold back her tears
that were coursing down her face.

Why am I crying?

Why should I cry if some guy decides to
walk off over some petty thing like a belt?
Once in her room she grabbed a piece of
paper and scribbled in pencil.

Ok, Mr . . . if you're not game enough to
say give up without the help of a friend. Have
it your way but I'm finished.

And the words of a broken heart is just
emotion that sweeping me over tied up in
sorrow lost in my soul but if you don't come
back . . . The rest of the song trailed off as she
quickened her pace past the social centre.

Why oh why?

Did her surroundings reflect the way she
felt?

How are you?

Oh! I'm fine just fine (she lied).

Got over him yet?

Now, really you don't think I'd want to sit
around moping over spill-milk.

Sorry, just asking.

"I haven't seen much of you lately thats
all", said her stocky built roommate, Janet.

Oh, I'm just busy that's all . . .

Just plain busy, she repeated trying to
convince herself.

Yeh wall do drop by sometime.

You know where my room is, don't you?

Thanks

Janet gave her an affectionate squeeze then
left.

It sure was a comfort having a friend like
Janet around.

She had only met Janet at the dinner table
a couple of days back and already she had
confided in her over a cup of coffee last night.

She collected her books from her room and
walked towards her night study room. It was
around 6.30 and already quite dark. Good
thing the lights were on in the classroom and
it was empty. She checked her assignment list.

Blow it!

Devah did have to go and put up a notice
saying tomorrow a test on the German
invasion of parts of Europe.

Why, she didn't even have the chance to go

over her notes.

She pushed
pity out of her
underlining all
worksheet.

Light out, and
of the song 'Sep
nothing left to
and pick up all
and maybe some
way another love

There was a
Janet entered.

He said he'd
Where?

On the valley
But I thought
over for me.

You can't mea
Course I mean

Look here, yo
week trying to av
that would remind
you know.

She turned her
wall.

Ok, ok, so you
expect me to do?

Crawl on my
snivelling little idi
come back?

No way!

You know I t
because deep down
actions.

Alright Jane
phropesy. Sorry
show up.

She covered h
and walked out
direction of the v
dark except for
dormitory A tha
court.

She could see
leaning against th
the net to.

She sat down s
and stared out on
from the staff hou
Well?

over her notes.

She pushed all lingering thoughts of self pity out of her mind and set to work underlining all the key factors on her worksheet.

Light out, and there it came again snatches of the song 'Separate ways' . . . "Now there's nothing left to do but go our separate ways and pick up all the pieces left behind us . . . and maybe someday, somewhere along the way another love will find us" . . .

There was a soft knock on her wall and Janet entered.

He said he'd like to meet you . . .

Where?

On the valley ball court.

But I thought we were finished, I mean it's over for me.

You can't mean it?

Course I mean it.

Look here, you've been moping around all week trying to avoid everyone and everything that would remind you of him. I'm not blind you know.

She turned her back to Janet and faced the wall.

Ok, ok, so you are right now, what do you expect me to do?

Crawl on my hands and knees like some snivelling little idiot and ask Mr Smartarse to come back?

No way!

You know I think your kidding yourself because deep down I'm sure you regret your actions.

Alright Janet, you don't need to prophesy. Sorry I just promised him, you'd show up.

She covered her nightdress with a laplap and walked out of dormitory B in the direction of the volley ball court. It was pitch dark except for the laundry light from dormitory A that lit a small corner of the court.

She could see him, shoulders sagged and leaning against the iron post used for tying the net to.

She sat down some metres away from him and stared out onto the slope lit by the lights from the staff houses.

Well?

(Silence) . . .

Why did you call me here?

Well! . . .

I'm listening

Well to state if flatly, I've never had a girlfriend before.

You had me.

Yeh, but that's different

Oh!

I mean over the past few days, weeks, months whatever you wish to call it, I've been alone a lot of thinking and I realize you're different.

What do you mean.

(Silence) . . .

You're too good a lady to fool.

Please explain

Well we both see eye to eye in everything from music to dancing. All my friends keep telling me I'm a fool to finish from you like this. I've done a lot of thinking and I suppose it's best that we end it on a good note.

Look I respect you and I admire you for what you are and who you are.

I've always let you know how I felt about you and I had no cause to doubt you!

"Look I guess I'd better tell it to you straight. We both don't see eye to eye when it comes to the idea of sex."

Well I told you, I can't let go of my principles. I'm a proud woman, and I take pride in my virginity and I'd only give it to the man I will marry and no other less than that!

Well if that's the case I admire you but do not wish to destroy the opinions you hold concerning sex before marriage.

There was a long pause and tears raced down her face burning her cheeks. So it's really over? She turned to face him but he was crying too. I'm so confused I'm not sure whether it's the right move to make.

I'll give all the things you gave me back, he said.

I don't need them, she answered.

But they're yours, she retorted.

Look here I gave them to you because I wanted to show I cared. Just because we've finished doesn't mean I get them all back. I guess you don't understand what love is. It's giving not so much taking.

The final bell rang and they departed in the dark and walked silently over the mist-laden grass to their respective dormitories.

Well, she thought, I suppose that's life. Tomorrow she'd have to face up to Devah's history test.

September came round and my, was she busy.

She was getting used to the idea of clucking round corners or sleeping behind classmates to avoid being seen and so far so good.

A class mumus had been planned before the school year would end and already she could feel the weight of responsibility. You're wanted for a brief meeting in the staff room.

All right, I'll be there.

Don't forget we're leaving at 3 o'clock this afternoon to collect Bananalenn. I won't.

And it went on.

By 3 o'clock she was armed with a bush knife and sitting on the school tractor with the rest of her mates all boys and one girl set to go banana leaves hunting.

Up on the mountain slope looking down she could see the school grounds with the students like ants digging mumu pits at their allocated spots.

A wave of pity swept over her. The mumus each year were almost monumental, for they marked the end of a living, eating and working relationship together.

On returning in the late afternoon from their banana leaves hunt she was absolutely joyous. The tractor was packed with banana leaves. The boys suggested she sit right at the top of the pile as they sped along the mountain road singing "we shall not be moved" and whooped when they bounced off a jut in the road. It began to drizzle and by the time they reached the road leading towards the school they looked like drowned rats. They weren't singing anymore, it was too cold for that.

Dinner was served at six and the mess was a humming house of students queuing up for cups of over sweet milio and plates of chicken and roast potatoes, a specialty dish.

The atmosphere was warm and cozy yet there seemed to be touch of melancholy that

swelled and spread when some joker turned the juke box at the far corner of the mess, up full volume and the whole house shook with the vibrations of Abba's "knowing me, knowing you."

The song was infectious, the early diner's who had occupied the front benches facing the cook's serving window, were tapping their empty plates to the beat and pretended to teasing as they watched some girls dab the corners of their eyes.

She watched the girl next to her sniff and rise to leave the table.

Must be losing a friend in a few days' time she thought.

She felt like shedding a few tears herself but that wouldn't do any good. She had no one to share it with, perhaps if she was still with him she would, but she dismissed the thought; it seemed impossible to get back, why he'd be leaving in two weeks time.

I want you back.

You can't mean it.

I do.

Sometimes it's not so easy to come back.

Please try.

No it's got to be the decision of two hearts not one.

It was just a few days before he would leave and he wanted her back. She really didn't know what for. Was it out of sentimentally and the mood everyone was in. They were back together again and even promised happier times ahead.

The year would end at midnight after the party lights and music faded into the early hours of the morning.

Sleep came as a temptation to all the students who stayed up past midnight but they kept close together to keep warm and awake to watch their friends leave, never to return again.

Five o'clock he left on the school bus leaving her standing in the shadows of the fading night with a promise of love. Up over the green hills he'd go, then over the sea to his destiny; it was over for him but she was to return to her home of two years for it was like one day in her lifetime.

If goodbyes could stretched
let's stretch then

THE BREAKUP

Was it distance couldn't really tell he could. He e words of a son remembered h stretched into brief and lade assignments to d to struggle to ke dear."

The story was happy. He always assured h

It was June al began to try wit remember him were together, so the feeling of tog "It's no use", s for the card he assure her. He w

I love love lov
love love love
love you so I
the best of it t

It was writ
superstitious, tha
Her mind drill

All eyes were
five others in lir
for the President

"Fellow stude
stand up here a
position of presic

"Although I
position, I bear
elect and depriv
voters. The choic

If by any cha
most willing to
friends, you hav
whether I am c
remembered the
in her favour; th

If goodbyes could be stretched
let's stretch them forever.

THE BREAKUP

Was it distance that did it or was it time? She couldn't really tell. He wrote to her every day he could. He even wrote of his love in the words of a song. That touched her and she remembered him with tears. The days stretched into months. His letters became brief and laden with "I've got a lot of assignments to do these days; you've really got to struggle to keep your head above water my dear."

The story was always the same, but she was happy. He always tried to write and always assured her of his love.

It was June almost going onto July and she began to try with real effort, when alone, to remember him the way he was when they were together, so she could write to him with the feeling of togetherness implied.

"It's no use", she cried in anger and reached for the card he had sent last Christmas to assure her. He wrote:

I love love love love love love
love love love love love love
love you so I send you
the best of it that Christmas can bring.

It was written 13 times, she wasn't superstitious, that was his favorite number.

Her mind drifted back.

All eyes were upon her as she stood among five others in line. They were all candidates for the President of the year award.

"Fellow students, it is a pleasure for me to stand up here as a female candidate for the position of president.

"Although I am campaigning for this position, I bear in mind that the power to elect and deprive lies in the hands of the voters. The choice is ultimately yours.

If by any chance I am chosen, I will be most willing to take responsibility, but friends, you have the last say in deciding whether I am capable for the task." She remembered the show of hands and applause in her favour; the lunchtime announcement

that she had won. The beautifully-decorated chocolate cake with "a Good Woman" written on it in icing. But best of all, when she made him eat the cake till he could take no more.

Her mind probed on turning back in time. Sometimes she tried so hard.

Today just seemed like one of those days. She worked so hard but hardly achieved anything.

She kicked at a piece of paper underfoot. It didn't go far, so she picked it up and read.

It was addressed to her saying: "There are people you meet on the road of life, and you welcome them with a smile. But after a time, they drift away — they can't go that **"EXTRA MILE."**

"And then there are others who come along you're glad to have them near, but as soon as the going's a little tough they suddenly disappear.

"But once in a while you meet someone who's with you all the way — who cheers you up when your spirits are low, and who smiles when skies are grey."

"Someone who helps you to say **"SO WHAT"?** When your luck goes down the drain. Someone who trudges by your side in sunshine or in rain."

"Someone who shows the secret of showing **"I understand"** and who never fails when you need them most to lend a helping hand."

"Someone who's willing and ready to share."

"Whatever they've got."

"And who doesn't try to apologise if it isn't such a lot."

"Someone who helps you to believe that you're awfully bright and clever, and who makes you feel deep down inside that they'll be your friend forever."

Well she thought, pinning the piece of paper on her notice board, that sure has lifted my spirits.

Her week of rushing round handing in assignments and reporting on matters of discipline had left her well-and-truly exhausted. She had just been told by the principal to get a group of students together and go up to the mountain slope overlooking

the school to look for palm leaves and bamboo. It was Friday afternoon and the whole school was supposed to be preparing for the 'Big day' festival the next day.

Climbing that slope was no easy task; she remembered the last time she was up here was just before their temporary breakup. How foolish she was then. But was she any smarter now she wondered?

Hurry up, will you! Someone called. Sure he's coming; just catching my breath, she said, as she grasped a clump of Kurai to support herself.

The cool mountain air filled her lungs and she breathed deeply. Such a beautiful place, I sure hate to leave.

Bong . . . Bong . . . Bong . . . That was the dinner bell, it sounded so distant from up the slope. But the time the last bamboo was placed on the tractor she had hardly the strength to walk.

I wonder whether I'll hear from him today, she thought. It had been two weeks since she heard from anybody and she was becoming impatient in her wait. He's forgotten you, somebody joked. Give up and find someone else. Not me, she laughed; I'm no two timer.

