SEMOANA
A NOVEL IN PROSE AND POETRY

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ABSTRACT

This work uses a traditional storytelling form of Samoa called *su’ifefilo* where composers thread together different types of songs to make one very long song for a special occasion. The result is a tapestry made up of a wide array of styles and voices that explore and express Samoan themes, culture, history, perspectives and voices—especially voices—in an American Samoan context. The tapestry includes many shifts in language, points of views, voices, and forms that give new meaning and function to *su’ifefilo*. One significant function of *su’ifefilo* is it unravels western emphasis on plot, setting, character and point of view, including grammar and writing conventions. The outcome is a novel that is rooted in Samoan culture and captures authentic Samoan voices and understanding.
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O a’u o se tama’ita’i laulu lanuuliuli. Ou te fiafia e lalaga mo o’u tagata. I am a black-haired woman. I am a weaver for my people, the Samoan people of the family of Samoa, whose ancestor is Tagaloalagi who lives in the ninth heaven. My heart burns when I weave measina, treasures, for my people that connect us to our Samoan roots. I was born into a modern American Samoan society, the only American territory south of the equator, and educated in an American school system that emphasized the written word. The English word that is, and its culture and views. So unlike the gray-haired weaver of old who weaves with laufala strips, I weave with words to create criss-cross patterns that connect our Samoan past to our complex yet unique western experiences, so palagi, American, yet still so Samoan—so American Samoan. Ou te faaaogaina upu e lalaga ai tala e faamatala ma iloilo ai le olaga o tagata Samoa i Amerika—ua filogia i uiga faaamerika, faapapalagi, ma faasamo—faaamerika Samoa. My first criss-cross pattern reflects my name, Semoana. O la’u mamanu muamua e faasino i lo’u igoa o Semoana. Se, a Samoan prefix added to feminize and enhance the Samoan word moana for blue and ocean, as in the blue Pacific Ocean that surrounds my home Samoa.

When visitors come to my house, they will see that I am weaving a mat whose inner patterns reflect the movements of the currents of the Pacific Moana—west to east and north to south. When they listen to my family tell our stories, they notice that these criss-cross patterns were set in motion by my father’s career as a Protestant minister in American Samoa, my mother’s strong desire to keep her children connected to her family in the northwestern corner of the United States, and my father’s obsession with providing us with a good American education—even if that meant sending us away to Seattle,
Washington. My parents’ decisions meant my story moved northeast, pushed by the winds, then southwest, around the Pacific Moana, and then south again and again, until it finally crashed onto Samoa during my high school years. These criss-cross patterns meant I rode currents that collided, contradicted, and swayed deeply in opposition to my Samoan culture. For example, one year, I found myself living with relatives in a cold urban city, attending a Catholic school with palagi, African-Americans, Mexicans, and Asians, speaking my step-tongue, English, buttoned up to my neck, and eating macaroni and cheese. Another year, I found myself living in a Samoan village, speaking my mother tongue, le gagana Samoa, wearing puletasi and ie lavalava in the tropics, and playing the role of a good Samoan minister’s daughter. The two locations, cultures, and languages opposed and translated each other like the currents in the Pacific Moana—east and west, warm and cold, bright and dark. Like the Pacific Moana, I was constantly in motion, yet I always, always found security on the shores of Samoa and Ie Atua whose significance I’m still struggling to understand. Thus, I learned to straddle my two cultures, including the two opposing temperatures, and I am determined to master the channels the way my Samoan ancestors mastered the stars, winds, and currents when crossing the vast Pacific Moana. Today, I continue to straddle my two cultures, American and Samoan, but especially my two tongues, le gagana Samoa, and my step-tongue, English. Ou te tautala ma manava a’u gagana e lua. O la’u gagana moni, Samoa, ma la’u gaganafai, Igiilisi.

Beyond the inner patterns of my own story as Semoana, there were stronger currents that shaped my life. Those currents were set in motion by the presence of the United States Navy in my home island of Tutuila in the late 1800’s. America was looking
for a place to build a refueling station for her trading ships that carried goods between San Francisco, Sydney, and Asia. America’s need for a refueling station led to the structure of a United States Navy station on Tutuila and to the birth of my home country—American Samoa—from the family of Samoa in the Pacific Moana. The birth of American Samoa started the importation of American goods, culture, institutions, and language into the village life of Tutuila and Manu’a, which had easily accepted Christianity with the arrival of British missionaries on Samoan shores in 1830. This fusion between American culture, the faasamoa—the Samoan way—and Christian culture provides the social, linguistic, and cultural landscape from which I weave this story.

But here I must pause and stretch my sleeping leg. Tulou! Pardon me! For I see a wrinkle in my mat—my step-tongue—English, o la’u gaganafai—is becoming distractive here—especially her rules of parallelism, point of view, and punctuation—as I shift to my Samoan voice in order to tell stories the Samoan way. Let me describe the wrinkle I am looking at. Va’ai, the best language to capture the essence of my Samoan mat is le gagana Samoa. However, if I switch to le gagana Samoa, then many Samoan people and our visitors will not understand my story. Yet, if I continue weaving in my step-tongue and using only her storytelling forms, then I won’t be able to express Samoan views and voices. The story will sound too palagi. So I’m stuck, yet I must not stop weaving. I must continue. Ioe. E le mafai ona toe tu’u le galuega ua amata. Ia, se’i faaaau pea le lalaga. So here I am, weaving this wrinkle right into the mat. Se’i liugalua lo’u leo—let me shift my voice to my su’ifefilo’i voice, which will unravel my step-tongue’s rules but better
express my Samoan views. O lenei leo e ta’ua o le su’ifefilo, ona e fefiloai mea uma. This form I’m now using is called su’ifefilo and it threads my mother tongue into my step-tongue and my step-tongue into my mother tongue to describe Semoana’s world, her people, culture and identity. Semoana is living in America now, and like the curious toloa bird, she always, always glances back to Samoa every time she flies too far. Se’i liulu o’u mafaufauga ma la’u vaai e mafai ai ona lalaga lenei fala ma numi o le olaga o le tama’ita’i lenei o Semoana aemaise ai le tala o tagata Samoa ua su’ifefilo ma uiga faapapalagi. O lenei tama’ita’i ua nofo nei i Amerika, ae e pei lava o le toloa e lele ae tepatepa lava i le vai. You see reader, for a long time, I never felt at home in America. I felt like an outsider—invisible—e pei a’u o se aitu e le amanaia pe iloa mai a’u e se isi—because my Samoan identity didn’t matter here in America. In school, I learned about Christopher Columbus, the Civil War, Statue of Liberty, the Battle of the Alamo, Japanese Internment Camps, Martin Luther King Jr., Angel Island, Halloween, Emily Dickinson, and even St. Patrick’s Day. O le tele ia o tala eseese sa a’oa’o ai a’u, aemaise ai tala o tagata eseese ua aumau nei i Amerika. I enjoyed learning how these people were connected to America. But I never learned my story—the one that connected me to this country. Io! Ou te le’i faalogo lava o faamatala e se isi la’u pi’itaga i lenei atunu’u. The story about why this woman named America came to the islands of Tutuila and Manu’a—my home in Samoa—in the Pacific Moana. So I never felt connected to America because I didn’t see my story among the stories about papalagi, Mexicans, African Americans, Asians and other groups whose stories I read in school. Every time
these people talked about their connections to the greater American story, I sat there and felt like there was a mouse sitting on my head doing something very, very improper. Ioe! Ou te nofo ma faalogologo a’o fa’amatala a latou pi’itaga i Amerika, ae ou te le pisa ona ou te le malamalama i la’u pi’itaga i Amerika. Na’o lo ta nofo lava ma le gugu e pei a’u o se vale. So I sat there silently like a fool while others told their connections to America, yet I come from the Samoan family of Tagaloa who are not fools! Only when I entered graduate school at the University of Hawai’i-Manoa in 1998 did I begin to learn the mamanu, patterns, in my story. And what I learned is that there are so many mamanu in my story that I didn’t have the opportunity to learn in this country. I understood little about how tens of thousands of years ago people migrated from Southeast Asia into Samoa and Tonga, how the “Polynesian” people came into being in Samoa, and how they crossed the Pacific Moana using the stars, weather, and ocean to guide them. O ni tautai popoto ma le totoa tagata Polensisia! I also learned how these master voyagers settled the islands of Tahiti, Cook Islands, Aotearoa, Hawai’i, mim. But the story I knew least was my American Samoan story and how it originates in the history of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific Moana. Ou te le’i malamalama o le tala’aga o Amerika Samoa e maua i le talafaasolopito o le Neivi o le Iunaite Setete i le Pasefika. O la’u pi’itaga lena i Amerika. A’o o le tele ia o isi manamu e tatau ona ou malamalama i ai, ma o le mafua’aga lena ua ou punou ai nei e lalaga lenei fala. That’s why I’m weaving this story. To smooth out the wrinkles in my mat, which include our history, culture, genealogy, experiences of being misunderstood as Samoans in America and the Pacific. These experiences are not included in American, Pacific or Samoan books or media. The exclusion of my mother
tongue, history, and culture in American schools makes me feel so sad, disconnected and confused about my Samoan identity. O le tiga pito i faigata lena ia te a’u. O le leai o se avanoa i a’oga i Amerika e a’o ai la’u gagana, aganu’u, ma la’u talafaasolopito. When I weave these wrinkles out, then I won’t feel so invisible, so unimportant and so powerless here in America where I live like many of you whose ancestors came from other countries.

E faigata le lalagaina o lenei fala, ona o le tele ia o numi ese’ese, aemaise lava o le faaaogaina o la’u gaganafai o le Igilisi e faamatala ai uiga ma lagona faasamoa. There are many wrinkles in this weaving session and one of them, as I said before, is using my step-tongue, English, to express Samoan views and emotions. It’s difficult, if even possible. But like I said before, I must continue to weave. I must not stop. E faalavelave pea la’u gaganafai, ona e le mafai e lana gagana ma ana tulafono ona faamatala uiga ma lagona faasamoa. So I must create ways to use the su’ifefiloi form—to weave things in a way e malamalama ai tagata Samoa and so that I can express myself in a way that is true to my experiences as a Samoan. This means, I will break English rules, I will weave songs, legends, parents scolding their children, dance a little, add ghosts, and use simple words—te’i ua le malamalama se isi—in case somebody doesn’t understand. Oh, and I must add humor, lots of humor because Samoan people—Oh dear!—we fall asleep so fast and get so bored when things get so serious. E leaga le serious tele ona e oso ai le tiga o le manava, aemaise ai le fiamoe pe a le malie se faamatalaga. There will be many prayers too, tele lava talosaga, ona e ui ina tele le faafoliga o tagata Samoa i le itu faakerisiano—Toe tulou!—ae e fefefe lava ma talitonu i le Atua. So I will weave many,
many prayers because Samoans, even though we can be so hypocritical, we fear and believe in the Christian God. For example, Samoan people, even if they’re living in Hawai’i, California, Washington, Alaska, Texas, and now I hear North Carolina, and Florida, the father or mother, rooted in our Samoan past, still calls out to his family, in the evening, O mai se’i fai se lotu! Come let us say a prayer! Turn off the television! Tape le tv! Turn off the lights! Tape le moli! But the most challenging use of su’ifefilo in my story is the weaving of different voices and points of views into each other. This emphasis on shifting voices and points of views through prose, telephone dialogues, poetry, songs, prayers, and monologues are dominant over setting, plot, and events and visitors may find it confusing and disorienting. This isn’t my intention, so I hope our visitors view these elements of su’ifefilo as a challenge rather than a reason to go looking for their shoes as they exit the door.

Samoan writer Sia Figiel uses su’ifefilo in her work. Su’ifefilo is a combination of the words, su’i, meaning to sew or to weave and fefilo, a descriptive word that means mixed. Figiel points out that when Samoan composers need to write a long song for a special event, they string together many different kinds of songs to make one long, long song. In her original works, Girl in the Moon Circle and Where They Once Belonged, Figiel threads together Samoan and English and prose, poetry, songs, and even mythology to capture the voices of adolescent girls growing up in a traditional Samoan village. Su’ifefilo can also be seen in the works of other Pacific writers. For example, Maori chants, songs, and language weave in and out of English in Patricia Grace’s Potiki and Witi Ihimaera’s Tangi capturing a uniquely Maori voice and form. Across the Pacific
Moana, in the borderlands of the United States and Mexico, Mexican-American writer Gloria Anzaldúa uses a similar form. In Borderlands, Anzaldúa weaves her faaestiza into academic English and vice-versa, creating a very intense collision between her two cultures and underscoring her determination to maintain her mother tongue. Anzaldúa writes, if you want to hurt me take away my language. E to’atele tusitala o lo’o faaaogaina le su’ifeiloa ma aualoa e faataua ai a latou gagana. Fai mai le tusitala o Gloria Anzaldúa, a e fia tuia a’u, ona titiga lea o la’u gagana. E faataua lava e lenei tama’ita’i Latino lana gagana faaestiza. By weaving their traditional forms and native tongues into English, these writers show indigenous writers and artists how to toss our nets into the deepest parts of the Pacific Moana to remain rooted to our cultures. I take my hat off to these brave writers. Bravo to them! Malo alofaiva ma le sogasoga, aemaise ai le lotonu’u! I especially salute world-renowned novelist Albert Wendt—o le na mua i malae—the first Samoan and one of the first Pacific writers to light up the international literary radar. Ua emo’emo le radar a le palagi i lau susuga le tusitala, ma i latou uma mai le Moana tele na tu’utu’u a latou upega i le loloto. Mua ia! Mua o!

Wendt and Figiel’s works are set in New Zealand and the Independent country of Samoa. My mother’s grandfather is from the village of Falefa in Upolu, and the only story I inherited from my Upolu pattern is that my great-grandfather was a matai from Falefa and his daughter, my grandmother, received her malu, tattoo, in that village at the tender age of thirteen. I treasure that single Falefa story in my heart! My father’s mother comes from the village of Safotu in Savai’i. My Savai’i pattern barely shaped my life. My grandmother traveled from Savai’i to American Samoa when she was a young
woman, married my grandfather from Fitiuta, Manu’a and Laloifi, Tutuila, and remained in American Samoa until she passed on. The only pattern I inherited from Savai’i was a story about how a storekeeper from the village of Safotu ran out of supplies, Tulou! Pardon me! toilet seats. So the storekeeper ordered more falemamao, toilet, seats. In his order, he wrote, next to other items like soap, sweets and sugar, one dozen of toilet seats. So there you have it! One dozen of toilet seats. One tasene. Joe dear! Ata. Laugh and enjoy my Savai’i legacy! The famous one dozen story I inherited from the village of my beloved grandmother, whom I never met, from the magnificent island of Savai’i. That story is a keeper too!

Though I am connected to Independent Samoa, those connections were not woven into my life, so I’m still a tama’ita’i from American Samoa. American Samoa and Independent Samoa are one—from the family of Samoa our ancestor Tagaloa—yet we are different countries. E ui ina tasi le aiga, ae ese’ese malo. We are on different pathways. Western colonialism in the Pacific Moana placed us—from one family—on two opposing currents. One American, the other British, German and New Zealand. That’s another set of wrinkles on our Samoan mats to be explored and celebrated some day: American Samoa, Tutuila and Manu’a and Independent Samoa, Upolu and Savai’i. One family—the family of Samoa—yet on opposing currents.

So this mat is woven from the layers and connections between the United States and American Samoa—the islands of Tutuila and Manu’a. It is also shaped by my aiga, uo and the people of Samoa—my parents, the one and only dearest grandmother I knew, aunties, uncles, cousins, teachers, ministers, neighbors, storekeepers, bus drivers,
boyfriends, pets, dolls, and girlfriends, especially girlfriends. Their stories criss-crossed into mine resulting in this unique American Samoan mat.

As I’m reaching the end of this section of my story, I must say, Tulou! Pardon me! once again. This is a Samoan gesture, not an apology for acting Samoan. I must say, tulou for several reasons. First, I want to apologize to the Samoan audience for the missteps in language and expression. Afai ua iai se upu ua sala pe pa’opapa i le faafogaaga mamalu a le aufaitau, ia lafo i nu’u e le aiga. Second, I apologize to our visitors if this story does not fulfill your expectations. This is but one mat, so you will only witness its mamanu. But there are many, many more mats to be woven, presented, and placed in the hands of weavers, both old and young, Samoan, American Samoan, Samoan-Hawaiian, Samoan-palagi, Samoan-African American, Samoan-Asian, Samoan-Mexican, and many from America’s diverse people who have woven their stories into our Samoan mats. Many, like me, who were swept away on the Pacific Moana currents and now live scattered throughout the United States, yet still rooted to the islands of Tutuila and Manu’a, American Samoa, Upolu and Savai’i, Independent Samoa, and the entire family of Samoa. They too have mats, beautiful mats that will make us weep, laugh, and even suspicious about us, unusual people from the family of Samoa whose favorite thing to do in the entire lalolagi, the whole wide world, aside from thanking and worshipping God, is to laugh and laugh, then cry and laugh some more until the tears make use breathless, gasping for air.

