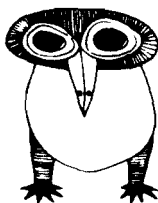


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Nema Namba

Poems by Henginike Riyong



PAPUA POCKET POETS

Port Moresby, 1974

HENGINIKE RIYONG comes from the Highlands. A graduate of Goroka Teachers College, he teaches in Chuave High School, Chimbu. His writing first appeared in Kovave, November, 1971.

c Henginike Riyong

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CONTENTS

Nema Namba

Bride Price

Korova

Kumo Wena

Death

The Mountain

The Hidden Gospel

Karai

Meri Simbu

Larim

The Village

The Breeze

The Axe

The Merciless Blade

In the Late Hours of Night

In that little room

Beauty

The Black Men's Dream

The Melting Heart

Nokondi

The Cry of the Mama

The Heart in the Grave

Pamundi's Love Song

The Last Call

NEMA NAMBA

Mother of birds
Your voice vibrates
Shakes everybody
Brings souls from far and near
Tall, short
Fat, thin.

You scare women
With your huge beak.
When the mothers see you
They flee to the caves
Where, stretching legs
They guard their children.

Nema Namba,
When the other nema nambas call you earnestly
Down in the woods,
You fly high.

The oina of Mother
Walks to and fro
Bringing comforting songs.
Quietly the oina crawls into the humans
To gore their sleepy bodies.

Your beak vibrates endlessly
In the early hours of this morning.
Leaving the earth, throbbing
The clouds of fog
Creep into the sky
Which you tear
With your long fearful beak
Nema Namba.

BRIDE PRICE

Riding down eyes are hunting you,
Walking up legs are exploring you.
When toes hit stones
They touch you.
Legs tired
Eyes exhausted
They sit listening
Airing the size and volume of bride price.

The mother
The bridegroom
The village
In procession :
How much hunt they have made
How much time they have spent
How much money showered
How many pigs
Birds of Paradise
Have been frustrated.

KOROVA

The black korova drove me in.
Lips held fast
Eyes open wide
I waited for korova to exit.

Blood rushing up
Head tightened
Body pressed into wall
Ears swept by breath
I felt the weight of my own heart

And became the first
In watching Korova
Entering
And leaving my body.

KUMO WENA I

Kumo wena Kumo wena

Seeker of intestines

Lover of human flesh

Let the forehead that gives you light

Light up the darkness

Let the heads of all sisters flash

Let the light brighten the dwellings of those
who have gone before us,

Clear the dirt

Empty the contents of the box

Beat the barks that hold the bodies tight

Show all that you have got

Look at the crowd

They have come to share your hunt

Let the old mouths have the young flesh

Let the new mouths have the old flesh

Let all lights shine

Brightening the whole earth.

KUMO WENA II

Leave your husband's body home

Let his oinya rest tonight

Wear the skirt that you have specially made

Wear your Kumo wena skirt.

Visit every corner of the village

Your stomach will get fat of the pig's intestines.

Travel, travel to the distant land

You will spot some food

Fresh, old, wrapped in skin

Ready for your treat.

DEATH

My weak body rests.
A voice erupts
Shaking me up.
Eyes half closed I sit up:
The voice growls.
I depart quietly
Blackening my bed
The fleas and bedbugs disperse.

Though the young people feel clumsy about it
Death really scares no one.
When the oinya leaves
He looks alien.

THE MOUNTAIN

On your forebody
Little twigs nourish.
On your unshaven face
Trees bury their roots.
On your breasts
The tallest peaks sprout.
On your resting feet
Your children play.
Shedding flood of tears
They laugh and cry.
Uprooting your hair
Emptying your stomach
They drift down the falls
Across the plains
And head for the blue ghost.
Everything is drained –
 the best soil gone,
 the rocks and tree stumps
 remaining exposed
 everywhere.
And you sleep
With your calm hands folded.

THE HIDDEN GOSPEL

As my pen fades
My memory unfolds :
Creep endless thoughts --

my mind sleeping
I walk the path of Nokondi
hunting
whispering
screaming

I climb the trees
that my forefathers climbed
I stare at the fields
that my forefathers trod

I dig anxiously
and proudly uncover
heads
of spear
bamboo
pipes
buried deep in Nokondi

Shaking the earth
I seek the hidden gospel.