Hey there you've got a letter shouted. Janet from the entrance of Dormitory B.

Really?

Did you see the address?

Yeah, it's from the university.

It's time all right, she thought, as she jumped off the tractor as it came to a halt and raced towards Dormitory B.

Looks pretty bulky to me, said Janet.

What do you both write about anyway?

Shut up Janet, she said laughing just the same.

She eyed the letter curiously, it had been well over a week since she had heard from him and right now she wasn't quite sure what to expect.

On opening it she read:

Dearest Marian,

"I would like to spell out what is supposed to be the reason for my writing of this letter and would like to make certain requests to you.

Firstly and most important of all I would

like you to read this letter with a very open mind, as for a lady like you it could be hard to absorb what I have to say.

Secondly, I would very much appreciate it if you really make yourself comfortable and be by yourself. It sure helps to sit by yourself so that you'll be able to think properly. . . .

Her hands shook as she turned over a page and continued reading.

"Over the weeks that have passed or should I say months, I have done a lot of solitary confinement thinking and believe me sometimes it takes so long that I am exhausted. This is no fake.

"During these past holidays especially I have done at least one hour, just thinking. On other occasions I would just lay down on my bed and just think and think and think until somewhere around 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning.

"I have come to realise that I am not longer a teenager or youth but now claim myself to be a man. I look back to what I have done in the past and on numerous occasions regret and mock myself for what I had done.

"This letter I write is to express my very deep and inner feelings; therefore you should not be surprised at what I place on paper as I am fully aware of what I write. You are looking and reading the writings of a mature man who has given considerable thought before proceeding".

"What I have been thinking about is the friendship that exists between the both of us. I do not know when this relationship started but I am pretty sure it is short from being a year. This doesn't serve much significance in what I have to say. Both of us have come to acknowledge the fact that there are a lot of similarities in our personalities and approach to life. That we cannot deny.

"We have both shared intellectual conversations, we have walked together, we have laughed together, we have danced together, we have played around a lot and we also have cried together."

"All of what we have done, a lot of which I may not have mentioned, contributed to the strengthening of our relationship, in its own special way."

"However if the relationship was impenetrable should be able great importance covered."

"We cannot neither can we li exist and do not

"Friendship but it is the co should be treat

"My dear, w the fact that the life and friendsh approach to life I am after, to be both of us havi we holding two regards to sex ; beginning to ta your side but become frustrat turn is making tl I have realized tl be satisfied witl admit that I am this friendship a of us hold two d stage of life."

I sincerely h have written so impression that because I am ; doing that th companions as discarded after purpose, believe not on my mind partner, it was s in time. Maybe with you. I woul there was great p told me how go person you were Before you came seriously involve any girlfriends. S there was nothin and boyfriend. !

"However if we were to analyse carefully the relationship which sometimes we thought was impenetrable, we should or at least you should be able to see, 1 or 2 holes which are of great importance and ones which need to be covered."

"We cannot be ourselves if such holes exist neither can we lie to ourselves that they do not exist and do not serve any importance."

"Friendship to my opinion is surely tough but it is the condition of its existence that should be treated carefully and tenderly."

"My dear, what I am trying to establish is the fact that there are different approaches to life and friendship. Both of us have the same approach to life no doubt, but it is friendship. I am after, to be more specific the business of both of us having to indulge in sex. Both of us holding two completely different views as regards to sex and from what I see, this is beginning to take its effect. Maybe not on your side but surely on my side. I have become frustrated both sexually and this in turn is making this friendship also frustrating. I have realized that I have been pretending to be satisfied with this friendship but I must admit that I am not getting satisfaction from this friendship at all, simply because the two of us hold two different view about sex at this stage of life."

I sincerely hope that after reading what I have written so far, you do not get the impression that I got involved with you only because I am after sex. Other people are doing that this very day, using their companions as sex objects which are discarded after they have served their purpose, believe me I ain't that type. Sex was not on my mind when I got you to be my partner, it was something that came later on in time. Maybe you wonder why I ended up with you. I wouldn't know really, except that there was great pressure from my friends, they told me how good you were and the type of person you were so I decided to try you out. Before you came my way, I swear I never got seriously involved with any lady. I never had any girlfriends. Sure I went out with ladies but there was nothing of what you call girlfriend and boyfriend. Sex as I saw it then was a

means of enjoying life.

You changed all that. Ever since I got you, I have gone without sex and my frustration has made me realize that sex is a necessity. You may not believe it, but let me assure you that one has to share his or her body. The thing I see about you is that you concern yourself with the question of when to indulge in sex. As you told me, you wish to remain a virgin until you marry. You do not want whoever is your husband-to-be to know that you have been fooling around. I think you may have used an inappropriate word in 'fooling' because surely careful. Sex isn't fooling. I do respect you for everything you believe, in what you are but what about me. Do I just hang on to my frustration until marriage which is a lot of years to come?

There's no guarantee, my dear. You know, I go around bragging that I will marry you and we'll raise a good family but that's everybody's dream. Now I look back at it and I mock myself because I lost my head. Everything doesn't look all that it ought anymore. Not from the way things are going at present. It gives me the shits to think that I am no longer enjoying a good sex life. This is the time to really get down and see what life is, so to ensure a happy marriage. Life certainly doesn't revolve around sex, but it's one of the important things. In marriage certainly yes, but young world is a question, still it doesn't limit or give excuse not to have sex.

My dear, please understand me, just because I may have been with other women before I got you doesn't mean I am going to use you. I am not a sex maniac and I don't intend to treat my partner the way the world does, listen honey, you're a different thing to me, I've gone from liking you to loving you. I guess you don't believe everything I say, sure go ahead live your own life, nobody's stopping you, nobody's going to point a finger at you. That nobody includes me; if I'm interfering with your business just tell me so.

I'm sorry, I've been very brutal in my approach, but let's not forget that, this is a serious matter, maybe not serious to you but surely to me 'cause it's the main thing behind

all my frustrations.

Hate me or even swear at me if you will, just let go of yourself because I will understand if you do. I don't intend to hurt or confuse you, but let's face the truth, I have been pretending all this time to be satisfied with our friendship but my pretence only boils down to frustration, so it's only fair to be both of us that I remove the mask. My dear, I haven't reached the stage of "Love and Let go" but rather a state of consciousness of having to face up with truth and reality.

In ending this letter, I'd like to say take all the time in the world to weigh things carefully but believe me it's hard enough having to wait until marriage to have sex with you.

I don't wish to impose any conditions on you, my dear but I still remember the first time we discussed sex, how you gave me a serious talk of chastity and the 'Do or Die' factor of remaining a virgin until such time, Mr husband-to-be came along.

Now that I've said that I'd be grateful if you told me to get lost or piss off. Please understand I'm not doing this because I've got another woman caught up in my little world, no I'm not a two timer, however what we back in our friendship in mutual consent therefore I leave it to you to decide once and for all your way or mine? There may come a time when you will change your mind, I'll be around.

Enjoy yourself.

I remain JULIO.

Thoughts and words were hard to come by; her hands shook and the letter fell to the floor. No tears greeted her dry swollen eyes, her mind in a mess of emotions. She lay quietly on Janet's bed and shut her eyes, it was over or was it? The decision was . . . "Your way or mine . . ."

That afternoon she was absent from the mess. Her books due to be returned to the library that night sat abandoned beneath an overdue note on her notice board; she didn't care how the world or even school felt that night but she was hurt, though she didn't shed any tears for her friends to be curious about, Janet's comfort was enough without having too many undesirables wanting to know

about her affairs.

She wanted to reply to his letter but didn't know where to start so she left it for a while and took Janet into her confidence by saying "Do you think I should agree with his terms of friendship, Janet?"

"Well, I can't and won't allow myself to interfere with your affair, because if I say yes, give in and you do and then regret it, I won't be able to feel proud that I am your best friend, so Marian what do you feel deep down, it has to be sincere and you've got to tell him the truth."

The truth in its simplest form was that she was afraid. It all boiled down to her upbringing and the stress her parents laid on "unwanted pregnancies" and sexual promiscuity, especially her mother's advice after her father had left her, and her aunt and Uncle after her mother died. She had been bashed in the brains with the idea of a white wedding and remaining a virgin until the sheets were stained by the Bridegroom and that in itself had affected her first friendship with JULIO.

She checked her assignment list and saw that most of the major ones had been completed; there was a short English Essay due tomorrow but as it wasn't that important it could wait. She sat down at her study table and taking pen and paper poured her heart out.

Dearest Julio,

I love you unconditionally and more deeply than anyone else in the world but I do not always believe in my love.

I am becoming weak and sad in my love because I am afraid to become totally involved with you. Yet I cannot imagine life without you.

I have taken you into my life and I have moved into your life where we have shared the ups and downs and our innermost beings; any separation now would be like a divorce even though we are not married.

Yet in spite of our friendship to each other there are two conflicting feelings in me, my love for you on one hand and my fear for this commitment on the other because sometimes I doubt our love and our strength to

endure the hard

Julio, in even be some uncertain another person up is a kind of friendship must

Oh I wish want to help understand your friendship need in the end only true.

There are many mind but I am p the way that I k and I always wi you is selfish; y you have desire and I thank you frustrations.

As I cannot h frustrations dest wish. If it satisfi you are free to guess it is natur change what responsible for y

One thing I w that I'll still love yourself. I will s The questions I

Can you hear when I show you when I tell you follows me?

Are you prep though you don because its also to endure when of me. Which is hard to bear?

I cannot guar but much pain b and much povert and much being and much helpes therefore consid entering into a de

Julio, you say now and not afte

endure the hardship of a life together.

Julio, in every certainty there will always be some uncertainty, that moving close to another person is taking a risk, that opening up is a kind of dying that each marriage or friendship must be trusting in God.

Oh I wish I could show you how much I want to help, love, believe, trust and understand you but all I can say is that every friendship needs principles and God because in the end only he can sustain our love if it be true.

There are many things that weigh on my mind but I am prepared to sacrifice my love in the way that I know how. I know I love you and I always will but to say it and hold on to you is selfish; you are a man I understand, you have desires and I respect you for them and I thank you for being honest about your frustrations.

As I cannot hold onto you and watch your frustrations destroy you, you may do as you wish. If it satisfies you to have other woman, you are free to do so. You are a man and I guess it is natural to your instinct. I cannot change what is in you; only you are responsible for your actions.

One thing I would like you to remember is that I'll still love you just the same; let go of yourself. I will still love you in my own way. The questions I ask myself now is.

Can you hear with me,
when I show you who I am,
when I tell you my worries and the guilt that follows me?

Are you prepared to love or leave me even though you don't understand much about me because it's also part of me? Will you be able to endure when you come to know that side of me. Which is unknown to you; which is hard to bear?

I cannot guarantee your happiness
but much pain before love can grow
and much poverty
and much being human
and much helplessness before God
therefore consider everything well before
entering into a deeper relationship with me.

Julio, you say that you want sex with me now and not after marriage or whenever.

Would you be able to exclude me and have it with someone else; I mean I can't bring myself to accepting your terms and even if I did it would completely ruin the meaning of our friendship.

Once you take the step it becomes a routine then it becomes taken for granted. Will you despise me even more after my suggestion of sex with someone else.?

I understand your frustrations but if I give in it may help ease your frustrations but it will create hell for me. I'm sure it won't help me to indulge in sex now even though I'm in 18, because once I do it before marriage it will leave me cheap, dirty and there's no guarantee that you won't discard me. I want to be proud of my womanhood and be nobody's second hand use. You've got your pride and you want to prove your maturity.

Julio, I am prepared to face whatever you decided to do, with an open mind and heart. I trust you will see my point of view not now but later on in time when your aspirations are gained.

Please understand when I tell you that the risk involved in having sex before marriage chills me. I don't want to have an unwanted pregnancy or for my child to be fatherless, to be a woman forced into marriage at an early age to cover the shame from my parents. I don't want you to father a child and be obligated to marry me for a good name, to destroy your career and work to support a family so soon.