Mua!
Mua ia!
Mua o!
I wish to end this part of the weaving session by singing a short song for you from my father’s grandmother’s village of Laloifi on the island of Tutuila.

_Ua mamalu tēle lau ele’ele_
_Ua aofia ai le to’atele_
_O Laloifi lenei ua sau_
_E faapine faamau_
_O le aso na avea ai oe ma ta’ita’i au_

_O singing! Tra la la la la_
_Oi Samoa e! Fiafia ma osana_
_O le tala moni lena ia Samoa_
_O Laloifi o le tina o le alofa_

_The land is now sacred_
_The people have gathered_
_Laloifi has come_
_To mark this day_
_When you have become a leader_

_O singing! Tra la la la la_
_O Samoa! Rejoice and osana_

_This is the truth in Samoa_
_Laloifi is the mother of love_
PROLOGUE
The Weaver

At the break of day a gray-haired woman rises to weave for her people
She folds her legs, bends her back, and fixes her eyes on the floor
One hand lifts a line of laufala strips the other straightens another creating a criss-cross pattern locked in beauty as the noble artist herself She pauses, sits up, stretches one leg, opens her palm, and fathoms her offspring
A fingertip touches the end of one mat and the beginning of another an endless toiling for her daughter's dowry a wedding day display of wealth
She weaves with timeless fibers, the wisdom of yesterday and the love of today
Her sons light a sulu at night for her priceless labor extends into the test of tomorrow

Tialuga Sunia Seloti
O le Matuau'u

I le gafoa o le aso
e alafa‘i a‘e le matua ulusina
e lalaga mo ona tagata

E fatai ona vae, lolo‘u lona tua
pulato‘a aga‘i i le fola

E toso a‘e e le tasi le isu atu
ma fatu ai se mamanu faafelavasa‘i
ua faamauina i le matagofie
faapei o le laelei o le matauau’u lava ia

A mapu te isi, nofosao a‘e faaloloa lona aao
fofolona lona alofilima, ma fuafua aga o lona gapatia

E pa‘i atu le tumutumu i le pito o le tasi fala
o le amataga fo‘i lena o le isi
o se galuega e leai se mutaaga
aua se oloa mo lona alo tama‘ita‘i
se folasaga o tamaoaiga i lona aso faaipoipo

E lalaga i lau le tuutapulaa i ni augatupulaga
le faautaga o анаане ma le alofa o le aso nei

E o ane lana fanau tama ma tutu sulu i le po
ona o lona afu maligi le faatauina
e au lava i tofotofoga o a taeao

Tialuga Sunia Seloti
O a’u o se tina lauulu sisina. I am a gray-haired woman, a weaver for my people. Every morning, I rise and spread my laufala strips before me and fix my eyes on the unfinished mat from yesterday. I lift the laufala strip and bend it back far enough so that the next strip locks in a criss-cross pattern that will not unravel over time. A beautiful mat is a beautiful mat, but a priceless mat is one woven beautifully and firmly. Once the pattern feels firm in my fingers, I picture the connection between the last pattern and next and the emerging mat as a whole. The connections will strengthen the mat from the many hands that will handle it. Today, I weave a wedding mat for a young Samoan woman to be married to a Samoan man. This mat is part of the falamoe her family will present to the man’s family to express the happiness in their hearts and to bless the new couple in their future as one man and woman.

Born in a modern Samoa, and living somewhere in America, this woman is educated and with career, but she is determined to stay rooted to our faasamoa and our mother tongue, le gagana Samoa, denied to so many Samoans born and raised in America. After I weave a few more patterns for this wedding mat, I pause, stretch my sleeping leg, and picture the new pattern. But my eye catches a wrinkle in the mat. It is distracting. It does not echo the past or the present. It makes the mat too fragile to hold the weight of the patterns needed to complete it. So one by one, I unravel the laufala strips careful not to tear the fold that holds the first pattern together. I lift the laufala strip and begin again, keeping in mind the links between our Samoan past and the lives of Samoans struggling to stay rooted to Samoa in the papalagi culture. The work requires my patience but especially my love for young Samoans in their struggle. May they weave
their lives into the fibers of Samoan mats for strength and wisdom. O le mafua’aga lena e
mu ai lo’u loto pe a ou lalaga mo o’u tagata. Ou te iloa o lo’o tauivi pea alo ma fanau a
Samo a e tumau i le faasamo a’o latou soifu a i le aganu’u malosi a papalagi. Ia avea lenei
fala ma faa’iloa o measina a Samoa aua le au tupulaga. That is why my heart burns as I
weave for my people because I know the papalagi culture is powerful, yet they refuse to
give up the faasamo. Such brave, brave warriors! Such steadfast expression of their
Samoan heart! Malo le lotonu’u! May our measina, treasures, bind them to our ancestors,
the family of Samoa, so they will remain strong and firm in their walk in and beyond the
Pacific Moana.

* * *
PART I: SAMOA
Grandma’s Centipedes

Jesus was crucified on grandma’s living room table.

Thorns on his head
nails in his hands
Jesus hangs next to Mary
tears running down his cheeks

O mai, o le a fai le lotu, grandma says untying her rosary from Mary’s neck. Facing Mary, she waits for us to settle on our knees. My sister Sa’ili and brother little John kneel and face Jesus, the one who, after three days, rose next to Grandma’s white candles and showed us the holes in his hands. As soon as grandma and Mary say the rosary, I roll onto the couch and kick my feet into the air.

Le Atua le Tama, le Alo, ma le agaga paia, we repeat after grandma.

Our father, the son, and holy spirit.

My hand touches
my forehead
heart
and shoulder to shoulder.

Hail Mary! Full of Grace
Holy Mary, Mother of God
Pray for us sinners
Now, and at the hour
Hail Mary! Full of Grace
Holy Mary, Mother of God
Pray for us sinners
Now, and at the hour
Pray for us
O Holy Mother of God
That we may be worthy of the promises of Christ.

Sa’ili, little John and I live with grandma and pray to Jesus and Mary on our knees. Mataio and Fale live on a hill with aunty and uncle and pray to God, sitting in a circle with their legs folded in front of them.

Faafetai i le Atua le na afio mai luga ina ua alofa mai
Aua ua faapea lava ona alofa mai le Atua i le lalolagi ua ia aumai ai lona atalii e toatasi ina ia le fano se tasi e faatuatua ia te ia a ia maua e ia le ola e faavavau.

Lo matou tama o i le lagi ia paia lou suafa

Because grandma gave her heart to Mary and Jesus, she sends us to a Catholic School where we honor the flag and pray three times a day.

Our Father who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name
thy Kingdom come
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven

I pledge allegiance to the flag
of the United States of America
and to the republic for which it stands
one nation, under God, indivisible
with liberty, and justice for all

At school, my friend Terry brings her lunch to school and eats in the classroom. One afternoon, Sa’ili asks,

What are you doing?
I’m fixing my lunch
Why?
I want to eat with Terry in the classroom

The next day during lunch Terry asks
Why is your sandwich so sad?
It’s lumpy and fat in the middle
I think its because peanut butter is heavier than jelly

Why is your sandwich so happy? I ask.
Because turkey likes cheese, tomatoes and lettuce

Next time put more jam and less peanut butter, she says
Nah, next time, I’ll just eat in the cafeteria

Is that a wig?
I ask grandma one afternoon.
Leai. O le laulu o Sapina, lo’u tina, she says.
It’s your dead mother’s hair?
Where did you get it?
Na sau ma a’u mai Samoa.
But where in Samoa did you get it?
Sa ou teua mai le taimi na maliu ai o ia.
You cut it off her head when she died?
But why?
E tu’u i luga o le ulu o le taupou pe a siva.
That’s the hair the taupou wears when she dances.

Holding her mother’s brown hair, grandma and I glue white shells, red feathers, and seashells onto the tuiga. Then we tie great grandma Sapina’s brown hair onto the tuiga for the taupou.

Sh! Sa le pisa,
Don’t make noise near the graves
my great-aunt screamed to the village kids playing near our family cemetary.

Sh! Sa le pisa!
Don’t make noise
That was how my great grandma Sa-pi-na got her name
They changed the ~ s ~ to ~ n ~ to make it sound pretty

Grandma’s father was a matai from the village of Falefa and she was his taupou. That’s why centipedes and birds live on her thighs. The centipedes crawl along the sides and insides of her thighs while birds fly over them. A ta tatau tattooed the centipedes and birds on her body when she was thirteen and called it a malu. I saw her malu one night because her blanket slid off while the centipedes and birds moved on her thighs.

Pusi is grandma’s fat cat. She’s the color of grandma’s chair. When Pusi sleeps on grandma’s chair, grandma can’t see her. One evening, grandma sat on Pusi and almost squashed her. But Pusi is strong like grandma. She scratched grandma’s centipedes and jumped before the birds got her.

When my cousins come over, we dance in grandma’s living room while Jesus and Mary look on.

Do the hustle dududududududu
Do the hustle dududududududu
Do the huste dududududududu

Soul Train
Soul Train
Ohhhhhh
Ohhhhhh

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Ohhhhh

Everybody was Kung-Fu fighting
as fast as lightning

We follow cousin Sione
As he moved his hips
to the left
to the right
to the back
then around and around and around.

Grandma stays upstairs playing cards while the centipedes and birds rest on her thighs. Downstairs, our hips twist and turn around and around while Jesus and Mary look on.

A Samoan girl and boy live on our street. One afternoon, I went to play with them. When I returned, grandma was on fire. Instead of asking for water grandma screamed for a shoe. Grabbing the shoe, she swung it in the air setting my arm, shoulders, and thighs on fire.

Faapea ua gaoi ‘oe e se isi!
I thought somebody stole you!

Fire!
Dum Dum Dum

Aua ne’i e toe alu e eva i se isi fale!
Don’t ever go anywhere without telling me!

Fire!
Dum! Dum! Dum!

Grandma is on fire!
Grandma is on fire!
Grandma’s fire is not my kind of fire!

After grandma’s fire went out, I went to the room. Two years later, my mother arrived. It was time to return to Samoa.

Adam, you’re a fool!
Why didn’t you wait
to find out
if the tree was free  
or forbidden

Life is doomed  
all because of you Eve  
You can't hold your tongue

Adam,  
where are you now?  
You didn’t keep a watchful eye

Ready, end.

Atamu ma Eva amio leaga  
tulia oulua mai le faato’aga  
talu le fafine le mafaufau  
ua ai fua o le la’au

Atamu lou matavalea!  
ae le se’i su’esu’e pea  
po’o se fua o se la’au aina  
po’o se la’au faasaina  
Le olaga ua mala paga  
talu oe Eva lou tautala

Atamau e,  
po’o fea ea oe  
ua le teua lau amio e

Apatu fo e.

In Samoa, Miss Taumafai teaches my third grade class this song to sing every Friday before we go home. We sing, clap, sing, clap, and dance and dance to this song and we don’t think about the words.
A'oga Samoa

But why do I have to go to Samoan school? I ask my father.
You have to learn Samoan.
But I don’t want to learn Samoan.
So what kind of Samoan are you?
A smart Samoan or a Samoan who is faavalevea?
My father’s question stings me, so I say nothing.

You are a Sa—moan. Ua e iloa? Now you’re a minister’s daughter. O lona uiga, you’re a role model for the children of the village. Every—body will watch how you act, dress, and speak. So you have to go to a’oga Samoa to learn the Bible and Samoan.

Then . . . I don’t want to be a minister’s daughter, I say to myself trying not to be tautalaititi.

When you hear the pate tomorrow
ala i luga
wash your face
brush your teeth
grab your api and pencil
and go to a’oga Samoa.

O e faalogo mai?

I shake my head to say, yes.

At a’oga Samoa, you listen to the faifeau and his wife. A fai atu le faletua e fai meaa’oga, then you do your work.

O e faalogo mai?

This time I open my mouth to say, yes.

My father returns to his book. The discussion is over so I turn and walk to the front door. I turn the doorknob and push the door open. As soon as I shut the door I start to run. I run and run all the way down the stairs.

Semoana!
Se—moana!
Semoana!
Pele, my friend, calls my name.  
But I keep running  
I run pass the mago, the talie and the big vi.

I run up the ridge and don’t stop to catch my breath. When I reach the pua tree, I turn to see if Pele is behind me. She isn’t, so I grab the branch, pull myself up, and start to climb.

I climb and climb and climb  
hearing my father’s words  
echo each time I  
reach for a branch

When I reach the top, I look out at the moana. A gogosina flies over the bluegreen water. It’s white feathers sparkle over the ocean. As I watch the sparkling gogosina, my right foot slips. I reach for a branch but it slips through my hands. I fall, hit a branch and then the ground with my left side. Blood drips from my elbow. I wipe the blood, but I notice three large black rocks shaped like turtles in front of me. Suddenly, the largest rock starts to shake. I try to stand when voices speak from the rocks:

Funa! Funa e!  
Did you know that language is a treasure?

That’s why people say  
animals feed their young  
with fish and berries  
but humans feed theirs  
with words and stories

That’s why you’re  
to learn your language  
Everybody will watch  
how you act, dress and speak

Samoan people’s eyes are like radars  
They go up when you don’t wear white to church  
They go sideways when your skirt is too short  
They pop out when a boy holds your hand

So you better watch out  
Samoan eyes  
don’t miss a thing

I put my head in my lap
and think about my grandma’s corner
the one out there
far away from here

Sou funa Sina Sou funa Sina
Le tama fafine o le feagaiga
Na e tagi i lau tama o le gogosina
E te manamea i nai ona tifa
Ifo i vanu, a’ e vanu o au manu
Na ‘ae ta alu ita ne’i o ta pa’u o ta lili’a

Look at the gogosina!
E ‘i’ila nai ona tifa
She’s free in the sky
on the mountain top
over the blue moana

Vaai i le gogosina!
E ‘i’ila nai ona tifa
She’s free in the sky
on the mountain top
over the blue moana

The Call

Four years ago, Semoana’s father received a call from God to become a faifeau. His aiga from the village of Laloifi was happy. The family legacy would remain intact. The parents moved to Upolu to attend Malua Seminary while the children went to live with relatives in Seattle. It’s been three months now since they’ve returned. The father is a faifeau for the LBJ Hospital. He’s bought a bright orange truck that makes people stare. Semoana got a cat named Koko Rice and Fale got a dog named Darling. When Pele saw Darling, she asked, E! O se faafafine Darling? Semoana said, No. Darling isn’t a faafafine. He likes to play with boy dogs.

During Semoana’s first week of palagi school, Miss Taumafai asked, who knows why the hospital is called Lyndon B. Johnson? Nobody knew the answer. So Miss Taumafai said, o e fesili i tou matua. So Semoana went home and asked her father. The next day, Miss Taumafai asked again, Aisea ua igoa ai le falema’i ia LBJ? Semoana raised her hand but Miss Taumafai called on Ioane, who said, O Lynton P. Johnson o le peresitene muamua sa asiasi mai i Amerika Samoa. Miss Taumafai said, yes, he was the first and only president to visit Amerika Samoa. Ioane gave a good answer. It was the same answer Semoana’s father told her. So Semoana has learned a lot of things about Samoa since they’ve returned.
Semoana’s Father’s Voice

All you kids come over here! Tutu i luma o le laulau. Stand in front of the table. Amata mai i le tagata pito umi ma faasolo ane i le tagata pito pu’upu’u. From the tallest to the shortest. Ok. Let’s see.

Semoana—you go to first grade
John—you go to second grade
Fale. Stand up straight—you go to vasega fa
A’o oe Mataio. Alu oe i le vasega lima
Yeah, e sa’o—you go to fifth grade

How come Sa’ili doesn’t have to go to a’oga Samoa? Fale asks. Because ao’ga Samoa stops at grade seven.
Ia, time to go. Oulua Fale ma John. Aua le ulavavale.

Semoana!
Semoana!