KARAI BILONG TUMBUNA

Ai i pas yet
la i op
Tumbuna opim maus
Ol yanpela bilong tomaro
Putim ia gut
Dispela em strong pela tok bilong tumbuna
Taim yu liklik
Yu sindaun long soda bilong mama
lukim lek bilong mi
Em olsem hap stik
mit i pas punis long bun
Ai i tutak
Larim kaikai bilong wait man
Em giris bilong bagarapim yu
Lukim giraon
Lukim bus
Ol luk sori
Larim han bilong yu i doti
Larim simok i bagarapim ai
Tiring susu bilong mama
Tok i ron la i pas
Yu raon wait man rait "Nogat wok"
Sori yangpela
Taim bipo . . . bipo

LARIM MI KRAI

O mama larim mi krai
Nogut mi hangamap
Sore papa yu save pinis
Em samtin nogut bilon kukim leva

Sore poroman
Nau mi laik tokim yu
Dispela samting em samting nogut tru
Ating wanpela de bai yu painim aut
Dispela em mi luk save pinis

O mi laik kilap long biknait na krai
Taim san i hait insait long bel bilong tudak
Taim kiraut i pasim ai bilong mun
Simel bilong haus i bosim olgeta samting long haus
Sore larim mi krai
Tumbuna i tok
Papa i tok
Inoken krai long biknait
O lo nogut yu mekim na mi bagarap nating
Sore meri wantok
Yu lusim mi na yu go we
Masalai nogut man bilong sitilim meri
Nau yu maritim meri bilong mi
Moabeta mi lusim
Mi sore nating na yu hamamas.

THE VILLAGE BEYOND THAT MOUNTAIN

Look deep right –
Clouds mask the mountains.

Look extreme left –
Clouds crown the tree tops.

 I fly my eyes far beyond
Beyond those tame mountains
 That overshadow my eyes,
 The bubbles of the cloud
 Drop in the weak glittering of the sun,
 The crown-like
 The mask-like god
 Turns into a white
 Rolling monster
 Down the hills,
 Across the plains
 Swallowing all the tree tops.

Winds blow,
Rains pour,
 The poor god vomits
 All that he had swallowed.
 There appear trees, mountains.

My eyes reach that land
The land beyond those shabby ranges.
As my eyes transport sorrows
I stand loose with my naked heart
On the glued soil
 Where my forefathers walked.
 Here I unfold my minds

Minds that wonder
Minds that wander
Out to that tame land,
 I fire my eyes
Down deep into that uncrumbled land.
 The mountains show me their tenderness –
But not that smile,
 The rivers bring me back my memories –
But not that loving hand,
The glittering rays of the sun
Hook the earth
 And strip me naked.

THE BREEZE

The cool breeze of the morning
Kissing goodbye
Travels to the foot of the mountains,
Shaken leaves awaken,
Dews hurry onto the ground
 Wetting the earth's pants
 And its beards.
 The hissing breeze
 Breathes out cool air.
In my tidy mind
And from my strained ears
I can hear the bare feet
Shuffling down the mountains,
 Eyes search,
 Trees wave goodbye,
 Streams shed tears,
Lizards run to take dead leaves as their shields,
The hissing breeze has walked through once more.

THE AXE

Axe! Axe! Screams a beast,
On me is my mad husband!
Help me! Oh! Help!

My soul pants.
I must run, run for the kiap.

Exhausted is the poor devil
Swollen are his eyes like the onion bulbs.
The blade of the axe had done its part.

His spirit says to him
Axe! Good Axe!
You have done your good share
But the nerves say
Go! Man! Go!
Spears are landing on you
Axes have been pulled out of their places!
So go! Loto go!
After you is her uncle
After you is her brother
Go! Go! The minute you spare,
The spear you get,
The drink you have,
The blood gushes from your throat.
He's on you!
She is on you!
Everybody's on you!

THE MERCILESS BLADE

He is taken to the creek
 Where thousands of souls
Had been taken to.
The cool fat breeze from down stream
Blows against the greasy body.
People are chanting cross legged
 Under the shade of
The tall ferns and the pitpit.
The life seems to be in paradise.
His uncle with a bamboo pipe between his thick lips
His elder brother with his little bag under his armpit
And others whispering
And saying short prayers
He approaches the holy land.
The nerves of the young boy
The arteries of the young son
Mean nothing –
The old magic spell
That has brought all young men to manhood
is now cast on his body.
A great endless smile
On his tatoood face
He walks up to that sacred stone
That held thousands of lives.
It will mediate between men and gods.
It's on this precious altar
That all men are reborn.
He now sits and gazes
At one thing or another.

The bamboo blade
With merciless teeth
Is approaching.
His heart wished he was never born,
But that round face is smiling
With courage,
Looking down
Where the cool, friendly stream is gently flowing –
The flood of blood will be drained into it.
The unnoticed blade
Has made its way to the front
Of the young man.
The blade
The merciless blade
Is coming to the flesh.
He smiles, but the great burden
Makes him grasp and grind his teeth.
Seated on the sacred altar
His mind is always dreaming
For the great day that will come
When the young girls
Will give him lots of smiles –
Pigs that will be slaughtered in his name –
Great feast that will be held –
All in his name –
The axe and the spear
That will all mark
His entry to manhood.