Julio, these are my fears laid open. Sex can be fun for the moment but we're so young and unattached that I may carry the scar of an unwanted pregnancy. If you marry someone else the child and I may suffer. These are hard words but sometimes they are necessary. I want to show you what sex before marriage means to me. Have it with other women if it will clam your frustrations but I will still be around to regard as a friend.

I am sure you will agree with me that men that indulge in sex before marriage finally end up wanting to marry a virgin, someone who hasn't been used, but a virgin is hard to find.

I want to remain the way I am until such a time when I can declare with pride who my

husband will be and then and only then in all certainty will I be free to sleep with him.

I am sorry that you are not satisfied with the friendship of ours. Should this make me regret ever getting to know you . . . no I don't regret anything that has ever happened, it is all a part of growing up. Love is a feeling to be learnt, do not ever feel that you have an obligation or attachment . . . Let's say there was a link called friendship, where love didn't come easy.

Julio, I leave to you the decision to do as you please; as for me I can only say I love you, even if I hear you marry someone else, even if you father a child there will still be that fondness that one gets from a lasting sweet and painful impression.

If there ever comes a time when you decide to look back and accept me as I am with flaws and holes in my character, poverty and pain I will remain with my dignity and pride perhaps a little older and a little wordly.

Julio it isn't for me to say all these things. You know I hate being preachy but it causes me pain to think that I am to blame for destroying the way you once were, to have changed the way you once lived.

If you leave me now, that's all right by me. It will cause me pain, a lot of pain; you may see me going to the familiar places we visited to see if you'll be there; don't say anything; it only means I still care to remember those times, I may even go to an event where I know you'll be and hope you don't notice me as I watch you and tell myself how much you've changed . . . No I won't force another reunion on you . . . I'll just be where you are to reassure myself that you have really changed and that my pain is in vain and I should forget completely, when you don't seem me again and wonder where I am . . . please know that my heart has settled to being without you.

But now in my mind I see pain and love like twins who pretend not to know each other, the one who loves will suffer but not everyone that suffers has loved.

My love for you may cause you pain just as it causes me pain to write but if our love is to last we must have a strong will to endure

pain. To love someone is to allow that person to cause us pain and yearning for perfection when there is so much imperfection.

To love someone we must be willing to hurt that person without making excuses for our actions; maybe it is right for us to fall out of love into pain to really experience love which isn't a feeling of the moment but the conscious decision for a way of life.

I have learnt a lot from this relationship; I feel trapped but don't know whom to blame, my upbringing or your ideas and the question . . . "Your way or mine?"

No Julio my answer is no I cannot give in to you.

If I'm not your kind,

Speak your mind.

So turning your back you may find a reason to believe in someone else the perfect match in her.

I'm not your kind,

I'm not right,

Don't shut your eyes from the light

You have a dream

Fulfill it

I am an obstacle

Leave me but I still wish the

Very best for you . . .

These tears of mine are a part-time thing a cycle of love and pain they mean joy and shame

Turn away from me

And follow your heart

For I am a fading dream

A childish whim

Open your eyes and I'm gone

The bubble has burst

The fruit dries up like a raisin in the sun

I am that dream, that bubble

That raisin' in the sun

What more can I say?

Love

Marian.

MARIAN'S AFTER MATA

That was it. My last exam was over and so was the school year. Funny how time seemed to fly. Seriously enough I was beginning to

feel settled here.

Settled here? above sea level, a middle of an A Highlands.

Yet it was horrible yet happy years of puberty and shattered expectations.

I was number one. Just a few minutes we were scrubbing lime fresh toilet stalls in a large auditorium born, waiting for we had sweated for.

A boy sitting next to me, all buttoned up further on down his shoes, I could tell under his seat.

I was filled with so much older than it fear?

Some faces were what fate would be to cover their corners.

I was beckoning official dais where speech. All eyes of confidence that were caught sight of away tears. We held together. I clutched on and plunged on.

"There is always marks the close of is such a time and occasion.

Seeing the facade seated here today, wrote, "where you important as when

We are classic It doesn't matter have a common goal and that is, to achieve

There is a common our politicians and students are today

feel settled here.

Settled here? A couple of thousand feet above sea level, at a place called Aiyura in the middle of an Alpine forest in the Eastern Highlands.

Yet it was home for two years. Two painful yet happy years, all the awkwardness of puberty and rebellion, heartaches and shattered expectations, had it all paid?

I was number 102 in line for graduation. Just a few minutes ago back in dormitory B we were scrubbing ourselves to death with lime fresh toilet soap and now . . . we sat in a large auditorium clean as the day we were born, waiting for a piece of plasticised paper we had sweated for, over the years.

A boy sitting next to me seemed dressed to kill, all buttoned up to his neck. Another guy further on down the line wore a pair of tight shoes, I could tell because he kept shuffling, under his seat.

I was filled with . . . well . . . we all seemed so much older than we were, I hated it, or was it fear?

Some faces were blank as if not knowing what fate would befall them, others muttered to cover their confusion.

I was beckoned from my seat to the official dais where I delivered my presidential speech. All eyes upon me, I began with confidence that was almost shattered when I caught sight of Janet sniffing and wiping away tears. We had gone through so much together. I clutched the stand my speech laid on and plunged on with my talk:-

"There is always a place and a time that marks the close of another school year. Today is such a time and this place serves well for the occasion.

Seeing the faces of my fellow students seated here today, I recall the words someone wrote, "where you come from is not as important as where you are going."

We are classic examples of national unity. It doesn't matter where you come from, we have a common goal when we leave this place and that is, to achieve in our endeavours.

There is a common cliché used amongst our politicians and that is "Yesterday's students are today's leaders," yet let me add

they can also be tomorrow's destroyers. But let this not blind you, to my intentions.

Two years here in this institution may have done a lot or perhaps nothing at all for you. Yet today, you are seated here in this auditorium waiting to receive a letter saying you have attained the standard required.

Tomorrow you will be out somewhere in Papua New Guinea of if you're lucky, overseas showing others the quality of the standard you attained while here.

I as the outgoing president of the student council of Aijura take pride in saying that, as a female I never dreamed of being president in a college like this, where the male students outnumber their female counterparts."

I wish to thank you all for your confidence in me and your criticism at times that has helped me develop and to assist you in turn with the best of my intentions and abilities."

They ended; I couldn't stand it . . . Janet was terrible, she was hopeless at keeping a straight face in such matters. I returned to my seat dry-eyed, shock, unbelief; and feat of what would happen the following year had perhaps evaporated the moisture bags under my eyes.

"Marian! Marian! Don't talk of leaving," Janet wailed after the graduation had ended. I held her head against mine and we cried buckets on the freshly mown highlands grass, outside the auditorium. A dam had been released in side me and my body racked with the loud sobs that came forth.

"Aiyura . . . ah . . . Auyura . . . ah", a group of boys arms round each other facing heads down in a circle swayed to and fro, sideways, backwards and all around moaning and crying, sobbing out details of their friendship from touch rugby to dormitory games.

The whole school was crying, their sounds were infectious, even the staff joined in.

I cried so hard I thought my throat was going to shrivel. I cried for everything. Julio, Janet, the presidentship, the tractor boys, the countryside . . . I was experiencing that pain of loving and letting go . . . breaking away from Janet and a few others, I ran with tear-filled eyes out past the auditorium, the

classrooms, the mess, stood on the smooth white boulder outside dormitory B, looked up to the mountain side I had climbed for banana and palm leaves and remembered everything.

Dramatically unaware I stood arms outstretched drinking in the beauty of the place with tears coursing shamelessly down my face. "I hate to leave you", I cried, "I hate to go," I don't want to", I shouted and beat my breast with clenched fists.

The mess stereo was on full volume with the song of K C and the Sunshine band's, "Please don't go". I could cry no more, for I had cried so hard, my head, ached and my throat, was parched.

I slid off the boulder and tramped up the stairs of dormitory B and into my room. Janet and I were now roommates after our first year had ended and we got along excellently. The other girls nicknamed us "the terrible twins", because we raved on about all kinds of things and even took to eating on the boys' side of the mess when all the other girls were chicken.

That was all good clean fun but today's graduation meant that it was over. Everything seemed over. I was over Julio and now Aiyura was over for me and Janet.

The final year had changed me. I had given up being a romantic starry eyed two legs in a dress. I took to strutting after Janet in a pair of cut-offs or drainpipe Denim Jeans, casting cheeky remarks at passing Romeos.

It was all a silent battle to prove that I didn't give two hoots about being without a boyfriend.

There was to be a farewell dance in the mess that night and I was determined to rid myself of this headache, wear my drainpipe denims and black pullover and go with Janet in her favourite cut-off Jeans and T-shirt, frayed at the arms, we didn't want to spoil the dance with tears so we Yahooed and 'Cat called' as the all-year-round shy guys walked across the room, like you wouldn't expect and asked the most feminine-looking creatures for a dance.

Janet and I weren't defeated, we joined the rowdy mob of guys in our class who held

onto the end of their shirts in a snakey and did a follow-the-leader dance right around the area of the dance floor... It was great fun...

I danced and danced till I was fit to drop, by three o'clock I felt my feet wobbling for a rest. I'm killing myself I said to Janet, "Well if you're going to die die here," she said and jumped off a bench onto the floor curtsying in her cut offs to a guy for the last dance; boy she looked ridiculous.

I couldn't dance anymore and so I left the dance and walked back to dormitory B. Outside there was a heavy shroud of mist, dew had settled and the grass looked white and beautiful under the security light at the entrance of dormitory B. I was tired but too excited to sleep; besides if I went to bed now, I'd miss out on saying goodbye to Janet and a few other friends who were supposed to be leaving at five this morning, for Lae.

Janet's folks lived in Lae, so she had promised to meet me at the airport there, before I caught a plane back to Moresby. I realised she wouldn't be seeing me again after leaving Aiyura, not even at Lae because according to our departure times and destinations. I was to fly from Nadzab airport and not the airport at Lae.

Brrr... it was cold outside. The sky was beginning to lighten in the East, giving the clouds a peach coloured hue against the disappearing blue black skyline of night.

Those who were leaving Aiyura this morning were seen carrying mattresses to the storehouse, where a staff member waited to cross their names off the book.

There was a sense of finality about everything. Breakfast was served at six, earlier than usual. There was nowhere to sit and have breakfast as the mess had been rid of all its chairs for last night's dance.

When the bus arrived to take Janet and the other students who were going to Lae, she was nowhere around. Some told me later on that she had eloped with a guy from the agriculture station and would go home in her own good time.

The home-coming welcome by my aunt and uncle wasn't much of an experience. Well there was aunt fussing over how much weight

I had lost and did guess I was just to my plate of rice and about Julio and shrugged in a co said, "Oh he's arc Solomons. I think University here!"

Uncle nodded a

A week later envelope all the certificate and a fortunate classmate his own, was not school. He ended college instead.

He wrote:

Dear Muli (Th school)"

Hello and how mountains of the bit difficult, cause cry. I could have d weren't for Emily' talking about? Th

Anyway, how's And how's Janet are they doing fine and regards to the you know who I'm

Anyway let's go Do you remember students left for A when I saw you know I should h Aujura if it hadn' teachers who hate considered my p subjects.

You know, M thought of the goe remember how we creep out of the c wasn't around, ru as we could, bring whole class. It sur final results.

Being rejected t brought me sham my family. I'm t

I had lost and did I ever get enough to eat. I guess I was just too tired to talk or even finish my plate of rice and chicken. Uncle had heard about Julio and asked me about him. I shrugged in a couldn't-care-less manner and said, "Oh he's around somewhere, in North Solomons. I think; he's supposed to be at the University here!"

Uncle nodded and said no more.

A week later I received a large brown envelope all the way from Aijura with my certificate and a letter from a not too fortunate classmate who through no fault of his own, was not accepted for National High school. He ended up at Malaguna Technical college instead.