Semoana, your mother is calling you.
O le a lou ofu lena e fai?
I’m wearing my blue skirt
Sau se’i ou vaai i lou ofu.
Your mother wants to see what you’re wearing.
I said, I’m wearing my blue skirt.
Semoana! Watch your mouth!
Va’ai lou gutu.
Watch your mouth!
O e faalogo mai?
Ioe, I hear you.

How come we don’t go register like palagi school? John asks. This is a’oga Samoa.
You just go with your api and pencil.
How did you know I should go to second grade?
I just know.
But how?
Se, I just know.
What grade are you in palagi school?
Fourth grade.
See! Four minus two equals two—grade two.
Is that how you knew Fale should go to fourth grade?
Six minus two equals vasega fa?
Yes, six minus two equals grade four.
So Semoana is three minus two equals first grade?  
Yes—that’s how Samoan people figure things out.  
We subtract two from the palagi grade to get the Samoan grade.  
You better go.  
O la ua ta mai le pate.

The Minister’s Very Big House

Why do you ask so many questions? Mataio asks little John.

I just want to know why. In palagi school, we go see the secretary. Then we meet our teacher, and see our classroom.  
John! Fale screams. This is a’oga Samoa! There’s no secretary, and no office! Nothing! We’re going to the minister’s house. Ok. The minister’s house.

He must have a very big house then.  
Be quiet! Mataio says. Tomorrow, you two walk by yourselves. You ask too many questions.

Semoana’s Tears

This is our first day at a’oga Samoa. I ask Fale and little John, why are they sitting on mats? Where are the desks?  
This is a’oga Samoa! Fale says. Everybody sits on mats! Those mats!  
Look! Little John says. This is a big, big house! Bigger than our lunch room!  
Look! Those boys are lying down! Lying down on mats! Only mats!

I’m going to my class now, I say to Fale and John. I’m going to find a mat! I walk over to grade one and find a mat. I sit down and fold my legs. Next to me are three boys dressed in T-shirts and lavalava. Two boys sit behind them. Great! I’m the only girl in class. That boy has so much Samoan oil on his hair. I can smell it. Phew! It smells funny. As I open my api, a tall medium-sized woman, walks in and sits on a chair. Her hair is fastened in a tight faapatu. Huge white flowers cover her green mu'umu'u.

Na sau lou tina e momoli mai oe? she asks.  
She must be the faletua.  
No. Na sa a’u ma Fale ma John.  
Tusi mai le tatou Pi. Faamatatetele tou mata’itausi. Va'ai vae o isi p ma g e fai lava sina laiti, she says.  
Does she want us to copy those letters?  
Let me see what that boy is doing.

All the boys stand up and move their mats around. The boy with the blue ie lavalava moves his mat next to the blackboard. The boy with shiny hair moves his mat near the cement pole. Suddenly, one boy pulls the mat away, but the other boy pulls it back.
Aumai la'u fala!
Alu oe e toso mai sau fala!
Aumai la'u fala!
Tigaina a'u e aumai le fala!

One pulls hard, but the other pulls harder. The mat tightens in the air. Suddenly, a lava lava falls off. Hey! You’re not wearing an underwear, one says. The boys laugh.

Ua ma la!
Shame on you!
Ua ma la Pita!
E leai sau supporter
You don’t have a supporter

Ou ke le kea iai!
I don’t care!
My air conditioner is on
E lea e fai la’u ea kondishan

I want to laugh, but the boys stare at me so I tighten and tighten my lips. Soon the boys are quiet. But two boys giggle on their mats. I giggle a little too. The boy with the blue ie lava lava wiggles and wiggles on his mat before he starts to write. He draws a big like the one on the board. I stand up, grab my mat, and search the room for a spot. I see the boys lying on their stomachs with their api opened in front of them. There’s an empty space. I drag my mat and walk towards the spot. Before lying down, I look across the big, big room in the faifeau’s house. The children are lying on their stomachs holding their pencils in their hands. This might be a fun way to spend the summer months.

Because mother said
Teu ou vae for keep my knees together
so I don’t take a picture
of people who look under my dress
I tuck my skirt under my legs
and wiggle on my mat before
I look up at the blackboard:

A a E e I i O o U u W w F f G g L l M m N n P p S s T t V
H h K k R r

Those letters look weird!
Why is the picnic basket next to the A?
Where’s the red apple?
How come Z and the zebra are missing?
Where’s the Queen and her Q?
What are XVI, LVII, and C?

I look at the letters in the front:
A, E, I, O, U.

Why are the H, K, and R separated on the bottom? I look at the big A and the black basket. I see the big I and a small cup next to it. It didn’t make any sense. What happened to the A and his red apple? Even the big Indian is gone. I wiggle on my mat and then check to make sure the boys aren’t looking under my skirt. Whoever made this alphabet sure didn’t know what they were doing. I start to copy the big A, but there are too many loops. I erase and start again. The loops are hard to write. I erase my A again but this time I erase so hard I make a hole in my api.

As I write my A a third time, I hear the faletua say, Shhh! Soia le pisa, ae tusi mea la i luga o le laupapa. She hits the blackboard with a long stick making a very loud sound. The boys stop talking. She gives the boys a mean look, and then leaves the big room. As she turns the corner, I look up and the boy wearing the blue ie lavalava is whispering to me:

Ua ma la!
Ua ma la!
Shame on you!
E le iloa tusi le Pi Tautau
You don’t know how to write the Pi Tautau

As he’s whispering, he moves his hand up and down his face and sticks his tongue out. Then he giggles and soon the other boys join him. I feel a tight knot in my stomach. I look down at the pencil marks on my api. I want to run home, but my father will say to come back. I want to run and hide behind a tree, but if Fale and John see me they’ll say, Semoana’s a coward and you can’t play with the boys anymore.

So I bend and try to write
but my hand freezes in shame
tears fill my eyes
then drip on my cheeks
Stay back! Stay back!
I beg them
but tears don’t listen
they have their own way
to do as they want
to say what they will

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I wipe the tears but there are too many
I bite my lip and blink my eyes
I poke a big hole in my api
I hate those boys!
I hate them!
I hate them!

Tears drip
on my pencil
then my unfinished A

We’re Going to Say Prayer

John turn off the tv!
the father says
Alu e fogo uma tamaiti
We’re going to say prayer

Fale and Mataio!
Semoana!
Sa’ili!
We’re going to say prayer!
We’re going to say lotu

Semoana,
the mother says
Your hair is wet!
Get a towel so I can dry it

Fale, where’s your bible?

Semoana!
Semoana! Matua’i leva fo’i

E John! That’s my bible
No, it’s mine
Vaaia!

Semoana, dry your hair good
Mmm
O le a le mea e te mana’o ai?
Do you want me to cut it?
No!
Mmm
Then you better take care of it!
Ou tago atu lava oti ma lou lauulu
Ouch!
You’re pulling my hair
Mmm
Solo mago le ulu!
O e iloa?
I will

Does everybody have their bible and pese?

How come a’oga Samoa doesn’t have desks?
John asks

That’s a’oga Samoa, the father says. We sit and do lotu, we sit to have meetings, so we sit and learn Samoan.

I don’t know if I want to go to a’oga Samoa
Semoana says
Aisea?
The boys teased me today because I didn’t know my Pi Tautau
Did you cry?
John asks
Yeah Semoana, did you cry?
No! I didn’t cry
Pepelo! You cried
No, I didn’t.

John, ua lava
the father says

I didn’t know how to write my Pi Tautau. E le’i vaai a’u i le Samoan alphabet muamua. So when I tried to copy my A, it was hard. Na tago a’u e titiga ma titiga. I erased three times.

Ia, na a lea?
the mother asks
The boys teased me. They said, ua ma la e le iloa tusi le Pi
You children listen, the father says. O outou o fanau a faifeau. You must learn Samoan. There's a saying in Samoan culture about language, E fafaga tama a manu i i'a ma manu, ac fafaga tama a tagata i upu ma tala. Animals feed their young with fish and berries, but humans feed their young with words. So you learn Samoan. Semoana, aua le fefe oe i tama na o le vasega. Don't be afraid of those boys. A o'o taeao, ona alu lea i le a'oga Samoa. By next week, you'll be an expert in writing your Pi Tautau. Don't give up so easily.
But I know how to read Samoan.
But you also have to know how to write Samoan.
If those boys tease you again, the mother says, you tell the faletua. If they don't stop, then you say, E! Ma'ila!
What's ma'ila?
It means, you big jerk!
I can say that?
Yes, you can.
Who started a'oga Samoa? Mataio asks.
The lotu ta'iti church. A'oga Samoa was the first school to teach children how read and write about the Bible.
What's ta'iti?
Ta'iti is the Samoan word for Tahiti. The missionaries from Britain arrived in Tahiti before they came to Samoa. O le isiga o le LMS for London Missionary Society. Now it's called EFKS or Congregational Christian Church of Samoa.
What's Lotu Toga?
The Tongan church. The Methodist missionaries went to Toga before they came to Samoa.
The father opens his bible and says, nofo filemu. O le a tatou tapua'i atu i le Atua. Mataio opens his pese and sings song. Everybody sings along:

_Ua so'ona oilioli nei_  
_Lo'u loto ia Iesu_  
_O lau totoga e lelei_

That night the father's words echo in Semoana's mind:

Semoana, aua le fefe  
Don't be afraid
In the middle of the night, Darling starts to bark. Semoana sits up and looks out the window: Tavita from a'oga Samoa is standing outside the window and whispering, Ua
ma la! Ua ma la! E le iloa tusi le pi. That night, Semoana decides she’ll show Tavita what happens when boys stick their tongues out at girls, not any girl, but Samoan girls. Semoana grabs Kokoa Rice and waits for morning to arrive.

The Finish Line

Today I, Semoana, will wear my shorts to school, not short, shorts but the ones my mother says is ok to wear to a’oga Samoa. I’m wearing my shorts because I’m going to show Tavita and the boys something about us girls, us Samoan girls.

We’re going to read out loud from the *Tusi ‘Oti* today, the faletua announces. It’s payback time. Maybe those silly boys can write the Samoan alphabet, but I, this I named Semoana, can read better.

Muamua Semoana, the faletua says looking at me. Fia mulimuli a’u, I say, hoping she will let me go last.

In Seattle, when we visited Uncle Talalelei’s house we prayed the lotu Ta’iti way. At seven o’clock, the cousins gathered in the living room and sat in a circle. Cousin Amatamaisaua passed out the Samoan Bibles and pese. We sang Samoan hymns and then took turns reading the Bible. If we read well, uncle wouldn’t say anything. But if we stumbled, uncle would say, oioioioioioioi. That meant your reading wasn’t good. After we read the bible, he would say, ia, faamanuia mai le Atua i le faitauina o lona Afioga paia. Then uncle would bow his head and one of the twins, Sasa’e or Sisifo, would flick the lights off.

Ia, fa’asolo mai tama, boys first, the faletua says. Contestant number one steps up to the ring, but he stumbles on the third word. A’o le faitau, the faletua says, striking his arm with the *Tusi ‘Oti*. Contestant number two steps up to the ring. Toe faitau le fuaiupu lea! Read this again. This is a comma, not a semi-kolona. Two strikes on the arm. Tele le ta’a ac le a’o le faitau. The strike is loud so the second graders turn and giggle. Shh! The faletua screams. Turn around! Contestant number three stands up, taking his time. In the ring, he reads: O le pusi lea...

Smack!
Smack!

His pace was right
A’o le faitau!
A’o le faitau!
The faletua says
Striking and striking!
The Tusi Paia is right. Revenge belongs to the Man upstairs.

Contestant number four steps up
What’s this word?
Moa.
O le imoa, not moa!
Read again.
Moa.
Se leai!
What do you want me to do with the i?
Stick it in your ears?

The boy shakes his head
Ia, a’o le faitau
A toe galo,
then I will stick the imoa in your ear

Who’s next? It’s the boy wearing the blue ie lavalava. He and I lock eyes. He wants to win but so do I. As I watch him step into the ring, my heart changes from milk chocolate to dark chocolate.

Read this!
It’s the same thing!
Huh!
Too much ta’a and no reading!
Read this fuaiupu!

Ma’eu le a’oga...

Smack!
What did I say yesterday?
A ea?

Smack!
Sa ou fai atu, e a’o le faitau!
Ta’a!
Ta’a!
Leai ma se faitau!

The faletua grabs the Tusi ‘Otì and hits him across the shoulders and arm. Then she pulls and pulls his left ear.

Pull it harder!
I say, pull it harder!
Tears drip from his eyes
Sweat drips down the faletua’s forehead

She tightens her bun and looks at me. Tu mai i luga Semoana. All right. It’s your turn! Don’t mess things up. You might get your hair pulled in front of these kids. I step up to the ring and wait for my cue. The faletua points to the first sentence.

O le pusi lena ua nofo mai.
O lo o nofo o ia i luga o le fala.
E peti foi le pusi; aua ua ia ‘ai ‘imoa.
Pe a sau se tasi i le mea o i ai o ia,
e po atu e ia le ‘imoa i lona lima, ona maua lea.
E ‘ai foi e ia le ‘imoa peti.

Reaching half way to the finish line without stumbling, I feel Tavita’s words slide off my back.

Ma’eu le aoga o le pusi i le fale.
‘Aua ne’i saua oe i le pusi, ina ne’i le fia nofo o ia i le fale.
A le nofo mai o ia i le fale, o le a tumu le fale i ‘imoa.
Le pusi e, ina pu’e ia e oe ‘imoa uma e te iloa.
Ona fai ai lea o sou vi’i aua e lelei lava oe.

After crossing the finish line, I return to my mat. God above had paid the boys back and he was nice enough to pull Tavita’s ears for me. The faletua stands up and writes the first five commandments on the blackboard. I turn to look at the boys. Their heads hung like rotten breadfruits ready to be picked. I peek at Tavita. Wiping his eyes, he looked like a cockroach with a broken back. Suddenly, I feel something sour in my mouth. The bitterness stings my heart. I look at Tavita again. His thick eyelashes are wet and stick to each other. I put my finger in my mouth and bite it. I pull it out of my mouth and bite it again.

Go Vala’au! Go Vala’au!

Pea Toma ma Sione. Pea Ioane ma Vili ma Vala’au. Pea Semoana ma Tavita, the faletua says. The boys start to move their mats around slowly. Tavita stands and freezes like a cement pole. I grab my api and make room for him on my mat.

Tavita, Vala’au asks. How many inches did your ears grow? Tavita touches his ears and smiles. Ten inches! They grew ten inches. They giggle at each other. Then Tavita pretends he’s the faletua. Vala’au! Do you want me to stick the imoa in your ears?

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Ta’a! Ta’a! Ta’a! Ae le a’o le faitau! The boys laugh and I find myself laughing too.
Semoana? Vala’au asks. Do you know how to draw ears on your A? I look and stick out
my tongue. Vala’au, I say. I see a bald spot on the back of your head. Then the faletua
asks a question. O le a le tulafono lona lima? Ia e ava i lou tama ma lou tina, Tavita says.
Say it together! she repeats. We repeat the fifth commandment in unison: Ia e ava i lou
tama ma lou tina!

I can’t hear you, she says. We repeat the fifth commandment. Everybody! She
says. Stand up! You look sleepy.

Lima i luga
Hands up
Lima i lalo
Hands down
Lima i luga
Hands up
Lulu uma le tino
Shake your whole body
Se matau’i lulu
Shake it harder!

Let’s go outside for some exercise. O la a fai tatou miliga. You’re going to find out who’s
the fastest runner in vasega muamua. The boys kick off their slippers and shorten their ie
lavalava. I kick off my slippers too. Malo nei a’u! I’m going to win! Tavita screams. No,
I’m going to win! Vala’au says. Tamomo’e i le mago toe tamomo’e mai, the faletua says.
Run to the mago tree and run back. My slipper is the tigi. Are you ready? Sauni. Scoot
back Ioane. Aua le faimamago. Don’t cheat. Get ready, set, go! We start running. Tavita
runs to the front. Vala’au is right behind him.

Go Tavita!
Go Tavita!
The second graders shout.

Go Vala’au!
Go Vala’au!
The third graders shout.

Toma is fourth. I’m behind him. Sione and Vili are close behind.

Go Tavita!
Go Vala’au!
Go Tavita!
Go Vala’au!
Vala’au and Tavita reach the mago, touch it and run back. Both runners are smiling. Soon Toma runs before me. I run faster, but Toma is faster. He touches the mago and runs back. I touch the mago and run behind him. Sione and Vili are behind us. We all run for the tigi.