AT THE LATE HOURS OF NIGHT

At the late hours of night
The sound of soft footsteps
Got louder and louder
My ears opened like the wide caves,
But the sound vanished.
My ears said,
'There is no more sound.'
My eyes grew round and fat.
Yet I did not see anything.
I heard the sound coming —
Coming like a ghost.
I heard the cold friendly ghost coming.
'It is coming', said my soul,
'Run, free your body'.
But my spirit cried
Saying 'It's not a spirit
It's not a ghost
It is your well loved little brother
Leaving, running, going finish.'

IN THAT LITTLE ROOM

Back in that little room
Lie treasures of the forefathers,
Lie the true words
The seeds of truth.

Wiping out the dust
I detect some fragments of truth
Among the transplanted seeds.

Words of frustration come
The acid words
From the souls of untamed boars
Making me feel like the chief of my people.
But when I look at myself
I discover the shadows
That shape me into
A cheap Japanese doll.
I look back and beyond
I belong to that little room
To the dust
Where my treasures are lying waste.

Breathing in my air
The shadows step into my calm pool
While the piglets of the shadows
Pulling my doll's flesh in all directions.

BEAUTY

Beauty

In your eyes,

Beauty

In your hands,

Beauty just reflects itself.

In your eyes

In the core of your eyes

It lies hidden.

Like the gospel

It is glorified.

Once you inhale the incense

of beauty

You long to see

And possess it

Beauty remains

Misinterpreted

By your naked eyes.

THE BLACK MEN'S DREAM

Black men black men
Cries my suffering spirit
Wait till tomorrow, shouts my conscience
You will wear long sleeved white shirts
Black ties long pants
Brown shoes polished and shined for you
You will all be driving
In black big cars
You will be eating lots of fried eggs
Drink lots of beer
Sit in big soft cushions
Whites will be at hand
To wash your feet
Whites will be your cooks
Whites today will become workboys tomorrow
The sorrows of the black man
Will no longer hold you down
Blacks will live in big houses
Blacks will control the bombs
Will fly the jets
The dawn of the black will soon be coming
He will no longer be part of the shanty town
Will no longer be the coffee boy
School will all be his
He will get his head educated
And the whole world will be under
the blacks
YES, IT WILL BE SO
Amen.

THE MELTING HEART

Here I sit staring at the ceiling
I long to see changes
Changes yesterday
Are not the changes of today
Here my traditional song is played
I sit longing for something
Is it that song
Are they going to be reiterated
Like the ones in the tape

My sorrow extends deep deep into that soil
The soil where that song lies
The song of the forefathers
Sung, but it touches the root of my heart
It wounds around my heart
It's threaded so firmly
But seems loosening every now and then
As I play the tune back
My panicking heart seems to continue its journey
Longing to see the great lips
That hold fast the sweet melodies
They buzz into my skull
And collide like a hill of atoms
That tune stretches my veins
Holds firmly my attitude of change
The fast melodies only make my heart run
It runs to and fro
Searching for a place to rest its head.

NOKONDI THE MASTA

He gives me a kick in the head.

I say small kick,

He gives me a big kick.

I say Aha! Mi longlong,

He kicks my tummy,

Digs my gut out,

Emptying the sack

Deserting the sack.

Nn! Nn! Nn!

My eyes groan

My nose smells.

It's the magic bottle

Playing hide and seek games.

Fool!

THE CRY OF THE MAMA

Hey! "Saveman"!

My grand pikinini, "Saveman"!

Look!

My eyes have walked in,

My stomach has grown backwards,

Arms are like the digging sticks.

Grandpapa walked all over me,

Your papa, first to lead the virgin path.

Hey! "Saveman"!

You led your mother's virgin path,

Your primitive world

Was not a danger to your health

Nor did you have to labour

But now,

now!

That voracious land

Where the white civilization

Has dumped its disposal,

The empty cans,

Smashed bottles,

And the polluted humans

With the new corrupted society,

Have laid you a trap.

Watch that short leg

Where he leads you,

Watch those brown eyes

What they see.

Have led thousands
And will lead more.
Your virgin land
Will smile when she sees
Your shadow.
Come back and get
The round smile
And wipe the tears away from me!
Ai! "Saveman"!