He wrote:

Dear Muli (The nickname I had at high school)"

Hello and how's life up there in the cold mountains of the Highlands. As for me it's a bit difficult, cause I'm so lonesome I could cry. I could have directed this letter to you if it weren't for Emily's sake. Oh God what am I talking about? That was irrelevant.

Anyway, how's your school work up there! And how's Janet and the Dormitory B girls, are they doing fine? Well pass my best of luck and regards to them all especially, well I guess you know who I'm talking about.

Anyway let's go back to the bad side of life. Do you remember the day you and the other students left for Aijura. I had tears in my eyes when I saw you all board the plane. You know I should have been on that plane to Aijura if it hadn't been for those blustering teachers who hated my guts more than they considered my passes in all the required subjects.

You know, Marian, I was so mad, I thought of the good days back at high school; remember how we all used to crack jokes and creep out of the classroom when the teacher wasn't around, run down to the shops as fast as we could, bringing 'wopa' biscuits for the whole class. It sure was fun until we got our final results.

Being rejected to go to national high school brought me shame and disgrace, especially to my family. I'm the only one whose got a

decent education and my folks expected a lot of me, till now.

It's the teachers that ruined me and I know which ones, Marian I'm going to break-and-enter to show them. Better still attend the school's graduation ceremony and raise hell.

Tell those girls who are with you at Aijura to watch out . . . seeing them will only bring our my bitterness. Hey Marian, I'm sure you'll burn this letter after you've read it. It's just the frustrations of a born-looser I'm too much of a man to cry on a shoulder, writing it all out is easier. Hey, I miss you and the high school gang, be seeing you sometime, take care won't you?

Love from Sir-Joo Mendes.

"Poor Sir-Joo I sure hope to see him around some time", she said as she folded his letter neatly and placed it back into its envelope.

Tipping the large brown envelope upside down another letter fell out. This time a note that said that her application to university was accepted. Well it sure was a surprise to be thankful for. She kissed the envelope and announced "University here I come, so open your gate of understanding and let me decide, your way or mine".

That night she broke the news to her uncle and Aunt who wept, equally elated, but then plunged into a series of do's and don't that made her remark, "Listen I've been away in the Highlands for two years, nothing happened to me there. I didn't get caught in a tribal fight, raped or bring home an unwanted pregnancy".

Her aunt nodded in silence, thinking Aijura has sure changed, Marian, or was it her relationship with Julio that did it?

They kept preaching unwanted 'this', unwanted 'that' to me, I'm sick and fed up. If they hadn't been too rigid I wouldn't have had to suffer so much. Heck just look at all my peers; they're got boyfriends, manfriends and whatever else you'd expect when human beings get together; and look at me, I just clam up everytime anyone makes a pass.

I wish I hadn't been naive and stupid. I should have come back from the Highlands with a huge pregnancy . . . no I'm glad I didn't

they would have said I was just like every girl who left her home and family to go somewhere for further studies. "They always come back swollen," was my uncle's comment. Hate, she confided to her roommate in Luari . . . do you have to get 'busted' before you become a woman?

"What . . . oh don't be silly; you're a woman already."

"No, I mean a real woman."

"Marian, honestly don't tell me someone's been putting ideas into your head."

"Look Pat you've got to help me. Do I lklook all right."

"Course you do, you're slim and well-shaped; you're OK to me."

"What's your problem Marian, did some guy criticize you today?"

"No, the exact opposite, I've had several on my tail that I couldn't shake off, I'm scared."

"Of what, Marian?"

"Well, what if they expect to develop some kind of relationship, I couldn't stand being hurt the way I was before."

"If that's what you're worried about, be like me and the girls. Grab yourself some contras or take a chance and get 'busted'. It's scary at first but after you're over with it,

there'll be no hassles, nothing at all."

"What if I get pregnant?"

"You won't stupid; you'll be careful."

Kate was so worldly, I admired her poise and ease among members of the opposite sex but if getting 'busted' meant I'd end up being like her, affections divided to the four corners of Papua New Guinea, no thanks. It wasn't my game.

In the dining hall, I met up with Carol, a divorcee who didn't hesitate to run down my ear all her experience about how her live-in-boyfriend or husband of some sort jilted her after a three year affair without her knowledge. Her parting words were, "Marian, don't give yourself to anyone. Men are all the same they'll get what they want and leave you for another."

So this was university. A kaleidoscope of colour, individuals all different and their double lives. Nobody minded anybody else's business and what was wrong with an affair or fling . . . it didn't matter here. She was 19 but that was no big deal, there were others who were only 17.

She met Julio in the dining hall and they went out that night.

KING
MA

by John Kilburnki

It was Monday m
up very early. He
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week days Thoma
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household, Thoma
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so the breakfast
Most of the time
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over the open fire.

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KING OF THE MARBLES

by John Kilburnkit Kil

It was Monday morning and Thomas woke up very early. He had been disturbed by his mother who was preparing the breakfast. On week days Thomas had early breakfast. At times when there was no food at the household, Thomas went without breakfast. Sweet potatoes is the staple food in the area so the breakfast consists of sweet potatoes. Most of the time the sweet potatoes were boiled out at other times they were cooked over the open fire.

The pot over the fire place was boiling. It poured streams of water over its sides. Thomas yawned and walked past his mother. As he stepped out of the low hut a cool breeze hit him full in the face. Thomas breathed in deeply and let the air out very slowly. He did not know what time it was. He did not have a watch. Nobody in the whole village did. He guessed that it was around half-past six. The sun was already throwing its golden rays on the hill tops above his village. As the sun's rays mixed with the smoke that rose from the huts, they formed a beautiful pattern. It was very much like a rainbow. Thomas yawned again as he turned to the left. Most of the huts were situated towards the left. There the foot hills met the flat plain. The huts were built in a straight row, lined up as if they were the front line of a marching band. Behind the row of huts were the plots of sweet potatoes gardens. Thomas looked up at the sky. It was a very clearly sky. Only a few early morning clouds remained on the horizon. He said to himself, "Today is going to be a fine day."

"Thomas walked into the hut. His mother was sitting by the fire."

"What is the day like?" asked his mother.

"It is going to be a fine day, mother," he answered.

"Well hurry up and get the water for your bath."

The creek was not far from the hut. He got the bucket from the corner of the hut and ran down to the creek. Thomas dipped it in a moving pool and watched as the water slowly filled up. Once the container was full he put it aside and got some water in his cupped palm to drink. The water was very cold. He quickly drank two mouthfuls of water. Then he picked up the bucket and made his way back to the hut. Thomas poured the water into a basin and put it over the fire. He took his bath with the warm water. He then put on some dry clothes, combed his hair and was ready for school.

"Thomas the sun is up; its time for you to go to school," called his mother.

"I'm ready mother," he called back.

He picked up his breakfast. It was nicely wrapped in 'tanget' leaves. Thomas usually ate his breakfast while he walked to school. Sometimes he would bring it all the way to the school and eat it at recess. This time he decided to eat it on the way to school. As he walked down the path he looked over his shoulders. he could see his mother still sitting near the fire place. He stopped and looked at the hills for a while. Finally he turned and faced the path that led to the other huts and the main road. As he walked down the path the cold morning air was wrapped him and he started to shiver. He changed his pace and started to skip. Thomas said to himself, "Yes, today is going to be a very fine day."

As Thomas approached the first hut he whistled. It was answered by another whistle from the hut.

"Johnny, Simon; are you two ready?" called Thomas from the path.

"Just a moment Thomas, mum is fixing our breakfast," answered Johnny from the door of the hut. True to their word the came rushing out of the hut and joined Thomas within a few minutes. Johnny and Simon each had their breakfast under their arms. Their sweet potatoes were also wrapped nicely

in target leaves.

"We were about to come out when you called," said Simon.

Simon was Johnny's cousin. He was slim and very tall. Simon was a year older than Thomas and Johnny who were both twelve years old. Simon lived with Johnny's parents. His mother had died when he was only seven years old. His father left for the plantations soon after his mother's death. Johnny's family looked after Simon because Johnny's and Simon's fathers were brothers. Simon was big but he was not as fat as Johnny. Johnny had won the one hundred metre and four hundred metre races in the school competition. There was something about Johnny that other boys were afraid of. Even Thomas who was a close friend of his was sometimes afraid. Thomas could not work out why there was this peculiarity in Johnny. Thomas at times wondered whether it was to do with having one eye. Johnny had lost his left eye. Some people had said that he had fallen off a branch but Thomas did not know the exact story. He even did not bother to ask Johnny about his eye. Something always told him not to ask. Nevertheless, they were close friends and they had many adventures together.

"Yes, I realized that as soon as Johnny answered me," replied Thomas.

"Catch me if you can!" yelled Johnny and started to run down the path. The two boys fought for the lead. Thomas got in front to Simon. Then they were running after a disappearing Johnny. After fifteen minutes Thomas and Simon caught up with Johnny. He was talking with some of the children who were also going to school. Some of the children were giggling as the two boys neared the group of children. A small boy who had a missing front tooth pointed at the two exhausted boys and started to laugh. The other children joined the small boy and laughed as well.

"What is the matter?" enquired Simon. The small boy stopped laughing, cleared his throat and answered.

"The way you two were running was really funny to watch. You ran as if someone was chasing you with an axe."

"Shut up!" ordered Simon. "You talk a lot. Next time you open your stupid mouth I'll shut it up for you. Understand?"

"Honest, I did not mean to make you cross. I only thought it was funny," pleaded the small boy. "Funny or not, next time do not laugh like that, okay?" Simon was angry inside but decided to drop the matter at that. He knew that they were defeated. Instead he changed the subject and talked about the weekends adventures. On Saturday morning Simon and his uncle had left for the bush on a hunting trip. They had taken with them two blankets, an axe, a bow and arrows each and two boxes of matches. Before the hunt they had built themselves a small hut from bush materials. They had left their blankets there and had gone ahead with their hunting. That day did not bring any luck at all. But that night they had some luck. They had caught two birds and a possum which Simon had spotted up in a tree. Sunday morning brought even better luck. They had killed five birds and three possums. Their total kill for the hunt was eleven, four possums and seven birds. Towards the afternoon they had roasted their catch. They enough for themselves and took rest of the meat home for the family.

"Is that why you were absent for the Sundays role call?" asked one girl who was in the upper class. She was also the daughter of the village catechist.

"Yes, I've told you that I spent the whole weekend up in the bush with my uncle." Where else could I have been? I can not be in two places at the same time. Can I?

For Thomas and Johnny that weekend had been quite different from Simon's. Early on Saturday morning they had gone to a village not far from their own village. They took with them twenty marbles and deck of playing cards. The boys from that village had lots of marbles. Thomas and Johnny had lost one hundred in a card game to the boys from that village. That had been on the previous weekend. If it had been won through the ring game played on the ground then it would not have been that easy. Thomas and Johnny were both good shots and they could have

knocked all the r without any difficul that the winner cou how they had lost : the thirty they ha weekend they had played the ring gam Saturday morning. was better than Jot marble two or th Saturday Thomas best at the ring marbles with Thor on Saturday broug they lost. But those the village. The bo more. They had to come back any ti marbles.

The morning s the children starte time they had b stories. As they their breakfast. E started to knock was growing al travelling on the n any leaves and sh work of the child from school. W concentrating at k Thomas quietly Johnny to follow pace and the boys they felt the othe were running do coming up hill, l going to town. Tl lorry. The boys were locally prod the market in to waved to the th and continued to to the creek the faces and drank was the clan bot the clan of Sibai clan of Kebaka. warfare.

"What's up,

knocked all the marbles out of the ring without any difficulty. But with cards it meant that the winner could be anybody. That was how they had lost seventy marbles as well as the thirty they had won that day. The last weekend they had learnt their lesson so they played the ring game when they went there on Saturday morning. In the ring game Thomas was better than Johnny. He could knock off a marble two or three metres away. And on Saturday Thomas and Johnny proved to be best at the ring game. They won lots of marbles with Thomas winning most. The win on Saturday brought back their one hundred they lost. But those were not all the marbles in the village. The boys from that village had lots more. They had told Thomas and Johnny to come back any time if they wanted to play marbles.