Go Vala’au!
Go Tavita!
The children shout.

Tavita and Vala’au are next to each other. The faletua is jumping and shouting. Tamomo’e! Tamomo’e! Run! Run! As the boys reach the tigi together, Vala’au’s ie lavalava comes loose. The kids break into a loud roar because Vala’au’s go’o is showing.

Vala’au!
Your go’o is showing!
But you’re the champion!

Vala’au and Tavita both laugh. The faletua is laughing too. Toma reaches the tigi and I’m out of breath.

Malo Vala’au!
Malo Vala’au!

The faletua covers her mouth from her laugh, but she cannot. Vala’au is still laughing. Ou ke le kea iai! I don’t care! I don’t care! he says. I’m the champion of vasega muamua! Vala’au is the champion!

The faletua grabs Vala’au and Tavita’s hands and says, ua manumalo nei Vala’au ma Tavita i le miliga. You are the fastest runners in vasega muamua. O mai! Come over here, she says. Ua a! Exercise is good. Next time let’s tighten our lavalava because some of us don’t wear supporters. Ok? We laugh but Vala’au laughs the loudest. Vala’au is the champion! I’m the champion! he says.

Let’s say our Ten Commandments and then you can all go home, she says. What’s the fifth commandment?

At the top of our lungs, we shout:

Ia e ava i lou tama ma lou tina
ina ia faalevaleva ai ou aso
Honor your father and mother
so that you may live a long, long life.
Mataio’s Manufata

Every morning the hospital chaplain
visits the sick
When the sick die, he attends their funerals
often two to three times a week

At midnight, the telephone rings
the children hear
footsteps
running water
racket from the closet
and the truck pulling away

Their father is
going to pray over little boys
on hospital beds
whose mothers
sit nervously
in waiting rooms

Today, the faifeau attends a funeral but he doesn’t come home that afternoon. Instead a red truck drives up and a man with a black shark on his arm jumps out. Whose home? he asks. I am, says little John. You are? the man says smiling. Is there somebody older? Yes, Mataio, Fale and Semoana. Alu e fogo Mataio, the man says. Is that a shark on your arm? Yes, and he likes to bite little boys. Little John freezes and pulls away but the man touches little John and says, I’m kidding. Little John peeks into the truck and sees a pig’s head. O ai lou igoa? the man asks. O little John. That’s a nice name? Little John smiles. I know a man named big John. He was a little John like you but he grew and grew and now he’s a big John.

So he’s a big John and I’m a little John?
Joe, he’s big John and you’re little John.
Give me five! The man says.
Give me another five!
Are you The Man?
Yes, I’m The Man
Yes, you are The Man!

Little John smiles because he likes the man with the shark on his arm. There’s an older boy! a fat man in the truck hollers.
Oka! Fale! Semoana! little John screams. Come! Come! Look at the pig! Quick!
Fale and Semoana. Come look at the pig!
John, soso i tua, Mataio says.
But look at the pig!
John, I said, soso i tua.
But Mataio, it’s a dead pig! A real dead pig!

We’ve come to bring your father’s food from the funeral, the man says. O fea e la’u i ai mea nei? Mataio points to the space near the back door. The man scratches his head and orders the men to unload the gifts. Faavave! La’u mea i tala ane o le faitoto’a. The men unload cases of tin fish, rolls of ie togas, tins of cabin crackers, one large fine mat called a tofa, a thick roll of colored material, five paelos, baked fish, oka, taro, palusami, and one freshly husked coconut with a dollar bill stuck in its eyes. Then the man opens the gate of the truck, and pulls out the dead pig. Mataio and the others grab the right side. Are you ready? The man asks. We’re ready! Ia . . . tasi . . . lua, Si’i! Dead, the manu sits like a queen on the wooden platform. Oka Fale, look! Look at the flowers in the pig’s ears! Look at the flowers in her nose!

The men carry the manu onto the walkway. As they lower her near the door, Fale reaches up and touches her nose. Oka John! Oka Semoana! Her nose is really malo. Why is there a hibiscus hanging from her nose? He asks. Oka John! Fale says, she has leaves hanging from her go’o. Look Fale! Semoana says, her eyeballs are burnt! Faaeteete! the man says to Semoana. She’s alive. Semoana and Fale jump and the men giggle. Tala ula! the man says, patting Fale’s head. She’s dead. Her name was Kopai. Why did they name her Kopai? Fale asks. Because she liked to eat kopai. Do you like kopai? Yes, I like kopai. Good, because that was Kopai’s favorite food. The man smiles at little John. Why does Kopai have mango leaves in her go’o? he asks. She’s been baked in a umu. We took out all the stuff in her stomach, cleaned it, and stuffed her with hot rocks. Oka! Semoana, the man said they took out all the things inside Kopai’s stomach and stuffed her with hot rocks. I know John, Semoana says, I heard him. I’m standing right here. Why does Kopai have flowers in her ears? Semoana asks. Kopai went to the funeral so she had to look pretty. Don’t you think Kopai looks pretty with the red hibiscus and white pua in her ears? She’s dead. Yes, but doesn’t she look pretty? Pretty and dead don’t add up, Semoana says, blinking and blinking at the man. I have a pig named Miss Piggy, little John says. E to’aga oe e fafaga Miss Piki? Yes, we feed Miss Piggy every morning before we go to school. We give her a bath with the faga’a’u. A bath, huh? the man says, looking at Mataio. Yeah, we spray her with the faga’a’u. Well, you keep feeding Miss Piki because she’s important to your family. Miss Piggy is very important to me! She’s our pet. O le a? Our pet. Miss Piggy is our pet. That’s good, the man says rubbing little John’s head. We have to go. Tell your father that we brought all the gifts. Mataio shakes the man’s hand and opens the car door for him. Bye-bye Kopai, the fat man in the truck says as the truck drives away. Pai-pai, Pai-pai, little John. Little John looks puzzled but waves good-bye to the fat man.
Why is that fat man laughing?
Se, o la e taufa’alili mai ia oe, Mataio says
But why?
Se, he’s only teasing you
I don’t like it when people taufa’alili me
Don’t worry about it
But I don’t like it
Never mind him, little John

Little John kicks a rock that hits Kopai in the head. Why did they bring so much food? Semoana asks. It’s the family’s way to thank the faifeau for doing the lotu, Mataio says. But why so much? That’s the faasamoa. The Samoan way. They give lots of food to show their faaaloalo. Semoana, go put the food in the refrigerator. But why do I have to do it? Because you’re the girl. But what about? Semoana! I’m going!

Later, the neighbors, Tautua and Fiafia, help Mataio carve Kopai into pieces for distribution. Mataio, Tautua asks. Have you carved a pig before? No, Mataio says. Ia tala mai loa ou a’ao e fa’ata’ita’i. Today you’re going to learn how to carve a pig. Take off your shirt. Why? You’ll get blood all over it. Blood? Here, grab the knife. Aua le fefe. Tago i le niafi. You’re the oldest boy in the family. Your father will get many, many pigs because he’s a faifeau. You need to learn how to carve the pig so you can pass it out to the village. Fiafia and I will hold the pig while you carve it. Hold the knife tight. Va’ ai mai i le pa’u lea i tala a ne o le vae? Cut deep into the flesh and then around this part of the leg.

Aua le fefe
Don’t be scared
Cut now
Mataio, push the knife harder into the skin
There
Now keep cutting
U’u mau le niafi
Don’t be scared
Keep cutting
More

Now, let’s cut the other leg. Ua e va’ai mai i le itu lea o le vae? Put the knife here and cut along this line. Harder, Mataio. Harder. Don’t look away. Keep the knife steady. There. Keep cutting. Good. See this bone? Crack it with the hard side of the knife. Fiafia, tago mai i le vae lea. U’u mau. Mataio. Hit the bone right where my finger is.

Here?
Yes
With this side of the knife?
Ioe, that side
U’umau le naifi
Don’t be scared
The pig can’t feel it

Crack!
Crack!

One more time
CRACK!

Lelei tele! Fiafia, fuli mai i le itu lea. Mataio, tago e ta le itu lea. A uma ona e tago lea e tipi motu le ‘a’ano.

Crack!
Crack!

Toe ta!
CRACK!

Don’t wipe the blood on your shorts, Mataio. Just leave it. Come over here. Look at this part of the pig’s head. There’s a bone here. It’s not hard. You’re going to cut along this line.

Ready?
Now cut
Se ... matua’i ‘o’omi i lalo le naifi
Deeper
Keep cutting
Good

Now were ready to distribute the pieces. Come over here. See this piece? This is the tua. It’s the most important part of the pig. It goes to the minister and the matai. Put all the legs here, the arms there, and all the other pieces over there. Bring the pig’s head over here. Are you scared? No. Then grab the head. Vaai, e mamafa. Now grab the faga’aau. Fiafia, tago e talae uma mea na. Hose all this blood and grease so the flies don’t come.

As the boys organize what’s left of Kopai, Mataio’s father walks out of the house. Mataio, you carved your first manu? Wiping the blood on his hands, Mataio says, yes, my very first manu. He’s ready to carve the many, many manu people will bring to your house, Tautua says. Yes, the father says. Too many manu for us. Aua le galo ona ave le tua i le faifeau ma le sa’o. Don’t worry. We’ll deliver theirs first, Mataio says, watching
blood disappear into the gravel. Can I rinse this blood off now? He asks. Don’t you want to leave it on your chest? Fiafia says, giggling. It looks good. We’ll go swimming later. Swimming? Won’t that attract sharks? That’s the best part, Fiafia says, laughing. I’m kidding! I’m kidding! Tautua and Fiafia laugh at Mataio. You’re learning, Mataio, you’re learning.

The next morning
a brown dog runs out
of a front door

Whiskey! Whiskey!
a young boy, screams
chasing after the brown dog
Come here! Come here!

But the dog
wags his tail
and crosses the street

Whiskey! Whiskey
the boy screams as
a car makes a loud thump

That afternoon, the faifeau’s telephone rings. A nervous female voice says, Please! Come to the hospital. A little boy is in pain. His mother is stroking his hair and his father is holding his face in his hands. The faifeau pushes away his soup. Is he going to be all right? the faletua asks. I don’t know. The faifeau drives to the hospital and prays over the five-year-old boy. He spends the rest of the afternoon in the hospital. Later, he parks his truck behind his house.

How’s the boy?
He survived
How’s the mother?
Sitting next to him
The father?
Holding her hand

What’s cooking?
the faifeau asks
A problem
the faletua says
Your first stealing case on the job
It’s Semoana and her books
It all started when she got bored. She went into Sail’i’s bedroom and found a magazine. The one with the pretty palagi girls. The blonde girl’s red lips, massacred eyes, pink cheeks, and tight blue dress did something to her. So she opened the magazine: pink lips blue eye shadow soft skin trim waist and a pink lace blouse. I say, E Semoana! Tapuni la ea tusi. That magazine is for older girls! But Semoana, you know her. She keeps looking, and looking and then the palagi girl says, Semoana! Semoana! Look at me! Don’t you want to look pretty like me?

When she got bored of looking at the palagi girls, she went into the boys’ room. She found *Batman & Robin, Mad Magazine*, and *Spiderman*. She opened *Batman & Robin* but she didn’t like the batmobile. That’s when she closed the book, crossed the street and entered the store. Inside the store, she found *Richie Rich*. Fai mai she couldn’t take her eyes off the big pipi, turkey, and the pink ice cream. So she turned the page and saw Richie’s long black car.

You mean the limousine?
the faifeau asks

I . . . That’s it!
lemozine

Then she saw a man in black and white near the door. O le a fo’i le igoa o le tamaloa lena?

O . . . le chauffeur
the faifeau says

Ia o lena
shouferr

Anyhow, Richie’s house had long stairs shaped like an ice cream cone. That’s how Semoana described it. I don’t know. Ou te ofo fo’i—stairs shaped like an ice cream cone. I can’t believe it! Mata’utia fo’i lena ice cream cone.

E faapena mansions,
the faifeau says

O le a?

Big houses are mansions
Ia o lena
O le manjen
Well Semoana said, she read another book about a high school, Rydell High School. She said there was a palagi girl named Veronica who had a blue line like this in her black hair. What’s a blue line like that? O le streak o le blue line i le lauulu. Ok. Ia o lena. It’s a blue streak. Anyway, Semoana said she kept reading and the more she read, the more she wanted Veronica’s clothes. Fai mai she liked Veronica’s high shoes and her pink nails. Can you believe it? Semoana is only in grade three and she wants to wear high shoes. Tafefe ia Miss Ma’ila! Anyway, she said o Betty, o le best friend lena a Veronica, she was in love with Veronica’s boyfriend. Can you believe the things Semoana is reading in those books? Sounds like some of the men and women in this village. She said the palagi kids never have to do chores. Never go to church. Don’t even have parents. Can you believe it? There’s no aunty or uncle or grandma to look after them. Fai mai they go on picnics in nice cars with their friends every Saturday. Tafefe i na tamaiti! Picnics every Saturday! No chores. Well, that’s how some people live their lives, the faifeau says. Ea ea? What’s the matter with those people? What’s going through their minds? Letting their children run around like that? Ta-fe-fe! Listen to this. Faaalogo mai oe. Semoana says that’s the life she wants. She’s tired of doing chores every day. She’s tired of picking up ulu leaves and cigarette butts. She wants to go on picnics like those palagi kids. Tafefe lava ita ia Miss Ma’ila. Who does she think she is? Anyway, I guess Betty wanted to steal Veronica’s boyfriend. So Semoana came home and picked up the lauulu leaves and cigarette butts right after school. She worked fast because she wanted to find out how Betty was going to steal the boyfriend. Va’ai le faiatala o Semoana! She thinks she’s a teenager already. So she went to the store but she didn’t have any money so she started to read the book in the store. While she was reading, the lady came and touched her shoulder. Fai mai, the lady really scared her. The lady said, E fa’asa ona faitau tusi i totonu o le faleola. She has to buy the comic books. Fai mai Semoana she was so rna so she said sorry to the lady.

Later that night she dreamt about Betty’s plan. She probably wanted to help Betty steal Veronica’s boyfriend. I don’t know. Ta’ilo ia Semoana. She’s only in the third grade. What does she know about boyfriends. Miss Ma’ila. What was Betty’s plan? The faifeau asks. Ta’ilo. I didn’t ask. So the next day, she went over to the store and peeked through the window to see if the lady was working. When she didn’t see the lady, she slipped in the door. After finding out that Betty’s plan didn’t work, she felt another touch on her shoulder, so she left. Fai mai she laid low for a whole week. She really wanted to find out if Betty and Veronica were still friends and if they went on any new adventures. Can you believe this Semoana? I don’t know why she wants to know what those palagi kids at Rydell are doing on Saturdays. If she wants adventures, there’s plenty of adventures here in this village in Samoa. She can have an adventure doing her chores and going to church and a’oga Samoa. Anyway, Semoana didn’t know what was happening. She got bored again. So she went back to see Spiderman. When Spiderman started to climb the building, she closed the comic and left.

Look both ways 
when the coast is clear
slip story in shorts
and walk away feeling
story against the skin

High in my tree
Sweet candy between my teeth
story on my knees
Nothing could compare
high in my tree
story on my knees

Semoana, come over here, the father says.

The lady said I had to buy them first before I could read them!
I borrowed them!
I took them back!

The father looks at Semoana. Semoana looks at the wall and sees Judah whispering to Jesus. Then she stares at her feet sitting there stuck in her sandals. On his first stealing case, the faifeau is lenient. Semoana avoids the left side of the house for the rest of the year. It hurt because her reading tree, Miss Piggy’s pen, and the vaiti were on that side. Several years later, Semoana is reading another story. A lady walks by and she freezes. The lady straightens out two magazines and walks away.
Do You Hear Me

John!
John!
Come over here
What do you say when you walk in front of people?

Tulou!
So why didn’t say tulou
when you walked in front of Aunty Sa?

Mmm ….. John
You better listen!
Do you hear me?
Do you want me to sasa you in front of these people?

No!
Mmm ….. John
Then you better listen
Next time, you’re going to get it from me
O e faalogo mai?
Do you hear me?

Fale!
Fale!
Go get my tioata!
It’s on top of the laupapa auli

Auoi!
Fale!
Come over here!
What?
I said, come over here!
Soso mai ia a’u!
What?
Next time, I tell you to get something for me
I want you to hand it to me
All right?
Don’t throw it at me
O e faalogo mai?
Do you hear me?
And you too Semoana!
What did I do?
Next time, I tell you to get something
Put it in my hand
Don’t throw it at me!