THE HEART IN THE GRAVE

It's that helpless creature kicking out balls of tears,
Streams of endless tears,
Lips painted with saliva
All in the blackened haus.
Under the wooden box
Among the white barks
Lies him who causes my tears.
With heavy, coated lips
Stream of tears flowing endlessly
I sit crosslegged
On the hard wooden bed.
It's him that had brought
Souls from near and distant lands
Uncles, neices, brothers, sisters, cousins and relatives:
One soul had invited hundred
But is now speechless resting in his bed.
Now the box is the centre of everybody's attraction
As his spirit travels into every eye
Kicking out balls of tears
And shaking every heart to ache
And stinging every eyebrow to swell
Like the ant hills.
All hearts beat slowly
As the tribes chant.
Every heart cries
Every mournful spirit cries
The flood of streams
The pond of tears
Have now failed every eye
As the throats vibrate for a sip of drink

Now the body is being lifted
As my heart is also being lifted

The body is taken away
I run to have the last glance
Like a goat tied to a chain
I cling onto my papa's belt
Giving my legs extra strength.
I run, run for the grave beds
And I look beyond my foot
And say quietly to myself
The home of my forefathers
Where my grandpapa sleeps
Where my grandmama rests
Here my only uncle is going to rest
It's now the grave bed
Which is the centre of attraction
Every eye moves
As he is lowered
All hearts are lowered beneath him
All are descending with him
The object drags every heart
Till the body touches the base of the grave
Where the sorrowful hearts
And the causer are all going to rest.

PAMUNDI'S LOVE SONG

My ears open wide
I hear a song
A song from a distant mouth,
My ears search for the sound
My eyes explore to discover the mouth
And above my heads
The sweet melody
Flows swiftly into my waiting ears.
I listen! Walendo! Walendo!
Mula! Mula!
Oh! That song
Says Mula
Oh! That tune
Says Mula,
I hunt for the mouth
I'll seek to the last for the melody.
Both search the mountains,
Across the valleys.
 Here! Says Mula,
Walendo stares and pulls closer.
They stare,
The new line
The new link
All brings to a love.
They head for Pamundi's home.
Across rivers
Sweats freely flow,
Up hills, legs tire
But the three lovers

Go on
On and on
They go!
 Eyes fixed
 Trembling
The three souls show not a sign of fear,
Heading for the village
They come,
 Mothers greet
 Uncles greet
Pamundi has marked his bravery.
But the wealth seekers
Are coming to look for Walendo and Mula!
Mula resists
Walendo answers No!
The day has come,
Pamundi's mother loses her wealth
Pamundi's father opens up his wealth
 The village shouts
 Pigs slaughtered
 And Pamundi is anxiously listening
 To what the wealth seekers are saying.

THE LAST CALL

Ei, nokondi my son nokondi
Remember you are not under my care
You are not any longer nokondi
White missionaries only come to get young people
They come only to scare mothers
Remember you are the great fig tree
That stands tall and strong
Among the thick twigs of the forest,
When you come back
You will not be any different
Than the tall fig tree

Your early days
The childhood days
All seem to be yesterday

The tears your mother sheds
Are not for your departure
Not for those cruel missionaries.

But for your young days
Remember my son nokondi
That far away land
Is the land of beauty
Is the land of attraction
Full of white man's perfume

White man's words
Shall all land on your back
The perspiration of your back
Will drain it

Listen my son
Let your ears be wide open

As my tiny words creep into your ears
Let them filter all other great words,
From my round fat "popo"

You were fed

Nokondi

Give me your head

I will fill it up with little words

Lend me your tongue

I will lay on it the words of love

Pass me your heart

And I will nurse it

With seeds of truth

Your very heart

The heart that I started.

NOTES

Nema Namba is Mother of Birds. In Elimbari tradition, Nema Namba also means a divine personage associated with a special kind of bamboo flute. Each family is supposed to have its own nema namba for its male members. In a secret nema namba ceremony, young men are shown the bamboo flutes and thus initiated to adulthood.

Oina is the spirit of both people and animals.

Korova is a spirit from the bush. People can make fun of Korova, but not Oinya (the spirit of all human beings).

Kumo Wena (also spelt Kiemu Wena) women move in a group, led by a woman chief. They are of all ages, and it is believed that they have lights on their forehead. They eat human and pig flesh. The Kumo Wena women regularly visit cemeteries to look for their meals, and it is the chief who first opens up the grave and digs out a corpse which is shared by them. The villagers complain that when they kill a pig, these women swiftly come to grab it. To prevent this, the villagers normally leave some fat for these women.

Saveman are all those who have adopted Western Culture.

Nokondi is a strange god who dwells in the Elimbari mountains. He is also a trickster. Nokondi plays an important role, especially in hunting.

Loto is the husband who axed his wife.

The last poem is based on a well known episode of **Pamundi's** love with two girls—**Walendo** and **Mula**. The girl's parents (the wealth seekers) are dissatisfied with the brideprice that Pamundi and his parents can offer.