The morning sun was getting warmer as the children started to walk to school. All this time they had been listening to the boys' stories. As they walked some began to eat their breakfast. Boys picked up stones and started to knock the tops off the ferns that was growing alongside the road. People travelling on the roads could see ferns without any leaves and shoots. No wonder it was the work of the children who were going to and from school. While the other boys were concentrating at knocking off the top of ferns, Thomas quietly signalled to Simon and Johnny to follow him. Thomas increased his pace and the boys followed his example. Soon they felt the other children behind and they were running downhill. A P.M.V. was slowly coming up hill, fully loaded with passengers going to town. There were lots of cargo on the lorry. The boys knew what they were. They were locally produced vegetables to be sold at the market in town. The people on the lorry waved to the three boys. They waved back and continued to run. When they came back to the creek the boys stopped, washed their faces and drank some of the water. The creek was the clan boundary. On the other side was the clan of Sibaka and the boys' clan was the clan of Kebaka. Both clans were allies in tribal warfare.

"What's up, Thomas?" enquired Johnny

and Simon at the same time.

"You know our plan, Johnny, don't you? It's time Simon knows about it too."

"Oh! well, it's like this Simon. When we came and played marbles in the other village on Saturday the boys told us to come any time we were ready. So we thought today would be a nice time to join those boys and have a game of marbles. Furthermore we hid all the marbles we won on Saturday; somewhere we can pick them up very easily. Do you want to join us or not Simon?"

"What about school?" enquired Simon.

"We are only starting after the holidays so there won't be any proper school. Last week was the first week of schooling and remember we did not do much that time. Well it will be the same this week."

"It will be only one day, any way," interrupted Thomas.

They heard the voices of the approaching children and Simon made up his mind to join the boys. He quickly followed the creek and walked up to its head. When they were some kilometres away from the road, they turned left and faced their village. They followed a track which led to the sweet potato gardens and soon they came upon the main path which led to the bush. They travelled for about an hour the other way until they came upon the other village. Every time someone passed they would duck into the bushes. They feared that someone might ask what they were doing there when it was time for school. As they approached the village where they were supposed to play marbles, Thomas and Johnny went into the bushes and came out with a bag each. Each boy counted out fifteen marbles and gave them to Simon. As they took the trail again for the village the sun looked down strongly at the boys. Thomas again remembered the comment he had made to his mother.

Thomas and Johnny led Simon to the playing ground. It was some kilometres away from the village. The playing ground was hidden inside some tall grass and away from the path that led to the bush. It was a well chosen spot. The ground was flat and very smooth. If the boys talked while playing

nobody could hear them. A small hill was in between the playing ground and the path that led to the busy. When the boys talked their voices would be blocked by the small hill, stopping those who went by from hearing them.

As they approached the playing ground, the boys from the village were already playing. There were two groups. One group was playing the ring game while the other group of boys were playing cards. The boys were so busy playing that no one was aware of the approaching boys until Johnny stepped on a dry branch. Snap! all eyes were turned to the three boys, leg muscles tense, ready to run for it if someone from the village happen to come. They relaxed as soon as they saw that it was the three boys. A boy as big as Simon came up to the boys and greeted them. Thomas and Johnny knew him as Taka from their earlier games with the boys in this village.

"What about school, boys?" asked the same boy.

"Today is public holiday," answered Johnny.

"That's okay then," said Taka.

There were five boys from the village. Three of them looked the same age as Thomas and Johnny. The other two matched Simon. Soon the boys started to play the game. Thomas and Johnny insisted on playing the ring game and eventually everyone agreed to it. They started off by placing two marbles around the ring. When they threw for placings, Thomas was first on the play. From one metre he knocked off two marbles from a single try. Then he knocked off another one. The third round he missed and the others joined in. Johnny did even better than Thomas. He knocked six out of the ring. They won a total of nine marbles in that single game. The game lasted for two hours with the three boys winning most of the marbles. By the time another two hours passed Thomas' pocket were full. As he bent down to play, marbles were pouring out of his pockets. He found an empty fish tin and kept the marbles in it. Even Johnny and Simon were loaded with marbles. But they had not as

many as Thomas. He had won most of the marbles that the other boys had lost within the past two hours. Within another hour two of the boys from the village left to fetch more marbles. The other boys from the village called for a break. That brought chance for the three boys to count the marbles they had won. Thomas and Johnny originally had seventy-five each and Simon had thirty. Now their number had gone up. Thomas now had another one hundred and fifty. Johnny counted his winnings and this came up with another seventy-eight on top his seventy-five. Simon had another sixty on top of his thirty. Their total win for the three hours was two hundred and eighty-eight.

It was past twelve o'clock and the sun was very hot. Sweat was pouring down the boys' faces. As they rubbed their faces with their earth-covered hands, the dust mixed with the sweat and their faces looked muddy. Simon who was a bit new to this kind of thing, had difficulty trying to keep the running mud out of his eyes. At one instance it ran right in to his right eye and he had to run to a nearby water hole and wash his face. The three boys were very hungry by the time another hour passed. The two boys who had gone to get more marbles came back. A small boy, aged nine, came back with the two boys. He had with him six sweet potatoes and a one and half metre long sugar-cane. He charged twenty marbles for everything. Thomas and Johnny paid ten marbles each for the food. They shared the food, two sweet potatoes each and a piece of the sugar-cane. The three boys did not bother to give any to their play mates; their homes were close by and they were able to get their lunch whenever they were hungry. The boys felt better after their small lunch.

The marble game had started at eight o'clock sharp and had lasted for a full five hours. Now the boys from the village were very low on their marbles. The number of marbles betted on the ring grew fewer and fewer as the three boys won more and yet more marbles. Thomas now had four empty fish tins filled with marbles while Johnny had two fish tins full and Simon with one tinful.

One of the villagers won the game. He took the marbles from his belt and gave them to Thomas. The only game that had lasted in the village were Taka and a good at the game and Johnny. Take their friends. This day must have been for the boys if continued to be amongst themselves heated and two thrown punches intervened. One marbles and was upset and angry the three strange and play marble present on Saturday Johnny had come the boy was upset when he won. For a man, wealth they will benefit boy with lots of many things to buy marbles. Others buy marbles from income for him. Marbles were used adults played the child labour. It Everyone wanted the boys, they a person who had that they can gardens, bringing even fetching work be done the kind someone to do. Later, they would be the king and beat the king would want someone better than as a king. And to had unseated the now the king of was the king. H

One of the village boys lost all his marbles in the game. He took out a twenty toea coin from his belt and bought ten marbles from Thomas. The only boys from the village who had lasted in the game so far up until now were Taka and a boy named Alko. They were good at the game but not as good as Thomas and Johnny. Taka and Alko were losing like their friends. They did not have many left. This day must have been a most unlucky one for the boys from the village. As they continued to lose, they started to argue amongst themselves. At one stage it got very heated and two of the boys would have thrown punches at each other if Taka had not intervened. One of them had lost lots of his marbles and was very upset about it. He was upset and angry at his own boys for inviting the three strange boys to come to the village and play marbles with them. He was not present on Saturday when Thomas and Johnny had come. Thomas knew exactly why the boy was upset. It had meant a lot to him when he won lots of marbles in his village. For a man, wealth flows in if people see that they will benefit from him somehow. For a boy with lots of marbles, the marbles brought many things to him. He could buy food with marbles. Other boys would bring money to buy marbles from him. That was a source of income for him, a way of earning money. Marbles were used widely by boys and even adults played the game as a means to pay for child labour. It was a kind of a sickness. Everyone wanted to play marbles. Especially the boys, they would do anything for the person who had the marbles to pay them so that they can play. Things like weeding gardens, bringing firewood from the bush and even fetching water. If there was any task to be done the king of the marbles would ask someone to do it and pay him in marbles. Later, they would try to play the game with the king and beat him if possible. But always the king would win all the marbles back. Only someone better than himself could unseat him as a king. And today was such a day. Thomas had unseated the king of this village. He was now the king of kings. Back in his village he was the king. He knew that the boys in the

two villages will be coming after him. He did not care. No matter how hard they tried he would still be the king, provided that he played the ring game. No one would beat him in that; not for some time anyway.

The sun had sailed across the clear blue sky. It was now directly above the small hill that bordered the playground and the path that led to the bush. It stared at the boys as if they were doing something which it did not like. Thomas' clean shirt was already stained with dust from the earth. His pockets were filled with marbles. Where he had put his hands in and out to get at the marbles, there was dirt on them. His face was even worse. It was black all over. Even Johnny had a hard time trying to keep his good eye safe from the dust and sweat. At one stage he had to run to the water hole Simon had used, to wash off the dust and sweat that covered his good eye. Simon and the Village boys also looked the same. They were covered with dust and sweat. Simon swore under his breath for coming with the boys. He told himself that this would be the first and last time for him to listen to Thomas and Johnny. He had never humbugged like this before. The other two boys were used to this kind of thing. For them this was his first time. He never gone around with the two boys before because he knew that they would get him into some mischief. That was the reason he used to give when ever he wanted to go out with his uncle. Now he had a ugly feeling that something was definitely going wrong. Only he did not know what.

A breeze started to blow from the South. The light soft wind cooled down the boys who have been suffering from the sun's heat. And was not as strong as before. The game had nearly ended. Only Taka was playing with the three boys. The other village boys had lost all their marbles. They now stood around the ring and watched the four boys played. Taka was not doing any better. He had only five marbles left. He was playing a loser's game. His aim was wild whenever it was his turn to shoot. The three boys knocked him out of the game after two rounds. He stood up, dusted his hands and joined the other village boys.

He was happy for one thing and sad for another. Happy because king of marbles in his village had lost to someone else. So many times he had laboured for this boy. Now he would never labour for Alko again. Taka was sad because he had lost all of his marbles.

"What makes you such a good snot?" Taka asked Thomas.

"I do not know, Taka. People are gifted with certain things. They cannot be good at everything. They can be good at one thing only. So, maybe this is what I am good at," answered Thomas.

"Well, certainly you are very good at marbles."

"He is now the king of kings and that is not a simple thing. Or is it?" joined in Johnny.

"Come on Johnny, forget about the gab," interrupted Thomas.

"Thomas, Johnny, I think it is about time the children will be coming home so what are we staying here for? There aren't any marbles left in this village. Let's go", said Simon.

"Simon's right, Johnny. Let's go home", said Thomas.

"Thomas, if you want we will come on Saturday and work for some marbles from you", said Taka.

"I do not know but it is best you don't come this weekend," answered Thomas.

Another hour had passed while the marbles game was being played to its end. It was about four o'clock when the boys started back for their village. On the way they counted the marbles they had won. Thomas had a total of three hundred and seventy-five marbles. His winnings for the day were three hundred marbles. Johnny had two hundred marbles. One hundred and twenty-five came from his winnings in the game with the village boys and he had seventy-five originally. Simon had won hundred marbles. He now had a total of one hundred and thirty marbles. The boys in that village had lost a total of five hundred and ninety-five marbles. They had brought one hundred and eighty marbles with them when they came to the village to play. Now, their overall total was seven hundred and five marbles. Thomas and Johnny were really proud of their victory over

the boys from the village. On Saturday they had boasted about their skill. Now they were defeated on their own land. Well, now there was nothing to boast about any more. They could only talk about how badly they had lost to the three boys.

As the three boys walked proudly along the path that led to their village, they talked how it had been so easy for them to win. The defeat of the village boys had brought a new pride to the boys. They were now some kilometres from their village. They avoided the main road and kept to a bush trail that was not used often. They did not want people to spot them with lots of marbles. They would certainly have asked what they were doing with that amount of marbles. When the boys came close to a section where the trail ran close to the main road, they heard the voices of two children talking. The children were walking towards the village. The boys waited until they had gone past and then they continued walking towards the village.