Mmm.....
You children are too much!
Those behaviors!
Throwing things at people

Mmm.....Fale
Next time, you going to get the belt if I have to tell you again and again
I didn’t do anything!
Semoana!
Watch your mouth!
It was Fale!
Don’t talk back to me!
Go make me a glass of lemonade
With one teaspoon of sugar

Semoana!
Semoana!

What!
I can hear you slamming the cupboards!
What did I say?
When you do your chores
Do it quietly!
Aua e te faife’au pa’o!
Don’t slam things back there!
Mmm.....Semoana
Your time is near
Your time is near
Ua lata mai lava le taimi
My Sweet, Sweet Neipa

Se—moana!
Se—mo—ana!
Come out and play!
It’s me, Pele!

Look towards the ridge! Semoana
The mangos are ripe
the guavas look sweet
and the koko Samoa are red
Let’s go!
Let’s hike up the ridge
pick the ripe mangos
the koko Samoa
and the sweet, sweet guavas

Won’t that be fun, Semoana?
Won’t it?
Yes, Pele
It will be fun!
It will be great fun!

Follow me, Semoana
Follow me!
Let’s run up the ridge
jump over the rocks
and swing over this ditch

Faster! Semoana! Faster!
Oh, what fun it is!
To run, jump, and swing on the trees!

Isn’t this fun! Semoana
Isn’t it!

Yes! Pele
Yes!

Look up! Semoana
It’s the ripe mangos!
Let’s pick and taste
It’s sweet, sweet ripeness

Oh, Pele!
Why are you putting rocks in your dress?
My Pele, those are big rocks!

Semoana,
Do you see those juicy mangos?
Yes,
Do you want to bite into their juicy sweetness?
Yes, I do

Then move back, Semoana
Move back!

Semoana, my dear friend
Yes, Pele?
Hold the rocks while I jump over this ditch
Be careful! Pele
Be careful!
No worries! Semoana
No worries!

All right, Semoana,
Toss over the first rock
Toss over the first rock

Now step back, Semoana
Step back

Oh, Pele!
You missed the mangos!
You missed the mangos!

No worries! Semoana
No worries!
Toss over the second rock
Toss over the second rock

Watch out! Semoana
Watch out!

Oh, Pele!
You missed the mangos again!
You missed the mangos again!

No worries! Semoana
No worries!
Come on!
Toss over the third rock
Toss over the third rock

Step back! Semoana
Step back!

You did it! Pele!
You did it!
You hit the sweet, sweet mangos!
You hit the sweet, sweet mangos!
They are falling
Falling like rain!

Look! Pele Look!
Look at the ripe yellow guavas!
So many ripe yellow guavas!

Follow me! Semoana
Follow me!

Oh no, Pele!
Must you climb the guava tree!
The branches are thin!
They will break!
And you will fall! Pele
You will fall!

No worries! Semoana
No worries!

My Oh! My! Pele!
What are you doing up there in the guava tree?

Run! Semoana!
Run!
The ripe guavas are falling!
They're falling down on you!
I got them, Pele!
I got the sweet guavas! Look!
Shake the guava tree one more time! Pele
One more time!

Semoana!
Look out! Look out!
They’re falling!
The ripe guavas are falling!
Falling like rain

PE—LE!
PE—LE!
O FEA OE?

Oh, no! Semoana
Oh, no!

PE—LE!
PE—LE!
O FEA OE?

What’s the matter, Pele?
My aunty is calling me!
I must go!
I must hurry!
I hope she’s not angry
I hope she’s not
What does she want?
I don’t know!
But I must hurry!

Pele, take some ripe mangos
and sweet guavas
Oh no! Semoana
Oh no!
But why, Pele? Why?
Won’t your aunty like ripe mangos
and sweet guavas?

My aunty?
My aunty?
My aunty does not like ripe mangos and sweet guavas
But Pele, they are sweet, so very sweet!
Se-moana . . . my aunty does not like sweet things
My aunty is not a sweet thing

Semoana!
My slippers!
Where are my slippers?

PE—LE!
PE—LE!

Semoana!
My dear friend!
Help me find my slippers!
Help me!
Where did you leave them, Pele?
Where did you leave them?
I don’t know!
I don’t know!
Pele, they’re not under the guava tree!
Could they be under the mango tree?

Hurry! Semoana
Hurry!
Good-bye! Semoana
Good-bye!

But Pele!
Your slippers!
I found your slippers!
Good-bye! Semoana
Good-bye!

What about your slippers! Pele!

See you next time! Semoana
See you next time . . .

Of course, Pele
Of course

When is next time . . . Pele?
When?
You always say,
See you next time
See you next time
But next time never arrives
Last time wasn’t’ next time
This time wasn’t next time
And next time won’t be next time
So when is next time? Pele
When?

Se—moana!
Se—moana!
Next time is next time
Next time will be a sweet next time

Of course, Pele
Of course

Pele, sweet Pele
is the smartest girl in sixth grade
Her eyes are pretty and her hair is long
She lives in a yellow house with her aunty
When Pele comes home from a’oga Samoa, her aunty says,
Pele! Watch the kids!
Cook the mea’ai!
Take the dirty dishes out to the sink
underneath the coconut tree
Do the laundry!
And don’t forget to beat! beat! and beat!
the dirty clothes

Pele!
When can you come out and play?

I’m washing the dishes! Semoana
I’m washing the dishes!

Do you know that I found your slippers?
Do you know that?
They were under the mango tree
I keep them in my room!
It’s all right, Semoana
I have these slippers!
See! Right here. On my feet!

But they’re not your slippers, Pele!
They’re not your slippers!
Yes, but they’re slippers, Semoana!
They’re slippers!

I’ll keep your slippers! Pele
I’ll keep your slippers safely in my room!

I must finish the dishes, Semoana!
I must finish the dishes!

Of course! Pele!
Of course
See you another time,
When the mangos are ripe!
The guavas are yellow!
And our time will be sweet!
So sweet!

Hey Pele!
How come you didn’t come to A’oga Samoa this morning?

I had to cook my grandma’s food
She’s sick
Nobody is home to take care of her

Will you come to A’oga Samoa tomorrow?
I plan to
I hope to
I’d like to
I don’t know
My grandma
My niece
Nephews
The laundry
My grandma’s breakfast

Yes! Yes!
Pele
Sweet, sweet Pele
Prayer Time

**Father**
Little John, bring my bible  
Call everybody to lotu  
Where’s your bible?  
Did you shower?

**Mother**
Semoana!  
Sit nice  
Girls don’t hang their legs all over the place  
Nofo faalelei  
Fix your legs  
Teu ou vae

Sa’ili!  
Did you turn the stove down?  
Stir the stew one more time  
And then turn it to medium

Fale and little John!  
Sit still

**Father**
Mataio,  
What did you learn in school today?  
Father said something about monotheism  
So what did you say?  
I said it is one God

Who is Tagaloa?  
The Samoan God  
He had a bird named the tuli  
Samoans believed Tagaloa was their God  
He lived in the ninth heaven

Why the ninth heaven?  
Tagaloa had nine heavens  
And the ninth one was his home

Some say he had a son named Pili
Pili disobeyed Tagaloa
So he was cast down to eleele
Earth
He landed in Manu’a
He was re-named Pilipau
Pau means to fall
Pili has fallen on Manu’a

Fale
What did Miss Nu’u
teach you today?
We sang oso i luga ma tuli i susu
ma lue fo’i lou ulu

Little John,
Do you know that song?

I do!
I do!
Semoana says

All right
Semoana and Fale
Get up and sing
so little John can learn the song

Tutu i luga
Sauni—ready!
Ia—start!

Oso i luga ma tuli i susu
Ma lue foi lou ulu
Oso i luga ma tuli i susu
Ma lue fo’u lou ulu

Got it little John?
Yes! Yes!
Ia pese faatasi
Sing together!
Sauni—ready!
Don’t forget to jump
Sauni—ready!

Oso i luga ma tuli i susu
Ma lue fo'i lou ulu
Oso i luga ma tuli i susu
Ma lue fo'i lou ulu

Finished?
Nofo faalelei
Sit nice
Faatai vae
Fold your legs

Let us thank God for this day
Tatou ave le faafetai i le Ali’i mo lenei aso matagofie

Little John and Semoana
You say the thank you for us

Who wants to say our forgiveness?
I do! I do!
Ok Semoana will say the faamagalo
I want to pray in Samoan,
Little John says
I will help you,
says Fale

Le Atua
Faafetai mo mea’ai
Faafetai mo lou alofa
Faafetai mo lenei aso fou

Little John,
Turn off the lights

A’o le’i moe
ma faafetai ia Iesu
Ua aumai mea lelei i le aso
Lou Ali’i o lo’u faaola
Tausi mai ou ‘a’ao
i le po lenei atoa
Amene

Fale,
Turn on the lights

Little John
Come take my bible back to the room
Put it on the desk so I can find it

Mother
Semoana,
set the table
Aumai ipu ai ma ipu inu
Don’t forget your father’s dish and cup

Sa’ili
Bring the food to the table
laulau mai le mea’ai
I Need Sweet Candy

*Monday Tuesday Happy Days!*
*Wednesday Thursday*
*Friday! Saturday!*
*What a Day!*

Don’t you kids have homework? my father asks while John and Fale stare at the tv.

_Ua uma na fai!_ I say, without blinking.
All of you?
_Lei!_
When that show is over, turn the tv off and go read your books.
_E leai ni matou tusi,_ I say.
You don’t have books!
Our teacher said to leave our books at school, Little Johns says.
Next week you go to the library and check out some books. If I don’t see you reading, you won’t get your allowance.
_No allowance!_
_Lei . . . no dollar for the week! O le tulafono fou lena._

Well, I’m going to the library, I say. I need my dollar! No dollar means No candy! If I don’t get candy, I get restless. When I get restless, I go crazy.

So I need candy!
Candy is number one on my list!
So I must go so I can taste the
_Sweetness of candy!_
_Sweetness of reading!_

It’s your fault! Fale screams, squinting his eyes.
No, it’s not! I say, raising my one left brow.
Yes, it is!
No, it's not!
_E!_ Don’t be cheeky! he says, shaking his fist.
I’m not being cheeky!
_Fia fasi oe?_ he says, shoving me against the wall.

My brother Fale and I love and hate each other. On Thursdays, we ride his va’a’apa out to the middle of Pago Pago Harbor. Don’t be scared! he says, paddling the va’a’apa away from the rocks. On Fridays, we climb mango trees and hike the ridge
behind our house and watch the long white ships enter the harbor. On Saturdays, we chase each other around and around the house with rocks in our fists, screaming,

I’m going to catch you!
No! You won’t
Yes! I will
No! You won’t
Yes! I will

Today, I don’t feel like chasing Fale around and around the house. I ignore him because I’m going to the library. First, I pass BP Store and see the mean lady eating a banana. Next, I pass Shimasaki Store where I buy my banana-shaped candies on Fridays when I get my dollar. After I pass the two stores, I reach my brothers’ bus stop. The bus that takes them to the Catholic school on the mountain that overlooks Pago Pago Harbor. Fale said no girls are allowed on the mountain, so that makes me want to go on the mountain. After the bus stop, I see the big yellow house where the boy in the sixth grade lives. I walk around his house. Next, I pass the monkey bars with no monkeys. The same monkey bars Pele and I play on after school but never for a long time because that is where the palagi people live. After the monkey bars, I pass my palagi teacher’s house. At her house, I peek in the windows, but I can’t see because the blinds dance in my way.

B is for blinds
Blinds are for blinding
Blinds make me want to know
No blinds make me not want to know

When I arrive at the library, I see a big yellow arrow with the words, Children’s Books painted on the wall. I follow the arrow and see little blue chairs and red tables. I start to read the titles of the books: Dr. Zeus, The Big Red Dog, Lassie, and Old Yeller. I open a green book but the words are too big. I open a white and pink book but the words are too small. I open a light brown book and the words fit my eyes. The title is: Nancy Drew. I sit on the floor and read till I reach the last page. I look up and there is a whole row of Nancy Drews. I pull a blue Nancy Drew and read until a lady taps me on the shoulder and says, Ua ta le fa. It is four o’clock. I pull three Nancy Drews, hand them to the lady at the front desk, and walk home.

Lights go off at 10:00 on school nights in my house. That night my father is up late reading at his desk. Jim Allen has just been kidnapped. Nancy is on her way to Jim Allen’s house. What will she find at his house? I look up and see my father reading the Book of Matthew. I move my mat closer to his desk to get some light. Somebody was already at Jim Allen’s house. Nancy went to the back. She saw two men through the kitchen window. Suddenly, my father turned off his reading lamp. Oh no, I can’t see Nancy! I can’t see a thing! My father goes to the kitchen. I keep still. Soon he returns and...
doesn't see my mat next to his desk. He enters his bedroom and shuts the door behind him. Frustrated, I stand up. Did Nancy go into the house? I look through the dark room. The streetlight! The streetlight! I pull my mat next to the window and get enough light to see Nancy. Nancy enters the house through the back door. She hears the two men talking to each other. They’re going through drawers and throwing things around. Nancy bumps into a wall.

Nancy!
Be careful!
Be careful, Nancy!


You’re still awake!
Close that book!

E te le’i moe lava!
Fefe ua te’a le sefulu!a!
Tapuni ia lena tusi ae moe!

My father waits
No way out!
I close the book
drag my mat away from the window
and pull my sheet over my head

I need candy!
I can’t live without the sweet taste of candy!
Miss Nu'u

Talofa tama ma teine!
Talofa lava Miss Nu’u!
How are you this morning?
Manuia, lava faafetai!

You children look sleepy this morning. Fetua, what time did you get to bed?
Nine o’clock.
Ae a oe Susana? O le a le taimi na e moe ai anapo?
I can’t remember Miss Nu’u.
Well, tonite I want all of you children to go to bed at eight o’clock. O outou faalogo mai? So what time are you going to bed tonite?
Eight o’clock!
I can’t hear you. What time are going to bed tonite?
Eight o’clock!
That’s better. Now I want everybody to stand up. Come on! We need to shake that sleepiness out of you. Stand up! Tutu uma i luga!

Hands up! Lima i luga! Come on!
Get those hands up Susana!
Lima i lalo. Hands down.
Hands up! Lima i luga!
Higher! Si’i tele i luga! Come on!
Good! Very good!
Lima i lalo. Hands down.

Now I want everybody to shake their hands! Come on!
Shake them! Shake! Shake! Good!
Now I want you to shake your body.
Come on! Shake your body!
Girls! Look at me. This is how you shake!

Miss Nu’u! Oh, Miss Nu’u!

Look at Fetua! He knows how to shake!
Everybody shake like Fetua!
Come on Fale! Is that your best shake?
Good! Good! Very good, Fale!
That’s how you shake.

Now let’s switch
little shakes and big shakes
Come on! Ready!
Little shake! Big Shake!
Little shake! Big shake!
Big shake! Little shake!
Very good! Now one very big shake!
Shake! Shake! Shake!
Lelei tele! Very good!

Are you children awake?
Yes, Miss Nu’u

Auo! I can’t hear you! Are you children awake and ready for school?
Yes, Miss Nu’u!

Lelei tele! So let’s start our lesson with a song.
Miss Nu’u does not like sleepy children. Everybody, sing after me.

_Oso i luga ma tuli i susu_
_ma lue fo’i lou ulu_

Toe faalogo! Listen again!

_Oso i luga ma tuli i susu_
_ma lue fo’i lou ulu_
*Jump up and land on the right then left*
*And shake your head*

Sauni? Ready? Sing!

_Oso i luga ma tuli i susu_
_ma lue fo’i lou ulu_

Now let’s add actions! Jump up like this and land on your right foot then your left foot then lean your head like this. Sauni? Ready? Sing!

