A Poem for Mother

Robin S. Ngangom

Palem Apokpi, mother who gave birth to me,
to be a man how I hated leaving home
ten years ago. Now these hills
have grown on me.
But I'm still your painfully shy son
with a ravenous appetite,
the boy who lost many teeth after
emptying your larder. And
I am also your dreamy-eyed lad
who gave you difficult times
during his schooldays, romancing
every girl he wanted, even
when he still wore half-pants.

You told your children that
money and time do not grow on trees, and
I could never learn to keep up with them.
It isn't that I've forgotten
what you've come to mean to me
though I abandoned much and left
so little of myself for others
to remember me.

I know how you work your fingers to the bone
as all mothers do, for unmarried sons,
ageing husband and liberated daughters-in-law.
Worried about us, for a long time
your lips couldn't burgeon in a smile,
lines have furrowed your face and
first signs of snow are on your hair.

Today, as on every day you must have risen
with temple bells before cockcrow, swept
the floors and after the sacred bath
cooked for the remainder of us. I can see you
returning every dusk from the bazaar,
your head laden with baskets.
Must you end toiling foretver?

I'm sorry Palem.
I've inherited nothing
of your stable ways or culinary skills.
Forgive me, for all your dreams
of peace during your remnant days
I turned out to be a small man
with small dreams, living a small life.