"They must be coming from school," commented Simon.

Simon was now more worried about what would happen to them if their parents found out that they had not been to school and instead had played marbles all day. The more he thought about it, the feeling got uglier. He was now certain that something bad was going to happen to them. Simon knew that Thomas' father was a very strict man with definite codes of discipline. His uncle was also a very strict man. He could clearly picture what would happen to each of them if the two men happen to find out about today. He could not keep that feeling to himself any longer so he told the boys about it.

"Thomas, Johnny, what are we going to do if your father find out about today? I got this strange feeling that something terrible is going to happen to us. Do you think the same? I am certain that your father will be angry if they find out about us. You know how they act over very small matters. They will certainly belt us."

"Yes, I think you are right; what shall we do?" said a now Thomas.

"Lets ask one of the children and find out

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what happened at school today. Then we will decide on what to do next," suggested Johnny.

The boys turned to the right and cut across to the main road. They hid in some undergrowth and waited for the children to pass. They did not have long to wait. The children from their village were approaching. As they went by Thomas threw a marble at the same small boy who had giggled at him in the morning. The marble hit him on the side of his ribs. He stopped to pick up the marble and Thomas threw another one at him. It landed right at his foot. He picked up both marbles and some stones. The small boy saw a bambo shoot and started throwing stones at it. When the other children had disappeared behind the bend, the three boys came out of their hiding place.

"I knew that it was you who was throwing those marbles at me. What have you been doing all this day?" said the small boy.

"Never mind about what we've been doing. What happened at school today?" asked Thomas.

"Well, you boys are in really big trouble. The headmaster himself was out asking about you when he heard that you were missing. He told all the children from our village to assemble and he asked about the three of you."

"What did he ask you about?" enquired Johnny.

Thomas, Johnny and Simon were all in grade five. Their teacher was Miss Nancy. When they were not present at class by nine o'clock she had reported the matter to the headmaster. This was not the first time.

The three boys were well aware of what was going to happen to them if they went home that evening. Even if Simon had little chance of being beaten, Thomas and Johnny were in for a ugly beating. Their fathers had already been told the news that they had run away from school. Even worse the headmaster had told them to come over to the school tomorrow. That would make them more angry.

Thomas was more scared than the other two boys. He knew for certain that his father

would beat him until he was half dead. He used to beat him for very minor things such as not fetching water when he asked. Now running away from school was the biggest offence he had ever committed. He remembered how badly his father used to beat him up when he had run away on other occasions. This time would not escape with some of his old tricks like before because the headmaster had already sent words about his absence. This fear made up his mind not to go home tonight.

When Thomas told the other two boys about the idea he had in mind they quickly agree. They walked very cautiously towards their village, keeping track of every sound that they made. Now total darkness covered the whole valley. When they came as close as they dared the three boys separated. Johnny and Simon jumped over the fence and made their way around the back. Thomas watched them as they walked through the sweet potato garden. Then they disappeared into the dark.

After some time Thomas followed the path up to his hut. He was very careful not to give away his presence. He made no noise and kept a watchful eye at the dark path ahead of him. Twice his father had ambushed him on similar occasions when he had walked up the path to the hut. Thomas avoided going through the gate. Instead he jumped over the fence that surrounded the sweet potato gardens and the hut. Outside the fence was the common feeding ground for the pigs. He cut across the sweet potato gardens and came upon the creek. From there he followed the creek along its bank for some two teacher had reported such things. Actually it was not the first time for Thomas and Johnny. However it was the first time for Simon to be reported. He had never missed school before. As for Thomas and Johnny they had missed school on many occasions. One time they had gone fishing on a Tuesday when they were supposed to be in school. Another time they had just decided to have a day off. There were countless other times the boys had missed school. The headmaster had been very cross when he learnt of the news. He had said, "... Thats it! That does it," when the other

children told him that they had run ahead of them, he realised that the two boys were up to their old tricks again and he was fed up with them. He sent someone home to tell Thomas and Johnny's father to come to the school with or without the two boys.

The sun was hidden behind the hills. The valley was starting to get dark. It was always like this. Up in the mountains, darkness came earlier than the coast. The high mountains and hills swallowed the sun before its normal time to disappear from the face of the earth. The slow hours from five to seven were spent in semi-darkness with the light fading very fast. Then darkness would rule the valley for twelve hours.

As they learnt of the bitter news, each boy was aware of the fear that was building up in him. A question grew in their minds.

"Where do we go from here?"

Hundred metres and he came upon the path that led from the creek to his hut. Thomas followed the path very carefully up and went to the back of the hut. There he found a safe spot and settled down, ears pressed against the wall to hear what was being said.

After first he could not hear anything. The house seemed to be empty. He waited for a while, holding his breath to detect the slightest sound. Then he heard it. It was the noise of the pigs coming into the front yard. His mother must have opened the gates to let the pigs in because he could hear her voice above the roar of the pigs. She was calling to Pura to keep an eye on the pigs in case they went into the gardens through the gaps in the fence. He heard Pura coming out of the hut. When she was sure that all the pigs had gone into the hut she joined mother inside the hut. Thomas could hear them fastening the pigs to their pens.

"Pura, Thomas is not back yet. Call for him. I know that he is somewhere close but afraid to come home," said his mother.

Pura came out of the hut and called for Thomas. Pura was his sister. She was the fourth born in the family while Thomas was the last born. She did not know that he was so close. He felt like calling out and say that he

was here but decided not to. His mother told Pura to go and ask the Kisipa family whether Johnny and Simon had returned home. She came back after a while with the negative answer.

"They told me that the two boys are not home," said Pura as she came into the hut.

"These boys won't come home now. They know that they are in the wrong so they must've found some place to sleep. Probably outside somewhere," said his father. "Wait till I catch that little rat. I will give him something to remember for the rest of his life."

That was the first time Thomas heard his father talk since he had taken refuge at the back of the hut. There was something in his father's voice that made him feel uneasy. He started to shiver and did not know whether it was fear or the cold and hunger that took control of him. He had heard what he wanted to hear so he did not waste time any more. Knowing that his father wouldn't have mercy, he left the hiding place and quietly made off for the gardens.

At the garden he felt for the mounds in the dark and dug out three of the biggest sweet potatoes he could find. At least that was what he thought. Then moving over to a group of sugar-cane, which were tied to a pole, he chose the thickest one. He broke the cane in the centre and at another place close to its root. Where he had broken the cane into two, he pulled it out a little and adjusted it to a thirty degrees angle. This made it possible for him to pull out the cane very easily and also no trace was left to indicate that a sugar-cane was missing from the group. It was a very common trick the boys used when stealing sugar-canes. Thomas and Johnny had used it many times like common thieves to steal sugar-canes like that. Now he did the same because he did not want his father to discover the theft. His father was very strict about sugar-cane. Not that he was going to chew the canes himself because he did not have any teeth left to chew hard stuff like sugar-cane, but it was for visitors and for special occasions like Christmas. This time strict or not, Thomas did not care. He was already in the wrong and what did it matter if he did

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Quietly as he had come, he made his way down to the creek. There he washed the earth off the sweet potatoes and using the sharp end of a bamboo he started to peel the three sweet potatoes. Thomas once again washed the sweet potatoes in the creek and made sure that they were very clean this time. Satisfied, he sat down on a flat rock, resting his back against a big boulder and started to eat the raw sweet potatoes. As he crushed the sweet potatoes pieces between his teeth, he felt the nice juice coming out of the potatoes. It was the flavour he liked best. That flavour was often spoiled when the sweet potato was over cooked. Thomas finished his second potato and felt satisfied. He washed them down with a piece from the sugar-cane. Then he lay back on the flat rock and studied the bright night with its clear blue sky and bright stars. He tried to imagine what lay beyond that deep blue sky. His mind refused to think that far.

Thomas stayed for another half-hour and then made his way to the appointed place. He crossed the creek and went over to the other side. The village men had some time in the past cultivated this part of the land but now it was overgrown with tall kunai grass and other bushes. It provided an ideal place for hiding. Not only was it good for hiding but the place was on the slopes of the hill so it also provided a good opportunity for the boys to keep a close watch on the village below. They could also watch the movement of the people in the dark because they travelled around with torches made from dry pitpit.

He whistled softly for the boys but there was no reply. He did not whistle again. He feared that someone else might hear him and decide to investigate. Instead he walked slowly up the slope, groping his way through the tall grass and bushes. Vines and grass got entangled around his legs and it made the going difficult. He reached a clearing after some time and sat down to rest. As soon as he had sat down something landed next to him with a thud. Thomas turned around, muscles tense, ready to run for it. Then out of the undergrowth crawled Johnny and Simon.

"My good mother! I thought I've had it,

boys. You gave me the scare of my life."

"Sorry we gave you a fright," said Johnny. "We though you would know."

"What happened to you?" asked Simon. You took so long and we though your father must have caught you.

Thomas told the two boys about what his father had said and how he had his dinner.

"That's really serious. What do you intend to do about it?" asked Johnny after hearing the story.

"I do not know but it depends on. At present let's not talk about it," answered Thomas.

For Johnny and Simon, there was a similar threat from Johnny's father. Johnny's father was very angry at Johnny and Thomas for having persuaded Simon to follow them. He liked Simon better than his own children because he was well disciplined and honest. He had also stated that Simon had made a very bad mistake listening to the two boys. As for Johnny, he had enough complaints about him, from the school and the villagers' alike, so he had promised to give the little rascal a good beating when he caught him. He said it would be better for Johnny if they expelled him from school. That would stop the teachers troubling him. He had worked very hard for his two elder sons and none of them had managed to go to high school. Now he was certain that Johnny would follow his brothers and fail in the final exams. He did not care what each boy did. He had tried his best to help them to have a better future.

"Is he certain that the headmaster is going to expell us?" asked Thomas.

"Why would the headmaster tell our fathers to come to the school tomorrow? It must be about something that is pretty serious," stated Johnny.

"Why can't we just forget about that and prepare somewhere to spend the night?" complained Simon.

The clear night was very cold and the boys started to shiver. Their teeth were rattling like an old lorry on a stony road. The shirts they had on were made from very thin material and it could neither stop the cold air from reaching their bodies nor kept the heat in their

body. They were at a great disadvantage. They could only blame themselves for getting into that situation. And now there was no way out of it.

At around half-past ten the boys got themselves busy preparing a place to sleep. They found a hollow, probably arranged like that when the earth was removed from a mound of sweet potatoes at the time when the slopes were cultivated. They flattened the grass in the hollow. They then made a small hut from strong pitpit and twigs. They covered the top with grass and left a small opening for them to crawl in to sleep. More grass was collected and placed at the floor of the hut. Satisfied with their work the boys sat down at the clearing for some twenty minutes, surveying the village below them. Not able to see anything in the dark, they retreated into their grass hut. With Simon in the middle and Thomas and Johnny on either side of him, they went to sleep.

Thomas could not sleep. His mind kept wondering off. He thought of his warm bed and the food that was waiting for him. His mother was a woman who understood him better than anybody else. She would put some food aside for him whenever he did not come home early. She must have done that now. He was certain it. There was no way he could get at the food. Sometimes he was sorry for his mother. She had always intervened when his father was too harsh on him. Twice she was beaten because of him. But she never gave up easily although sometimes father would. He did not know why his mother went through all this trouble trying to fight his war with father. Some day he would ask her and find out the reason.

His thoughts then turned to school. He remembered the countless times when his teacher, Miss Nancy, had told him not to miss school. One day she had called him into her office. There she had told him that he was a very bright student and he should not take days off when he was supposed to be at school. She had told him that he was definitely going to high school and there was no question about that. But now why had the headmaster called for his father to come to school? It was

very unusual for his father to be told to come to the school. Whenever he was absent from school, they used to punish him the next day. But now something was wrong somewhere. Probably Johnny's father was right when he said that the boys would be expelled. No, that cannot be possible, thought Thomas. Maybe the headmaster just wanted to warn his father about him so he told father to come over to the school. Yes, that must be it!