_Oso i luga ma tuli i susu_
_ma lue fo’i lou ulu_

Very good! Very good! Ua a? Ua te’a le matamoe? Ia, lelei tele. Now you may sit down so we may begin our next lesson. I want all of you to think about a story to share with the class. Ok. Are you thinking?
Yes!
Are you sure you’re thinking? Seu is staring at his feet. Seu, there must be something interesting on your feet. What is it?
It’s a loi.
Ea... ea. Is it a big loi or a small loi?
A small loi.
Gees, I wonder why the ant is on your feet... ali’i Seu?
Maybe Seu didn’t taele!
Auo! Who said that?
Simi said it!
Simi don’t say that. Of course, Seu bathed before coming to school this morning, ali’i Seu?
Miss Nu’u!
Yes, Teuila?
Maybe the loi wants to join our class.
I think you’re right. Maybe the loi wants to join our class because you are such smart boys and girls who pay attention when the teacher is talking. Isn’t that right? So let’s show the loi how you all pay attention when the teacher is talking. Ok? Very good. As I was saying, I want everybody to think about a story to share in class. Think about what you did on Saturday or Sunday. Did you do something fun? Raise your hand if you and your family did something fun.
Auo! Nobody did anything fun?
Oh, La’i is raising her hand. Yes, Miss La’i?
I woke up early in the morning and helped my grandma feed her chickens.
Ea ea! So what did you and your grandma feed the chickens with?
We feed the chickens with pegu!
And where did you get the pegu from?
My uncle scraped the coconut to make the pegu to feed the chickens.
Very good, La’i! Has anybody feed chickens before? Tafefe! No one has fed chickens before! That’s too bad because feeding chickens is fun. Miss La’i, can you tell the class how to feed chickens? Come on! Don’t be shy.
You have to make a chicken sound.
Can you make that sound for us? Come on! The girls and boys want to hear the chicken sound.
First, you have to make the chicken sound: ku....ku....ku....ku....ku!
ku....ku....ku....ku! And when the chickens hear the sound, then they run to you and you throw the pegu on the cement for them to eat it.
Well, Miss La’i, that was a very good chicken sound. Pei lava oe o se tama’i moa. Miss Nu’u?
Yes, Teuila?
Do the chickens get scared of you?
That’s a good question, Teuila. Let’s ask La’i. Did the chickens get scared of you?
No, the chicken didn’t get scared because when they hear kukuku, they think you’re a chicken.
Very good. Let’s give La’i a big hand for sharing her story with us but especially for making a very nice chicken sound. Thank you Miss La’i. Your grandmother will be very proud to hear that you made a nice chicken sound in class today. Does anybody
know what La’i’s name mean in Samoan? Oh, Onosa’i has his hand up. Onosa’i can you
tell us what la’i means in Samoan?
   It means matagi
   Lelei tele, Onosa’i. La’i means winds.
   Do you know which direction these winds blow from, Onosa’i?
   They blow from the west.
   Yes, they come from the west. See how smart you all are. All right, who else has
a story they want to share? What about a boy? Let’s get a boy. Manumalo has his hand
up. Let’s listen to Manumalo.
   Hmmm . . . over the weekend, I went to the beach with my brother and we rode in
his va’a ‘apa. And then my brother’s friend came with his va’a ‘apa and we had a race in
the ocean. My brother’s va’a ‘apa won the va’a ‘apa race.
   Matua manaia tele le story a Manumalo. So did you help your brother paddle the
va’a ‘apa or did you just ride in the va’a ‘apa and cheer him on?
   I helped my brother paddle the va’a’apa during the race.
   Was it hard work?
   Yes. My hand got tired but I didn’t stop because we wanted to win the race.
   See boys and girls! If you really want to win a race, any kind of race, you must
keep on going like Manumalo even if you’re tired.
   Thank you Manumalo. Does anybody know what Manumalo’s name mean?
   I know! I know! Miss Nu’u.
   Leai has her hand up.
   Manumalo means victory!
   Very good, Leai! Lelei tele. Manumalo means victory like victory in racing,
running and . . . Oh, Malia has her hand up. Yes, Malia?
   Jesus was manumalo too!
   Ioe, sa manumalo Iesu i le tu’ugamau. Very good! Well, we’re out of time now,
but tomorrow we can listen to more stories. I want everybody to go home and think about
a story they want to write about in class tomorrow. O outou faalogo mai?
   Yes, Miss Nu’u!
   And don’t forget. I want all of you to get to bed early so we don’t have any more
sleepy children in class tomorrow. Everybody stand up! Let’s sing our song one more
time and then you may all go for your morning break.

   Tutu i uma luga! Stand up!

   Oso i luga ma tuli i susu
   Ma lue fo’i lou ulu

   Sauni? Ready? Sing!
Pagota

Girls and boys, today, you will write a very suamalie story about your weekend.
Miss Nu’u?
Yes, Miss La’i?
Can I write a long suamalie story?
Of course, you may write a long suamalie story, Miss La’i.
Fale, e i ai se mea o tupu?
Miss Nu’u, I can’t think of anything. I keep thinking and thinking but I can’t think of anything suamalie to write about.
Did you do something fun on Saturday? E a le Aso Sa? Did you see something on Sunday that was different?
Sunday ... Sunday ... Oka! Miss Nu’u! I did! I did see something on Sunday!
What did you see, Fale?
Something! Miss Nu’u. Something! Oka! Oka! Something happened at my church on Sunday!
What happened at your church, Fale?
Something! Miss Nu’u. Something! Thank you Miss Nu’u! Thank you!
You’re welcome, Fale. Aua le galo tama ma teine! Your story must be very suamalie.
Miss Nu’u?
Yes, Seu?
What’s a suamalie story?
Well, let’s ask the class. Who knows what a suamalie story is?
Miss Nu’u! I do! I do!
All right, Miss Teuila. Tell us what a suamalie story is?
A suamalie story is a very sweet story.
Lelei tele Teuila! Yes. Suamalie means sweet so a very suamalie story is a very sweet story. Who can name three suamalie fruits? Si’i i luga le lima. Raise your hand. Fale has is hand up. Mr. Fale, name three suamalie fruits?
Banana.
That’s one.
Papaya.
Two.
Mango.
Three! Lelei tele Fale. So if the banana, papaya, and mango are sweet, then what does that mean? Si’i i luga le lima. Raise your hand. Si’i i luga le lima. Miss Theresa has her hand up. Miss Theresa?
That your story must have bananas, mangos, and papayas in it!
Ioe. A sweet story is one with bananas and mangoes in it. Miss Theresa, can you eat a sweet story?
Eat a story? Miss Nu’u, what do you mean?
Can you eat a suamalie story, Miss Theresa?
Mmm. No?
That’s right, you can’t eat a suamalie story, but you want to because what?
Because . . . it taste sweet!
Joe! You want to eat the story because it tastes so sweet.
Very good boys and girls! Lelei tele! So today you will write a story that is so sweet that your classmates will want to eat it.
Miss Nu’u? Miss Nu’u?
Si’i i luga le lima. Raise your hand, please.
Mr. Pita has a question.
How do you write a sweet story?
Well, Mr. Pita, do you like to eat mangos and bananas?
Yes.
Do you like any mango or banana or are there special ones you like?
I like the ripe mango because that is the sweetest one.
And how do you know it is the sweetest one, Mr. Pita?
When the skin is red and yellow and it feels soft but not too soft on the outside.
See, Mr. Pita. You really know the kind of mangos you like. So when you write your suamalie story, you don’t want to add the green mango, you want to add the red or yellow mango because those are the ones that are what?
Suamalie!
That’s right, Mr. Pita. Those are the ones that taste sweet. Oh, Mr. Lima has his hand up. Yes, Mr. Lima?
Miss Nu’u, can you add salt to your story?
Auo! Salt! Add salt to your story! Boys and girls, Mr. Lima wants to know if you can add salt to your story. Well, let’s think about this a little bit. Who likes to eat chicken? Miss Rosa has her hand up. Do you like to add salt to your chicken, Miss Rosa?
Sometimes, but not too much.
That’s right! Chicken tastes good with salt, but if you add too much salt on your chicken then it will be too salty and then you’ll have to give it to the pigs or the dogs. So Mr. Lima, you can add salt to your story but you don’t want to add too much because it will make your story too . . . what?
Salty!
Yes, too salty. Good. All right, everybody take out a piece of paper and pencil and begin to write your story. Remember to write a sweet story that your classmates will want to eat.
Fale, are you all right?
Yes, Miss Nu’u! I’m adding a little bit of salt and a little bit of sugar to my story.
Lelei tele! And don’t forget to write your name and grade at the top of your paper.
Prisoners at My Church

On Sunday, my brother John and I were playing and playing in church. John said, Look! That lady is wearing her pajamas to church. Yeah, and she has a broken arm, I said. Shh! My mother said to us. Faasaga i luma! So John and I turned and faced the front. While we waited for church to start, the back door opened. Two men dressed in black pants and white shirts came inside carrying a piano. Suddenly, more and more men dressed in black and white walked in. Fale! John whispered, Look! That guy has a ponytail. And he has a tattoo too, I said. The two men put the piano down and sat on the left side of the church. I wonder who they are? I asked. They are prisoners, Mataio whispered. Prisoners! I said. Yes. You know. Pagota from the prison. Real pagota! Yes, real pagota, he said. They sing in the prison choir. So they will sing for us today. Shh! My mother said again. She waved her big fan to warn us. Faasaga i luma! So we all turned to the front again. After a while three policemen came inside and looked around. After looking around, they sat behind the pagotas.

When church started, my father stood up and said, the prayer. After the tatalo, he opened his pese and said, now the prison choir from Tafuna will sing the first hymn. The man with the ponytail stood in front of the prison choir. The other man turned the piano on and began to play. The man with the ponytail raised his hands in the air and all the men sat up straight. Then the man dropped his hands and the pagota began to sing out. The pagota sang loud! I mean very, very loud! The lady in her pajamas covered her ears and gave a mean looked at the pagota. But the men kept singing. After a while, she uncovered her ears and turned to watch the pagota. The prisoners sang a very nice song. Even the policemen sang with them. Look at that man playing the piano, John whispered. He’s moving his head up and down to the music. I wanted to laugh but I knew my mother was watching from the back. So I looked into John’s eyes and he looked into mine. Then we smiled at each other and kicked our sandals together. I turned to face the front. The pagota kept singing and singing very nicely and the man who played the piano kept moving his head up and down, up and down, up and down. I looked at the old lady and she was moving her feet up and down and down too.

Maybe if the pagota keep singing nice church peses, the sick people in the hospital will get well and the old lady doesn’t have to wear pajamas to church anymore and God will let all the pagotas go home for singing good in church.
Miss Nu’u, that is my suamalie story. I hope I didn’t add too much salt or too much sugar for you and everybody in class.
Teasing is Taufa’alili

Little John,
Look at your ears!
They look like somebody stretched them!

Fale,
Look at your head!
It looks like a watermelon!

Little John,
Look at your hair!
It looks like Miss Piggy rolled on it

Fale,
Look at your hair!
It looks like a chicken sat on it

Fale ma John,
Soia!
It’s after nine o’clock
Get to bed!

Pssst!
Little John,
You look like a monkey!

Pssst!
Fale, you look like a gorilla!

O John o se tama lelei
e ai pisupo
e ai mea lelei

Stop Fale! Stop!
You always taufa’alili me!

Father, O la e taufa’alili mai e Fale a’u
He said, I look like a monkey
You said, I look like a gorilla
You were first!
You started it!
Fale ma John, I said to stop it!
What do you boys want?
The belt?
Get to bed right now!
A ou toe fai atu loa,
ona ou tu atu lea'i luga ma le fusipa’u
Do you hear me?

See, Fale!
It’s your fault
You always taufa’alili me
And you too!
You tease me too!

I get this side of the bed!
I get the big pillow!
I get the small pillow!
I get the, the, the
The wall! I get the wall!
A Dress for Sa’ili

Sa’ili!
Your dress for the Junior Prom is hanging in your closet!
Oh, good! I’ll go and see it!

Mmm . . . this dress looks like . . . an old lady’s dress.

Sa’ili! Try it on! So I can see it!
All right!
Uuuu . . . This dress really looks worse than an old lady’s dress!

See Sa’ili! It fits you just right. The lace around the neck and arms brings out the blue.

Yes, it does mother. Yes . . . It does

This is a nice style for you!

Yes, it is, mother.
Yes, it is.

Now take it off and hang it nicely.
Yes, I will, mother, I will.

Taligi!
Taligi!
Ring! Ring!

Hello?
Is Meleane there?
Faatali mai!
Sa’ili?
Oh my goodness, Meleane!
What! What!
You should see the dress my mother bought me for the prom!
Oh, no! What does it look like?
It looks like an old lady’s dress!
What?
It’s got lace around the neck and arms and even the bottom of the skirt!
What!
Yes, Meleane! I can’t believe my mother is making me wear this to the Junior Prom! Everybody is going to laugh! They’re going to know I’m a square! That my parents are old fashioned! What am I going to do?

E . . . Sa’ili! Your parents are old fashioned!
E . . . Meleane! You think this is funny? Don’t you!
It is funny! So what did you say to your mother?
What do you mean? Nothing. I said, it’s a nice dress mother. What else!
Sa’ili, at least you have a dress. I don’t. I know what my mother is going to say, Meleane! Oi! Talofa e, i si a’u tama. Our tree money isn’t bearing any fruits this month.
You mean money tree, Meleane, money tree!
No, Sa’ili! My mother will say tree money. Our tree money isn’t bearing any fruits this month, so why don’t you look in your sister’s closet for a dress! If not, then you can wear one of my church dresses.
Good! Then we can both look like little old ladies at the prom!
Yes, little old ladies going to bible study!
So much for calling you for support!
E Sa’ili! Where’s your sense of humor?
Meleane, you don’t have to wear this dress!
At least you have a dress!
Yeah, I bet you can’t wait to see me in this dress! Ali’i Meleane?
Sa’ili?
Yes?
Don’t forget to bring your bible to the prom!
You wait, Meleane! You wait!
Sa’ili, laces on the neck . . . I’m going to die!
Chief Pisupo

Ring! Ring!
Taligi! Taligi!
Ring! Ring!

Hello!
Talofa! O ai lea?
O John.
Hey, John! My son. This is chief, Uncle Falesau.
Talofa! Uncle Falesau.
Talofa John. You sound like a chief. Do you want a matai title?
A matai title?
Yes. A matai title to become a Samoan chief. I can give you a title to make you a matai. Do you want that son?
I think so.
All right. Let’s see . . . What’s your favorite Samoan food?
Pisupo with cabbage.
Corned beef with cabbage! That’s a good choice, son. So your new title is Chief Pisupo. Hahaha! Do you like that?
Yes, I like Chief Pisupo.
You know son. Samoan people. They love to eat corned beef with cabbage, but you’re the king because you are Chief Pisupo. So next time I call your house, I’ll say, This is Chief Falesau. May I speak to Chief Pisupo? E te fiafia i lou igoa?
Yes uncle. I like my name.
You’re a good son, John. A good son. You’re going to make a good chief for our family in the future. Is your father home?
Yes uncle.
Alu e fai i lou tama o Uncle Falesau lea i le telefoni. Good-bye Chief Pisupo.
Good-bye, Chief Falesau.

Talofa!
Talofa lava! I gave your son a new title.
Oh, really!
Yes. Hehehe! He said his favorite Samoan food is pisupo with cabbage so I told him his new title is Chief Pisupo. The only problem is his title doesn’t come with any land. A chief with no land?
So my son is a chief with no land!
Yes, he can get all the corned beef he wants in the Pacific but his title comes with no land. He says he wants to become a matai in the future.
He said that?
Yes. Maybe your son will become the next chief of our family if he doesn’t want to become a minister.
Yes, maybe he will.
The ministry is a honorable profession for us. I know it’s part of our family story, but the global economy is changing so fast, so we need to tell our children to go into other professions. The ministry is not good for everybody.
Yes. It’s good to encourage our children to go into other areas. E tofu lava le tagata ma lana taleni.
Ioe. God gave everybody a talent, so they have to go and figure it out. That’s the reason why I’m calling. I’m thinking about my daughter Sa’ili. She’s in the same grade as Semoana, but she was born and raised here in Samoa living the life of a matai’s daughter in the village. I want her to experience life outside of Samoa . . . life outside of Laloifi. See your children have lived outside of Samoa and now they’re experiencing life in Samoa as faifeau’s children.
It’s been very good for them. Mataio doesn’t even speak English anymore. Ua tau galo le nanu a le tama. His Samoan is very good now. The English will come back, but the Samoan. They have to learn it.
And that’s good!
Ioe.
So I want Sa’ili to experience life outside of Samoa too. Se’i alu tasi i fafo e experience le olaga i fafo. I want her to go to school in the states for one year for some exposure.
Yes. I think that’ll be good for your Sa’ili. We’re thinking of sending Semoana back to Seattle for a few years for school. Sa’ili is living with her grandmother again, and will go to college next year.
How long has Sa’ili been back in Seattle?
O Aukuso lea na alu ai . . . a year now. We sent her back to live with her grandmother. Vise’s mother is over eighty now. We’ve been thinking of sending Semoana back for her education.
Well, I want Sa’ili to go with Semoana. It’ll be good because they’re in the same grade. Grade seven. But I want them to live with our cousin Talalelei, the minister, and his wife Moni. Talalelei has a lot of daughters who can help them and they can go to church together.
Sa’ili and her grandma are only ten minutes away.
All right. Fai la le tatou tonu lena. We’ll send Sa’ili and Semoana to live with our cousin Talalelei in Seattle.
They can travel with Vise’s cousin Vai who will be visiting us this summer.

O a mai le ma’umaga?
Oh, the plantation is growing. We received loads of new taro heads from my friend Auva’a yesterday. They look very good! I will take the boys up to the mountain today to plant the new taro heads, some bananas, and taamu.
Ua matutua fa’i?
Ioe. Se’i maua se avanoa then I will send the boys to bring some bananas over to you folks. There are a lot of bananas. Ripe ones too!

Se . . . matua manaia! Vise can make some banana poi for to’ona’i on Sunday. Banana poi will be good to serve at to’ona’i.

I’ll have the boys bring some bananas for them too! They can use it during the week.

Matua manaia!

We will bring some cucumber, cabbage, and israelu too. Yesterday, we had so many bananas, so I sent the boys to deliver them to the village people. They started from the catechist, then our village minister, and then all the matai in the village. We still had some left over. So I told Elei to pass them out to the women of the village. The village council will hold it’s monthly meeting on Saturday morning, so the women can make banana poi for lunch or breakfast. We have a lot of piglets too! Our aumatua gave birth a few days ago. Do you want some more piglets?

Se . . . ua leai se mea e tu’u ai. We don’t have space. We can only handle two at a time.

I need to call Auva’a to see if he needs piglets for his farm. I think we Samoans need to eat less pig. We’re getting sick. We need to simplify things.

I don’t eat pork anymore. I’m scared. Ua tele le faama’i.

Maybe each family should raise two or three pigs, and not ten. Maybe I’ll start getting rid of my pigs. Chickens are good. We can get eggs and people don’t get too sick from them. Taro and banana is good too. And kukama and cabbage. I think I’ll grow more papaya on my plantation. Yeah, maybe that’s what I’ll do. I need to call Auva’a to see if he wants my piglets. We’ll talk again.

Measili o lea ua maua le tonu ia Semoana ma Sa’ili.

O le mea lelei lava lea. But the boys will deliver the bananas this evening.

And the cucumber and cabbage!

Yes, and the cucumber and cabbage.

Tofa!

What did Chief Falesau want?

He said they’ll bring us bananas and cabbage and cucumbers later. He said they have lots of bananas. Ripe ones too. So I told him we’ll make banana poi for Sunday.

Matua manaia! Banana poi will be good to serve after church.

He also asked if we wanted more piglets. One of their aumatua gave birth a few days ago.

We don’t have space for more pigs. Two pigs is enough for us.

I told him that. But he really called to say that he wants Sa’ili to go to school in Seattle for a while.

O le a lau tala na fai i ai?
I said that we've been thinking about sending Semoana back to Seattle for her education. So we decided to send Semoana and Sa’ili together. Ea lena tonu?
That’s a good plan. Semoana can go see grandma and Sa’ili and everybody in Seattle. The old lady is getting old.
FLYING
Grandma’s Corner

My father wants me to get a good education in America so that I can become somebody.

My mother cares for my education, but I think she cares more that I live near her Catholic mother who lives in Seattle.

My father wants me to get a good education so that I can become smart and successful.

My mother cares for my education, but I think she cares more that I visit her older brother Falefa who lives near their Catholic mother in Seattle.

My father wants me to get a good education so that I can become smart, successful and independent.

My mother cares for my education, but I think she cares more that I live close to her brother Leni who lives with her aging Catholic mother in Seattle.

My father wants me to get a good education so that he will know that I’m not sitting around not doing something that will make me become somebody.

I know my mother cares for my education, but I think she cares more that I be near her sister Alofamoni who lives near their proud Catholic mother in Seattle.

My father wants me to get a good education so that he can say that education, education, education is the only way to a bright and useful future.

I know my mother cares for my education, but I think she cares more that I know her other sister Nai who also lives near their iron-willed Catholic mother in Seattle.

That’s why I’m sitting on this airplane, next to my cousin Sa’ili, whose father, my father’s brother, also wants her to get a good education in the northwest corner of America. Our airplane is in the air now, leaving Pago Pago International Airport, flying over my pua tree next to our white house, where Fale, little John and
Mataio remain with my mother and father, who will preach on Sunday at that chapel below inside Lyndon, B. Johnson Hospital. The airplane is flying faster now, but I cannot see Pele’s house, Pele my friend, who had water in her eyes when I told her that my mother had packed my suitcase and had bought me new shoes to wear on the airplane because I was returning to the place in America I had left three years earlier when I first saw her under a mango tree.

No one asked me if I wanted to return to America, so when I hugged Pele goodbye, a sad look showed on her face, and that scared me and made me sad too, because I didn’t know how to explain that the education in America is better than the education at Matafao Elementary. Even though Pele is the smartest girl in a'oga Samoa, Sunday School, and her seventh grade class, I didn’t know how to explain that her education isn’t as good as the education I will receive in America. So I hugged Pele a second time and left her, with a part of me, and went home to get ready so I can ride this airplane wearing my new shoes, which are now squeezing my feet in the sky. It’s good the airplane is turning east so that I don’t have to see Pele’s house and think of the time she threw rocks at the mango tree and screamed that the rock was going to hit me in the head.

There goes Pago Pago, International Airport, and here I am, sitting next to cousin Sa’ili, who will see so many things and people in America for the first time. We are flying east now, over my grandma’s village of Sasa’e, there below, malaeovevesi with its white sandy beach, tiny Catholic church where nobody in my clan attends because when my Uncle Falefa left the army and bought a house in Seattle, he and my grandma and their entire clan from that little white village below, packed their suitcases and flew over this Pacific Moana, and into the northwest corner of the United States, where they followed my grandma to St. George Catholic Church near the I-5 freeway every Sunday to dip their bread in the red wine in their new home.

It’s midnight now, the sky is black, but the small moon is awake as our airplane flies northeast, taking us closer to my sister Sa’ili who flew on this airplane a year ago when my grandma called and said that she was getting old. My eyes are heavy cousin Sa’ili is hugging her pillow and the Samoan flight attendant, wearing a white pua in her left ear, is walking down the aisle to pass out our midnight snacks. Here’s the snack, sitting on my tray. It looks like the snack I ate when I rode the airplane three years ago. Here are the peanuts that smell like the old peanuts from three years ago. But I can’t be sure, three years ago is a long time but I’m remembering things now. Little things like these peanuts.

It’s daylight now, our airplane has arrived in Hawai’i, the place that all people who leave American Samoa, must stop and breathe their last warm air before they board the airplane for the long, long ride to different corners of America. Here we are in Hawai’i, the place Pili from Samoa landed many moons ago. It’s hot, like
Samoa, only breezier. There’s Hawai’i, beginning to look less like Samoa. I am remembering things now from three years ago. Little by little. The people that make up Hawai’i. I remember this about Hawai’i. It didn’t look like Samoa. It looked different. Yet, Pili came from Manu’a then swam to Tutuila, Upolu and Savai’i, populating the islands of the family of Samoa and even Hawai’i. Samoa is in Hawai’i. I can’t be sure. See, I’m remembering things now. Things from when I was in Hawai’i three years ago. But we’re not here to stay in Hawai’i. Were flying to Seattle and to get to Seattle, we have to fly over Hawai’i. So here we go, leaving Hawai’i, flying higher, faster, northwest towards Aunty Moni, my mother’s sister, who will wave as we walk off the airplane and into the streets of Seattle.

Our airplane is over Seattle now. There are the green pines, the cold water, the Puget Sound waters, the lakes, the dark lakes, and the mountains. There’s Chief Seattle, below where my grandma’s clan from the village of Sasa’e now live near all those cars, buildings, and freeways crawling over their new home. The place my cousin Sa’ili and I have come to receive our good education, but especially because my mother cares more—than my education—that I live close to her strong-willed Catholic mother here in this corner. This is the place I told Pele about when I met her three years ago in Samoa. Now I’m here again, wearing my new shoes and forgetting, Pele and Samoa, and remembering this place, where the cars blow white smoke, and people, all different colors of people, walk fast when the lights turn green. There’s the Catholic school my grandma sent me, little John, and my sister Sa’ili because we lived in her Catholic corner. There’s the Catholic church near the I-5 freeway that my grandma now attends every Sunday wearing her yellow scarf. But during this second round, I will not stay in my grandma’s corner. I will live in a different corner with Aunty Moni, who’s married to my father and Sa’ili’s father’s cousin, a Protestant minister, like my father. Cousin Sa’ili and I will live in that corner, the Protestant corner, during this second round.

There’s Aunty Moni waving and smiling as we walk towards her, and the Protestant corner. Aunty Moni is here, right here now, in our arms, she’s smiling and we’re smiling in Seattle, so, so far away from Samoa and our parents. Here we go, in the car, leaving Seattle International Airport, and into the busy freeways with fast moving cars and different colors of people in their fast moving cars. Here we go up the hill, one, two, five humps to our new corner here in the city of Chief Seattle. Here’s our corner—our Protestant corner. But wait! My grandma’s corner, her Catholic corner, is near. Her son Falefa is near. Her daughter Nai is close by and her son, Uncle Leni is in her corner. So we’re cornered here because Seattle, this northwest corner of America, is after all, my grandma’s corner.
PART II: SEATTLE
The Revolving Door

This is Amata Vaelua speaking.
Amata!
Mother!
Amata! O fea oe?
I’m at work, mother. Where else?
O le a le taimi e te sau ai?
After work, mother! After work!
Amata . . . mmm . . . faavave! Sau e fai pepe a’oga a teineiti.
I will mother! Aua le popole. I’m coming over today, after work. Where are the girls?
O la e eva ma tamaiti.
How was their flight from Samoa?
Fai ma le o le ote ia o Vai!
Well, that’s Aunty Vai for you. Why do you think people call her Miss grumpy?
All she does is fai poga, judge, and complain. I’m surprised they survived the flight. I would’ve dumped her in Hawai’i. Semoana must be grown now. How old was she when they left?
Eight, nine . . . no . . . e pei uma lava e fitu. E se ua galo ia ta ita. I’m too old to remember those things, Amata. O lea e tele mea i lo’u mafaufau.
All right mother. I’ll be there after work. You can’t see me, but I’m raising my right hand to make my promise.
Don’t tease me Amata. Faavave mai!
Bye mother!

Sa’ili and Semoana!
Yes, Sisifo?
Mother said to come downstairs. Amata is here.
Ok Sifo, tell aunty we’re coming.
Is that you, Semoana? Oka, ua e matua.
Come, girls come here! Sa’ili, this is your cousin Amatamaisaua. She works at a money place.
It’s called an investment firm, mother, o le investment firm.
Ok, a firm, where they make money. Amata will tell you girls all about school and she will take you to register.
Look at you Semoana! Oka! You’ve grown so much! Look at your hair! It’s so nice and long. How old are you now?
Twelve.
Wow!
And you Sa’ili! Look at you! Oh, you have long hair too!
Hi Amata!
Sa’ili, do you don’t remember me?
I think so.
I remember you when you were very little. I visited Samoa about nine years ago
and I stayed with your family in Laloifi.
You did? My father never told me that.
Yes, you had that nice round haircut that went like this.
You mean the one where my mother placed a plastic bowl over my head and cut a
circle around my face?
Is that what Aunty Elei did?
Yes. Up until two years ago.
I’ll never forget Samoa! One time I was doing my laundry outside the va’iti and I
hung my clothes on the line and when I came back they were gone!
Well, my mother does have a washer now, Amata, a real washer, so you don’t
have to worry about losing your nice clothes next time.
I told Aunty Elei that I couldn’t find my clothes, and she threw a fit! She started
yelling at all the girls in the house. I felt so sorry for them. Then we found out the
neighbors stole them off the line. Aunty marched over to the neighbors and gave those
girls and their mother a piece of her mind. I never lost any clothes after that.
Did you get your clothes back?
Are you kidding! I didn’t want them back!
But how did you find out who stole your clothes?
One of our cousins saw them wearing my clothes at the store down the road. Can
you believe that, Semoana?
But Amata, where else they wear those clothes to?
Mother, she shouldn’t have worn them to the store down the road. If she had any
brains, she should’ve worn them to a store in another village, not in Laloifi.
Well, I don’t remember any of that, but everybody in the village is scared of my
mother. Heck! Even I’m scared of her.
I remember going out with cousin Loia and your father told me that I shouldn’t go
out so much.
Amata, in Samoa, girls don’t go out so much. And uncle is a chief in Laloifi, so
you need to behave a certain way.
Even older girls, mother?
Io. Girls have to act proper.
But I grew up here!
Io . . . but things are different in Samoa.
Well, I didn’t know that. Nobody told me. But I hear things are changing now.
Girls go to school events in the evening. Even Aunty Vise let Sa’ili—you sister
Semoana—go to her Junior prom last year and you know Aunty Vise, she’s more strict
than you, mother.
Things are changing in Samoa but I think they’re changing too much.
Change is good, mother.
Not all the time. It’s better in the older days. When we were growing up, we act a certain way. Today, e pule lava le tagata ia ia. No more respect. Not even self-respect.

See what kind of aunty you girls have to live with? I’m kidding mother. You’re a great mother. You can’t even count the number of nieces and nephews who have lived in this house.

No, I can’t count! But they all my children you know.
Yeah, you see! You deserve a national award for raising children from Samoa and your own children.

Yeah, aunty, you can add me and Semoana to your long list.
Mother...do you know the door at the bank?
O lea a le faitoto’a, Amata?
Se...you know. The revolving one—the one that goes around and around like this.

Oh, that door! I almost get stuck in that door last week.
Well, your front door mother is like that door. It revolves around and around for all your Samoan families. When one group of relatives comes through the door, another group leaves and so on and so on.

Samoan families are like that, Amata. They move and live with their aunties, uncles, and grandparents. That’s just how Samoan people are. Speaking of doors, I just remember a funny story about that door at the bank.

You mean the revolving door, mother?
Se, ioe! That round and round door. Your father hates that door!
Why, mother?
Every time we go to the bank, he step one foot in the door but the other foot is still outside. So he jump out and try again, but he always miss, so he let everybody behind go first and he kicked the door. One day he say, why palagi people make the door like that. A door should open wide so you can go inside and get your money, not wait to figure out how to go in.

Really! Did father really say that?
Yes, he did.
Are you sure you’re not making this up?
Amata, why will I make a story up like that?
Oh, trust me, mother. I’ve heard too many Samoan stories at this table—this very table—and I can’t even imagine some of them.

E...Amata! What you saying? This is a pepelo?
No mother! That’s not what I’m saying! But Samoans are full of tricks! They twist and twist things when they tell a story. In fact, you should all get Oscars for acting your stories out because they’re beyond miraculous.

Ask your father when he comes home, Amata.
That’s all right mother. I believe you! I believe you! And even if I don’t believe you, I’ll make myself believe you. I’m scared to ask father because he’ll tell me that it’s true and then he’ll say that he and Uncle Pita got stuck in the door and that Uncle Pita squashed him in the door and that’s how he got a bruise on his arm. I know that’s what he’ll say. I know it! I may have been born and raised here, but I’m not a fool.
Will uncle really say that, Amata?

Yes, Sa’ili. If I ask him, he’ll say that the door got stuck and the bank called the fire department to get him out. And if Uncle Pita is in on the story, he’ll say they broke the door to pieces and the bank had to install a brand new one. I’ll play it safe, mother. I believe you! I raise my hand over grandpa’s grave in Manu’a and say that I believe you!

E . . . you girls don’t listen to everything your cousin Amata says. She’s one of those . . . o le a fo’i le upu, Amata?

You mean a modern woman whose heard too many exaggerated stories.

Those stories come from your father’s family in Manu’a. They make up long stories.

Oka! Mother, I’m going to tell father what you said. See Semoana and Sa’ili!

Your aunty is saying that our father’s side from Manu’a tell the long pepelo stories. What about your village? What kind of stories do they tell?

We tell only good stories!

That’s not what I heard. I heard people from your village like to speak English and they always mispronounce things. I heard about the old man who said, I ko come back around!