The cold night slowly continued on its journey towards daylight. For Thomas the hours ticked very slowly. They seemed to stand still, and day was weeks away. He had not slept at all. He kept on thinking about the days incidents. The good day he had thought of earlier in the morning had brought him bad luck. No, not this morning, he thought. That must have been yesterday. Now this is Tuesday morning. He wondered how many people had bad luck on such days. He had surely had his turn. He was now certain that his future was in doubt. And as he lay there, waiting for the day to come, he felt more dead than alive.

The long hours of the night had dragged by and morning came at last. With the morning, the day creatures came to life. The birds were already singing their early morning songs, waking those who were too lazy to wake up and greet the new day. The hunters and predators were already up with the first signs of dawn. They were hunting for their prey, sneaking upon them with great efficiency. For them the day brought great excitement and pleasure in their activities. These were the creatures of the day.

As for the mid-night roamers, it was time for them to get back to their hiding holes. They were the intelligent lot. They had very keen eyes, sharp ears and good sense of smelling. These were their weapons for a successful hunt in the night for food. With their bellies full, they made their way back home. Those who had young ones to think about had worked even harder. Now they were busy feeding them while others made themselves comfortable for the day's rest. These were the rush hours of the early morning. It was said that one could see the

rush if he was out of dawn.

It was half-past ten. The sun had climbed over the horizon onto the valley. The day promised to be a clear one with hardly any cloud. The sky was to be seen to be warmer. Thomas collected on the grass. The mysterious process of evaporation. It resulted from a 'mumup' making its way to be blown to the morning breeze. The question only remained.

Thomas had been for the past two days heavy with sleep. The earth from his bed was a widow, painted only the color of the cloth. Furthermore his few pieces of rice like foreign objects now and then squeezed his eye. He had eaten any raw food. A problem for him. The rest of his bed was up a rock tried not to respond. It was weak. He could not worry, pain and of him. Thomas stretched himself in great pleasure. He was trying to think. He refused to think. He was in the grass hut and could not. None of them were sleeping. He had been awake for some time. He was very tired. Crawling into bed, he was asleep within a few minutes.

In his sleep, he was playing marble. Then the scene

rush if he was out taking a stroll in the hours of dawn.

It was half-past six when the sun finally climbed over the ranges to throw its first light onto the valley. Like the previous day, this day promised to be fine. Above there was hardly any clouds. Only the endless clear blue sky was to be seen. Up on the slopes the sun was warmer. The morning dew that had collected on the grasses and leaves through its mysterious processes in the night, started to evaporate. It resembled the steam that rises from a 'mumu' pit when the mumu is undone, making its way up to the clear blue sky only to be blown towards the mountains by the morning breeze. What happened later was a question only nature could answer.

Thomas had been a day and night creature for the past twenty-four hours. His eyes were heavy with sleep. He had not washed off the earth from his body and he looked more like widow, painted black all over, at a funeral. Only the clothes told the difference. Furthermore his belly was complaining. The few pieces of raw 'kaukau' in the belly were like foreign obstacles in someone's eye, every now and then, drawing his hands up to squeeze his eye. It was some time since he had eaten any raw kaukau and now it became a problem for him. The belly complained but the rest of his body asked for more. He picked up a rock tried to throw it but his hand did not respond. It fell limply to his side. He was weak. He could not think properly. Hunger, worry, pain and need for sleep took the most of him. Thomas went out into the sun and stretched himself, taking in the sun's heat with great pleasure. He lay there for some time, trying to think of something but his mind refused to think. He then walked into the grass hut and called the two boys to wake up. None of them responded to his call. Both boys were sleeping peacefully. They too must have been awake for the whole night, he thought. He was very tired and in need of some sleep. Crawling into a patch of grass he was fast asleep within a very short time.

In his sleep, Thomas was once again playing marbles in the village with the boys. Then the scene suddenly changed and he

found himself in the classroom, sitting at his desk and listening to someone talking. He could not make out who the person was. At one stage, the person looked like the headmaster, but then he was dressed in a blouse. That must be Ms Nancy, he thought. Finally the person turned and it was his father. He looked across at the other children and among them he saw Taka and Alko. That was strange because they were not school children. The presence of his mother further down at the back of the classroom drew his attention. She was telling him something but he could not hear what she was telling him. His father said something which he did not understand. He was calling Thomas to pay attention. Then he saw his father flush with anger and suddenly he was coming at him, with a raised axe, ready to strike.

"Aaaaaaahhhh . . . I," screamed Thomas as he jumped out of his dream. Sweat was trickling down from his forehead. His clothes were damped with more. He looked as though he had just jumped out of a swimming pool. As he stood up, he realized that he was shaking. He swore under his breath.

"God, don't let this happen in reality."

"What was that scream for?" asked a startled Johnny as Thomas turned to the other two boys.

"It was a nightmare, my good mother. I thought it was the end of me. I saw my father coming at me with an axe, all set to kill me. It was so scary and seemed real that I had to yell. Yes, that's why I screamed. Oh God, please help me!" finished Thomas with a soft whisper.

"I am not good at interpreting dreams but this one sounds serious. I suggest that we take great care in our movements from now on," stated Simon.

"I do not care in the least, boys but I think we are done for. I do not see any hope of escaping so let's prepare for the worst," commented Johnny.

The boys sat down for some time talking about the matter. They broke the last kaukau that Thomas had saved and shared it. They also took a piece each of the sugar-cane. It did

not satisfy their hunger but it was enough to keep their empty stomachs working. Work it did but it was more than just that. They found themselves shaking a lot. What they had just taken had irritated their whole system. There was little of the strength left in them even to go and look for food. The wind in the grass swishing and singing lulled the boys to sleep. A sleep that they would come out of for some time. By the time they were all fast asleep it was twelve o'clock.

At that very moment a very heated argument was taking place in an ill-lighted room. Seven people were present in that room. At the head of the long conference table sat the parish priest, Father Rice. On his right sat three people. Mr Kisipa in the lead next to Father Rice, then Mr. Yangu and further down the row Miss Nancy. To the left of Father Rice were the headmaster, Mr Kopo and Mr Yukumu who were both members of the Board of Management Committee. Father Rice was the chairman of the committee.

"But why can't you give another chance to the boys" Johnny's father was speaking. "After all they are young and they cannot be deprived of their education. No, you cannot do this to the boys."

"We are sympathetic to the whole thing but we can't help you. Our decision is final and we have told you the reason for the expulsion", said the headmaster.

The committee had decided to expell the two boys, Johnny and Thomas on two grounds. The first one was the more serious one. That was for missing school when they were not supposed to. Both boys had missed a total of twenty school days. The number of days missed by the boys exceeded the limit by fifty percent. The school laws stated that if a student missed more than ten days of school without any good reason that student will automatically be expelled. The two boys had missed a total of twenty days in just half a year and the committee strongly argued that, that number of days was just too much for only a year. The ten days absence limit imposed was for a whole year and what the boys had done was to the very extent than

that imposed by the law.

The other reason that had been a major factor that contributed to the expulsion, was for missing Sunday services at the station. They had not attended a total of seven Sundays. Father and the student catechist had kept records of attendance. They usually had roll calls after every service. It was understood that every student was supposed to attend church services and if he did not, serious disciplinary action would be taken. Father had made it clear that he would punish students that missed Sunday services.

It was for those reasons that the committee had decided to expell the two boys. It was thumbs down for Thomas and Johnny. When the meeting started at ten o'clock, the atmosphere had been tense and the two men had feared the worse. Two hours later that fear was proven true when the majority of the committee voted for the expulsion of Johnny and Thomas. When the motion was moved, three members of the committee voted for the motion. Miss Nancy voted against the motion and one member could not decide so he had not voted. Thus the motion had been passed in the majority's favour.

The two fathers and Miss Nancy were very upset about the outcome of the votes. They showed this when they further pleaded for the committee to review their decision about the two boys' expulsion. Thomas' father offered to pay a fine of twenty kina so that the boys could be reinstated but that offer was turned down. Miss Nancy tried to persuade the committee that the boys were clever and they needed another chance but there was also done in vain. Nothing would change the minds of the members of the committee and their decision stood firm.

The chairman adjourned the meeting by banging the table with the hammer. The two fathers started back for home without wasting any time. Miss Nancy tried to talk to them about the matter but the two men waved her aside. Each man was occupied with his own thoughts. Their sons' future was in the dark now. To them it would be a distressing thing to have their sons out of the school. The whole thing would bring shame to their

families and that meant no more or prestige for father was very much a matter.

He was a whole village important person already three three educated honor and pride he had worked shape them as they were now leave the family work for what worked long to them. Conditions too. To get up pick the tea in the morning dew determined by sun and after unbearable. But he had started to do so. As foresaw the future increasing urban influence of western court himself but he there was no job. There was a good education needed worked well for what about the future for him

He was still when they found Women who down the valley filled with stories another. If the sweet potato Many of their rope. Normal the gardens a garden work. was plenty of women were

families and the village. To lose a student meant no money in the future for the family or prestige for the village. Especially Thomas' father was very concerned about the whole matter.

He was a family man and nowadays the whole village looked upon him as an important person. He had four sons and already three of them were educated. His three educated boys had brought him great honor and pride. He remembered how hard he had worked to get these boys educated, to shape them and put them in the place where they were now. It had meant that he had to leave the family and go to the plantations to work for what little pay was offered. He had worked long to collect enough for the three of them. Conditions were not good that time too. To get up at six in the morning and then pick the tea which was chest high with all that morning dew was something only a few very determined people could stand. The midday sun and afternoon torrents of rain were unbearable. Many people had come and gone but he had stayed on. He had only one reason to do so. And that was for his sons. He foresaw the future. He knew the effect of ever-increasing urbanisation and the growing influence of the culture brought by the western countries; he was not educated himself but he was wise enough to see that; there was no place for his sons in the village. There was a great need for the boys to get the education necessary for the future. That had worked well for the three elder brothers but what about this poor last born son. The future for him was now shadowed.

He was still thinking about these things when they finally arrived at home. The Women who had gone to the gardens far down the valley walked home with their bags filled with sweet potato, one on top of another. If the bag on top was not a bag of sweet potato than it was a child in its cradle. Many of them had a small piglet tied to a rope. Normally these piglets were taken into the gardens and looked after while they did garden work. This was done because there was plenty of food in the gardens. Some women were washing the dirt off the sweet

potatoes in the creeks. When they saw the two men, they looked up enquiringly because they had already heard of the news of their journey to the school. Some of them expressed their sympathy while others showed their concern. One woman asked what had happened at the school and when she was told, she stated that the boys expulsion was a big loss for the village. The two fathers nodded in agreement.

The two men went all the way to the singing arena. It was located in the centre of the village. This place was used for big occasions such as feasts, traditional dances and public forums. Surrounding the arena were the men's houses. Traditionally every man was supposed to live in the men's house but now the younger men tend to live with their wives in the common house. Only the older men slept in the men's house. They still had their traditional belief that to associate with women and to live with them would bring them weakness.

There the two men chatted with the old men and some young men who were gambling. They told them what had happened at the school. By the time they had finished their story most of the younger men were sympathetic but the older men were angry about the whole thing. Not that they were angry at the committee for expelling the boys but angry at the younger generation. They were angry at the way they were dealing with life.

"These things never happened in the village when I was a boy," said one very old man. "In my time we had plenty to do. There was the gardens to tend to, pigs to look after, houses to build, firewood for the house to be collected. Now, look at that group outside there. Cards, cards and cards is all they think about. They get up very early in the morning and go home very late at night, playing cards all day. This is not pleasing at all. It was never like this, my men, no. How lazy they have become, these young men. I tell my grandchild to fetch water and I get this reply: 'Yu get go filim.' Whatever that means in that foreign language, he does not do the thing I ask for. He goes off to play marbles or water polo. Yes, my men, I think the white

men's culture has taken its toll amongst our young generation."

"That's true," agreed a middle-aged man. "My elder sons are all right but this last born son of my is a bighead. He has left school and refuses to go back when told. Any way it is too late since some moons have passed now. But the thing is that he does not want to do the traditional things that I teach him. Instead he goes out of the house early in the morning and comes home at six in the night. I have beaten him but that did not help at all. I have given up hope."

The other elderly men present nodded with agreement. Thomas' father also agreed with the men. He has seen that himself and experienced it within his own family. True to the words of the old man, this kind of life and attitude had never been experienced by his peer group. Now a new era had begin. He saw that the way of life was changing. There was a shift from the sweet traditional way of life he had lived to a different kind of life — the life that the white man brought along. The white man had come to his area when he was a small boy, just like Thomas. Then he was too old to go to any school. By the time he had married it was a far cry. But all this time he had witnessed the changes that had been taking place. He saw it necessary to work for his sons so that they could fit into the new kind of society that was immersing. That was why he had spent nearly five years in the plantations enduring all the pain and misery to achieve to his aim and objectives. That had gone well for his three elder sons but what was wrong with his last son. It was a question to answer today.

The elderly men present in the men's house started to go home to their common house. There they would eat their supper cooked by their wives and chat with their family for some time before coming back to the men's house. Thomas' father went home. He had given up sleeping in the men's house since he had his family to look after. That was many years ago. he increased his pace although the house was not far. It was just a kilometre up on the slight rise. Something in him told him that he must hurry. He had decided to get the

matter settled for once and for all. He felt that he was going to be tired after the business of fixing that matter. He hated the whole idea but he had to do something about it.

"That little rat! I'll fix him good and proper. Why have I wasted enough time and effort? I think it's about time he learnt something the hard way," he said to himself as he approached the hut.

It was half-past five when Pura walked out of the hut. She had helped her mother with the cooking. She had also taken care of the pigs. They were now securely tied to their pens. She had even fetched the water from the creek. Normally fetching water from the creek was not her routine of duties. But she did it today. Her mother had given her the task of making a string bag. Her hand was moving up and down rhythmically, storing the rope between her thumb and little fingers. This was a skill learnt as a child and developed over the years. The string bag was half completed. It would take another three weeks to complete it because she worked on it only in her spare time.

Pura was Thomas' sister. She was sixteen years old now. She loved her last brother because they were the only ones left at home. Her brothers were away, either working or at school. He had been missing since yesterday and she was very worried like her mother. Pura had asked about Thomas at her uncle's houses but they had told her that he had not come to their houses. She had also asked elsewhere but got the same answer. Now she could think of only one possibility. That is, he must have slept outside somewhere with the other two boys. she knew that the valley was not a place where boys could go into hiding. The forests were too far away and they would need food too. So it must be a place not far from the gardens.

Then she had an idea. She went over to the gardens and carefully searched for clues that would lead to his whereabouts. She could not find anything near the hut so she moved to the mounds of sweet potato further down, near the creek. At first she could not see anything but when she went close, there it was. The sweet potato leaves were turned

upside down. Also the mounds. The enough to avoid discovered the place sweet potatoes. She sugar came garden missing cane, a job careful person like I could think of Thomas could have food to the creek a hill on the other side boys must have slept the slopes of the hill

Her reasoning : went down the creek evidence that confirmed the husks of sugar chewed in the night peeled sweet potato looked up and down trail that would lead She found it a bit noted that the disturbed and a trail the thicket. She found the slope until she carried she found the smallest three boys were and Johnny on either not wanted to disturb she sat down quietly them. The sight of all looked filthy stomachs caved in out, clearly showing

"They must be Finally she decided presence. She took shook it very gently reaction. She tried a bit harder. Then to one side but digging his legs harder came time. Thomas was was about to scream down. She told person around so girl woke the other she had come to

upside down. Also there were foot prints on the mounds. The prints were covered but enough to avoid detection. Then she discovered the place where he had dug the sweet potatoes. She went down further to the sugar cane gardens and discovered the missing cane, a job nicely done. Only a very careful person like herself could find out. She could think of only one possible place Thomas could have gone after collecting the food to the creek and onto the slopes of the hill on the other side of the creek. So the three boys must have slept outside somewhere on the slopes of the hill.

Her reasoning seemed correct when she went down the creek. There she found the evidence that confirmed her belief. There were the husks of sugar-cane which Thomas had chewed in the night before and remains of peeled sweet potato in the clear pool. She looked up and down for some kind of a fresh trail that would lead her to their whereabouts. She found it a bit further up the creek. She noted that the grass had been recently disturbed and a trail of trampled grass led into the thicket. She followed that trail up the slope until she came upon the clearing. There she found the small built-in shelter. In it the three boys were peacefully asleep, Thomas and Johnny on either side of Simon. She did not want to disturb them or scare them so she sat down quietly for a while and watched them. The sight of them was quite sad. They all looked filthy and very hungry. Their stomachs caved in as they breathed in and out, clearly showing their ribcages.

"They must be very hungry," she thought.

Finally she decided to let them know of her presence. She took hold of Thomas' foot and shook it very gently. At first there was no reaction. She tried again and this time pulled a bit harder. Thomas moaned and rolled over to one side but did not wake up. She shook his legs harder calling his name at the same time. Thomas woke up with a start and he was about to scream when Pura calmed him down. She told him that she was the only person around so he need not to worry. The girl woke the others and she told them that she had come to take them home. The boys

looked very tired. They just nodded in agreement when she told them of her intentions. Pura was really sorry to see them like this. They were only kids, twelve and thirteen years olds. She could not think of any thing else but to take them home. She returned the way she had come up and the boys followed in single file.

Pura made sure that the two boys, Johnny and Simon, were safely at their house before taking Thomas home. Their mother was waiting for them as they entered the hut. On seeing her son in such a condition, she rushed and hugged him.

"You naughty little thing! Why don't you just come home last night? Eh? making me and Pura worry about you. Look at you. Filthy and hungry as a mouse. Your mother wouldn't beat you. You know that, don't you?"

Thomas felt like answering his mother to thank her for her concern but just now he could not do that. He was too weak and hungry to do anything. He quickly attacked the cooked sweet potatoes and vegetables his mother gave him. He washed it down with a mouth full of water from the plastic container which Mopuna handed to him. He did not feel satisfied and wanted to have some more food but his mother stopped him. She told Mopuna to fetch some water for his bath from the creek. Thomas meanwhile lay down on his back near the fire place. It was warm and nice.

Just then his father walked into the hut. He was sweating and looked very upset. He stopped suddenly when he saw his son.

"So little rat you've decided to come home after all. I hoped you might never. What changed you mind, my son?" asked his father.

Suddenly Thomas felt himself being heaved and thrown out of the hut. His father followed after him. He lifted him again and let him fall. He landed heavily on the sun-baked earth. He could feel his bones near to crashing under the pressure. Then blow after blow rained down on him. It hurt. It hurt like all hell had broken loose. The branch his father used broke and he went to get a fresh one. Once again he saw his father's bulky figure

looming above him. His arm went up and down came the stick, this time harder. The blows stung like red-hot sticks. It was as if he had just sat on a hornets' nest. As he rolled over in the dust covered earth, the contents of his pockets spilled out. There were the marbles, twenty shiny marbles. He put his hand out to retrieve them but yelled with pain because the stick had landed on his knuckles. His eyes were filled with tears, warm tears that rolled down his cheeks in torrents. He felt himself lifted once again and this time he was sailing through the air. He landed with a thud on top of a sweet potato mound. As he lay there gasping for breath, he heard his father's voice booming in the yard.

"Your mother is short like a toad. You son of your mother. How many times do I have to tell you to listen to my advice? Marbles, marbles, marbles. Is marbles all you care about? What is going to tell you something more worth while if you cannot listen to me? Do you want to wash your brothers' pants? Do you want to look after children? You will get nowhere in this world without an education. I am sorry but now they have expelled you from school, it looks very likely that you will be washing your brothers' pants and eating their scraps of food. You will die like a hungry dog, going around begging for your dinner. I know what! Your umbilical cord must have been eaten by the ants. Yeh, I will teach you to listen to advice if . . ."

"That's enough! You old fool", interrupted

his wife, "You always like belting my sons. The three bigger boys are not here and this is the only one I have left. Don't you touch him any more! I do not care if he misses out on his education. There is the land here, for him to work on. The other boys have been taken away to the white man's world and I do not think they will ever return to till this earth. So he will stay with me no matter what you do to us."

Thomas now sobbing crawled slowly away from his arguing parents. His body was numb but he managed to push his way through the sweet potato mounds until he came to a patch of ground which had been left fallow. There was lots of grass on that spot. He crawled into the grass. Picking up a stick he started to dig the ground. And there! In the fading light before darkness gleamed the colourful marbles. He had hidden the marbles the night before. It brought him a new feeling. It spurred new thoughts in him.

"What does it matter if I do not go to school? Father thanks I am useless; But who cares what he thinks. I will show him that I am not useless. I can get all the boys to work for me. Yes, they will do anything, anything for my lovely marbles. After all I am the King of the marbles."

Thomas talked to himself. His voice grew louder and louder. "I am the King of the marbles dad! I will show that I am not useless. You hear that, dad. I am the King of the marbles!"

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WHO IS THE RIGHTFUL ONE?

by Timil Lyakin

It is a pity the strangest case always has the least opportunity to be believed.

The center of civilization and modernization is the land of the dead. It is now a wide spread belief in Enga, developed in the early colonial era.

"Get the hell out of my house, you stupid daughter of a leper," boomed the rough, ugly voice of Kandi.

"Surely, my good man. I shall surely go as you bid," Mendaiwan said with a tone of sadness, half crying and half challenging her husband.

"C'mon, pack up now and leave my house, right now", barked the angry voice again.

"It is not very hard to leave your house as you persistently order, but my son, my little boy, my, m . . . mmm," Mendaiwan burst out crying without finishing what she was trying to say.

The shouting and crying disturbed Londari from his heavenly sleep. When he was fully awake and alert, he knew what was going on — the usual quarrels and arguments. Without trying to attract his father's attention he crawled from his bed to his mother and hid at her back. His action added fuel to the fire. His mother, being aware of his presence at her back, started crying terribly.

As Londari was already familiar with such shouting and crying it was against his wish to cry but nature helped him. As he heard his mother crying he found himself crying. Thick drops of sugary tears rushed out through his eyes, raced down the cheeks and further down the chest onto the thighs.

Turning around, Mendaiwan placed two loving arms around the back of her son's neck and held him there for a very long moment. Londari wished this would go on for eternity.

"Who's there at the back of that stupid woman," the ugly voice of Kandi boomed again. "You there!" he shouted pointing at Londari. You! You again! You little rat! You don't act like my son! You act like as if you are your mothers son! You are a stupid . . . "

"Please, my good man! Leave my son alone!" interrupted Mendaiwan. "You may beat me or even kill me if you like but please leave my son alone."

"Yea!" bellowed Kandi. "I could chop your stupid head off if it weren't for the stupid White men and their stupid, rotten laws."

"Thank you! Thank you", Mendaiwan said crying. "Thank you for what you have just said, my dear man."

Kandi had developed an habit to go home very late in the night, very often at midnight, and sometimes even just before dawn. It was his habit to kick at the door, very often with a thunderous roar, disturbing the sleeping mother and child.

Mendaiwan, perhaps half asleep and half awake, would habitually wake up, place a loving hand on her sleeping son's face. Withdrawing it she would noiselessly walke to the door. Opening it, she would habitually say:

"Come in, man."

Barking like a dog, Kandi would demanding ask:

"Where is my food, woman!"

When food was placed before him (especially roasted Kaukau¹ or sweet potatoe which is the daily diet) Kandi would always complain about the food saying the food was always faulty. He would sometimes say that the food was over cooked and at other times the opposite and yet some times he would say that the food served to him was not even worthy for the dos to eat, let alone human beings.

On the contrary, however, it was surprising that while complaining, he hungrily bite at the Kaukau and would swallow big pieces without even chewing. It was almost distinctly