E Amata! You’ve listened to too many Samoan stories.

Yeah, I’ve got the formula down, so if I have to, I can tell a few long stories myself.

E! You girls listen to Amata. I go sew some church uniforms. Amata, va’ai faalelei uma pepa na. I don’t understand all those school paper stuff. Don’t worry, mother, I’ll take care of everything. Semoana, pass me the papers. It looks like you have to catch the bus to school to the North End to a school called Gateway Junior High.

Why can’t we go to the school down the street?

They’re trying to mix all the minorities who live here in South Seattle with the palagi children in North Seattle.

But why? Did something happen?

Well, yes. It’s difficult to explain. They’re trying to make things more equal for everybody, especially those who come from different diverse backgrounds like us and women. It’s hard to explain. You’ll learn about it in school. Anyway, your bus ride is a forty-five minute bus ride.

Forty-five minutes! That’s how long it takes to drive from one end of Tutuila to the other!

You’re right Sa’ili. I forgot how small Tutuila is. It won’t be so bad. You’ll get used to it. The good thing is you don’t have to walk that far.

This is so confusing! In Samoa, you just go to the school closest to your village.

Things are different here. School starts next week, so we have some time to get everything squared away.

Will we be in the same class?

I don’t think so. You’ll have your own schedules. Next week, we’ll go and see the school.

Don’t worry Sa’ili! It’ll be fun. You’ll make new friends.
Things are really different here, huh Semoana? Riding the bus and meeting new people, different kinds of people. So much to learn. Don’t you think about Samoa?
I do. Sometimes I wonder what John and Fale are doing.
Do you miss them?
I guess. I don’t know.
I miss fighting over food with Rex, especially pilikaki. I remember when my mother made pilikaki meatballs, we’d fight to see who got the last one.
We always fought over the orange tang. Mataio loved tang! I don’t know what was so great about tang. He put sugar in it when the palagi already made it sweet.
Samoans add sugar to everything! Even coffee. Palagi ask you if you want sugar or cream but Samoans just put it in for you.
E valea le Samoa pe a le faasuka le kofe.
What would they do without sugar!
What about salt?
They would go crazy!
What if McDonalds ever makes it to Samoa?
Oh my! They would run out of burgers during the first hour!
Yeah, and they would say, ese le manaia o le hamupaka and little do they know the meat is made from guts.
Let’s call Sa’ili tomorrow and see if we can come visit.
Yeah, let’s do that!
Then you can meet my grandma. She’s sick now but still kicking. I think. She screams a lot, especially when she’s cold.

Sa’ili and Semoana!
It’s prayer time! We’re going to say prayer!
We’re coming, Sasa’e!
Hurry up!
Mareta and Melia!
Teria!
Saying prayer! Saying prayer everybody!

Sisifo, get my glasses.
Sa’ili and Semoana? Do you have your bibles?
Ioe.

Open your Bibles to the fourth book of Esther. Su’e uma tusi paia ia Eseta e fa.
Sisifo read first. Read loud and clear so I can hear you. . . . ne’i e manatu ina ua e i ai i le aiga o le tupu e faasaoina ai oe. Very good reading Sisifo. Mareta’s turn. . . . e iloa foi e ai po ua fai oe ma masiofo ona o se aso faapenei.
Mareta . . . oioioioioi . . . that word is faa—pe—nei . . . you need to practice your reading! You’ll get a husband soon and your reading is not good. Sisifo turn the lights off.
Oh, hello Aunty Sulia!
Hello, Amata—mai—saua.
Ua leva na e sau? I didn’t see your car outside! Where’s father and mother?
Shopping. I think. It’s just me and Sasa’e and Sisifo. They’re out back, playing.
Where’s Mareta and Melia ma Teria?
Ta’ilo. Something about volleyball practice at school.
Melia, volleyball practice? That’s a first. Aunty, your coffee smells good. I think
I’ll grab one.
Yes, pour yourself a cup. Have a sikoni too! Your mother makes the best sikoni in
the world.
Yes, she does.
Mmm . . . something smells good! What’s this?
Sapasui.
Oh, my favorite! I think I’ll have some.
There’s rice and taro over there!
Yeah, I think I’ll have some taro. I haven’t had any in a while. I only eat taro
when I come over to mother’s. Aunty, Do you want me to get you something?
No! I’ve been eating since I arrived. I think I’ve gained ten pounds. See this!
Yes, aunty. I thought you were pregnant.
How can I be pregnant at my age?
Hey Elizabeth was over sixty when she gave birth to John the Baptist.
E te taua’alili, a ea? You think you’re a clown, Amata.
Aunty. This sapasui is so good! Taro is good too, but I like it better when it’s
baked. I could use some palusami right now.
They had some for to’ona’i on Sunday. I think the Savali family brought it over.
I didn’t come by on Sunday. It gets too hectic here for me. I like my Sundays
quiet.
Sa e lotu i le Aso Sa?
Hmmm . . . not this past Sunday. I went to church last Sunday.
Did you hear?
Hear what?
The a’o’a’o are coming from Samoa!
The what?
The a’o’a’o. You know the single men from the seminary in Samoa. They’re on
break and they’re coming to find wives before they graduate from seminary next summer.
Why do they need wives before they graduate?
It makes them more marketable for serving in a church. If the church people see
that a’o’a’o is married and his wife will make a good pastor’s wife, then they will ask
him to come and be their faifeau.
I know but why do they have to be married before they graduate?
They don’t have to. It’s good for the work they are about to do and most of them are ready by that time. It also keeps them out of trouble with women, if you know what I mean. They maybe in the seminary, but they’re men just like other men living outside the gate.

The gate, huh?
Yes, the gate around the campus that keeps them locked in.
And keeps the girls out? So what does this have to do with me?
Amata, you’re the perfect candidate! Your father is a minister and you’re single.
Aunty, you can forget it! I may be single but I’m definitely not available.
Oh . . . Amata! Se aua e te faapena.
Aunty Sulia! You’ve gone nuts!
Your father will be proud, Amata. You’re his oldest daughter . . . marrying a a’oa’o from seminary in Samoa and carrying on the good work of sharing God’s word and the lotu.

Aunty! My father should be proud if I marry a man who will love me period.
Of course, Amata. That too. You can marry and then fall in love later.
Oh, aunty!
Amata, ua fia ou tausaga?
I’m twenty seven.
See Amata! It’s time to catch a man.
When the time is right aunty, all right?
You’re too much a career woman, Amata.
I’m not too sure about that aunty. I’d like to get married and have a family. But doing it that way? Trying to catch a a’oa’o from seminary in Samoa who is hunting for a wife! You’ve gone mad! I bet mother put you up to this! Didn’t she?

No . . . this was my idea.
Yes, with a little bit of help from her!
It’s not for me aunty. Not for me.
But you’re the oldest. It will look good for the family and the church too. A a’oa’o from seminary marrying the faifeau’s oldest daughter.
Do I look like I’d make a good pastor’s wife, aunty? I’m serious. Do you think so?

Amata, you can learn. Many of the wives learn on the job.
Well, that’s good and I’m sure they do well. Look at mother? She makes a good pastor’s wife. It’s not for me, aunty.

Amata.
Aunty? When was the last time you cleaned the wax out of your ears? I’m serious, aunty! I’ll buy you some Q-tips next time I go to Rite-Aide. Which ones do you prefer? The regular or colored ones?

Se Amata. O le mea lena e le maau ai se tatou.
I’m sorry aunty, but I have an opinion . . . you know what aunty?
O le a?
You just want to go to a wedding! Don’t you? You want a big family wedding so you can sew a nice fancy puletasi to wear to the wedding and you want to bake a huge wedding cake.

Well, we haven’t had a family wedding in a while. I’d like to bake a cake for one of you girls before I die you know. My oldest brother’s daughter.

That would be nice aunty. You make great cakes and we would be honored to have you bake the wedding cake. Don’t worry, aunty! I promise you. You’ll get your chance. With all these girls—Melia, Mareta, cousin Teria, and of course me—you’ll get your chance. Why do Samoan people make huge wedding cakes? When palagi make their wedding cakes, they only have two to four layers. But Samoan wedding cakes have so many layers.

Because we invite so many families, matai and ministers. So when it’s time to cut the cake, all these people with titles get a layer to take home so you need a big cake with lots of layers.

Is that why the layers equal the bride’s age?
It’s a good number to start with.
Well, when you make my cake, please don’t let it equal my age. It will be too many layers!

Then, don’t wait so long! I don’t want to make a cake with thirty layers!
Aunty you might have to make forty layers!
O lona uiga, I have to find an old lady bride to put on top of the cake!
Where do you find old brides like that?
You can’t! You have to paint the bride’s hair gray!
All right aunty! Now you’re hurting my feelings.
I’m sorry . . . Are you sure you’re not interested in a’oa’o, Amata?
Trust me, aunty. I’m sure! Even if you have to make a forty plus layered cake! I’ll take it. There’s a lot of girls in father’s church who will make better candidates. They might be more inspired by your ideas.

Yeah. They’re probably getting themselves ready for the competition. They’ll make much better faletua. Hey! This sasui is really good. I’m going to take some taro with me. I have some wahoo at home.

Where did you get your wahoo from?
Mother gave it to me last month. I can’t remember who came from Samoa.
O fea o le a e alu ai?
I have to make some stops and then I’m meeting a friend later.
Could it be a guy?
Maybe. Aunty, you never give up. Do you?
You gotta get moving girl! Melia is graduating this year and she may have a wedding before you.

That will be great! Then we can all prepare for a real family wedding. Who knows? Maybe you and mother can convince her to marry a’a’oa’o. I’m leaving. Call me when all the a’oa’o have returned to seminary in Samoa with their wedding dates fixed.

Never know, Amata! Never know!
See you later, aunty! See you later!
How many layers did you need again, Amata? Forty!
You think you’re funny! Don’t you!
Tofa Amatamaisaua!
Bye Aunty Sulia!
The Minister’s Taro

This morning, Tapu, a church deacon, woke up and drove to work. At work he climbed on his forklift and began to move crates of fresh oranges, apples, and grapes. At noon, he wiped his brow and climbed down his forklift and ate a chicken steak with mashed potatoes with gravy for lunch. Satisfied, he climbed back up his forklift and moved more crates. The piles of crates increased but Deacon Tapu worked so efficiently the pile never grew above his forehead. After work, Deacon Tapu stopped by Chang’s Market on Martin Luther King Way. Hey, Tapu! Mr. Chang said. Kalo just arrive this morning! Get good price! One tala and thirty-nine cents a pound. Oh, too much! Mr. Chang. Too much! Today I buy taro for my minister. You bring price down for minister’s taro, Mr. Chang! Bring price down! Oh, Chief Tapu! You too much. Every time, you come to market you say, I buy taro for minister, Mr. Chang! Bring price down for minister! Bring price down! But Mr. Chang! You get many blessings from God above if you bring price down for minister’s taro. You give good price for God’s servant and plenty more people come buy taro, banana, palusami, fa’i pilikaki, moon pie, panipopo, masi saiga and papa from you. Blessings for giving good price for minister’s taro. What! Mr. Chang. You don’t believe me! No! Chief Tapu. I believe. I believe. Here, I give you one tala and twenty sene for minister’s taro. Oh, Mr. Chang! Bring lower! Bring lower! Minister has large aiga. Ok, Chief Tapu. One tala and ten sene. And that’s final price, Chief Tapu! Final price! All right, Mr. Chang, I buy taro! I buy taro! You wait and see, Mr. Chang. God above give you and your aiga many blessings. See that empty bucket, Mr. Chang. You hold bucket to catch blessings from God, but you get so many blessings that you need more buckets. Pretty soon all your buckets are full and you have to give food away. Hehehe! Yes, Chief Tapu. I believe! I believe! God Tagaloa give blessings to Chang’s Market. No! Mr. Chang. Not Tagaloa. God. God above give you blessings. Oh, yes! God above. But I like God Tagaloa. Yes, Tagaloa. He a good God. Yes, good God. That’s why I give a good price for minister’s taro. Many blessings for Mr. Chang’s Market.

Deacon Tapu hopped in his red truck and drove to the minister’s house on the hill. Talofa, Faletua Moni! What chores are you doing now in front of that kitchen sink. Oh, talofa, Tapu! What brings the deacon to this side of town? I brought this for your dinner tonite. Talofa e, ia Tapu! You shouldn’t have! So generous! So kind! Matua manaia talo. And Talalelei was asking for taro the other evening. It was one tala and twenty-nine sene. I told Mr. Chang it was for the minister, so he give it for one tala and ten sene. Hehehe! Such generosity! Such generosity! Thanks to Mr. Chang. We pray for his market. Thanks to you! You must be tired from working all day. May the Lord return your agalelei to you and your family many times over so that your cup runneth over to your children and their children’s children. Where’s the minister? He’s in the front reading. Well, I’ve got to go. I came to drop off this nice taro. You don’t want to stay and have a cup of coffee or something? Oh, no! Leai faafetai. Faafetai le faaaloalo. Tapu Wait! Wait! Look at me. I nearly forgot that I made a umu papa this afternoon. A umu papa! Yes, a umu papa! I
walked into the kitchen from running errands this morning and thought, I shall make a umu papa this afternoon. So, I did. Here, you go! A bag full of freshly baked Samoan papa for you and the family. Oka! Matua manogi tele nei papa! La iloa lava ia oe le faletua. Take these cans of wahoo too! Oh, please Faletua Moni! No! Don’t give me the wahoo! Keep your wahoo! Somebody traveled all the way from Samoa and brought the cans of wahoo with them in their suitcase. Please! No! Take the wahoo! I can’t. Ua lava papa! No! No! Please, Tapu. Take the wahoo! It’s only a few cans. There’s more wahoo in the cupboard from Vai’s trip from Samoa. I won’t feel so good if you don’t take the wahoo. Well, since I can’t convince you to keep the wahoo, then I will take them with humility. Thank you ever so much for the umu papa but especially the cans of wahoo that traveled all the way from Samoa. And thank you for the very, very nice taro. I have to run! Ioe. Ua lelei! Thanks again! I shall have some papa tonite for tea. Yes, please enjoy the papa. And you enjoy the taro. Faafetai tele lava!

When Deacon Tapu’s red truck turned the corner, aunty opened the Seattle Times: Boeing granted more orders for airplanes! Washington Huskies defeated USC Trojans: 31-30! Aunty folded the airplane orders in half and covered the kitchen counters. Then she folded the 31-30 score under the corner to secure the newspaper in place. Setting the largest taro on the Washington Husky quarterback, she began to scrape the taro. One by one the brown skin fell on top of each other making a thick pile on the Boeing orders and revealing the white skin dotted with pink dots. Meanwhile the warmth from the oven heated aunty’s green mu’umu’u, toes, and the kitchen air. After aunty scraped three large taros, she sliced the nice taros into wedges and arranged them neatly on the hot oven racks. After an hour, the baked taro scent floated into the dining room covering aunty’s blue curtains and dining room air. That’s why when Sa’ili and I walked into the door after school, our noses and stomachs knew Samoan food awaited us for dinner.

Semoana! Aunty says, siaki ane kalo! Remove them and set them on a platter. While I arrange the nicely baked taro on a flowered platter, I see aunty open the cupboard. Where is the corned beef from New Zealand? The three cans that Uncle Fetofu dropped off when he returned from his father’s funeral in Samoa last month. Beans, corn, spam, and hot salsa. There it is! Hiding behind the taco shells. Aunty grabs three cans of pisupo and sets them on the counter and opens the refrigerator. Where is the cabbage? I bought cabbage the day before yesterday. Cucumbers, carrots, tomatoes. There it is! Sitting between the carrots and cucumbers! Grabbing the larger piece, aunty slices the cabbage into very thin pieces that topple on top of each other and then into the yellow plastic bowl aunty asked me to fetch. Semoana! O a’u? Aumai se aniani. A medium size onion, Semoana! A medium size onion! As the taro pieces continue to cool, I hand the onion to aunty who begins to slice into its thick and sour whiteness. The whiteness soon sizzle in the hot oil that aunty stirs with her gentle but firm hands. As the onions turn crispy, aunty scoops the pisupo into the skillet and it quickly gives off a wonderful meaty pisupo scent. Hmmmm . . . pisupo and sizzling onions! Matua manogi, Sa’ili says as she enters the kitchen. Ave ipu i luga o le laulau, aunty says. As Sa’ili and I set the plates and silverware on the table, aunty throws the cabbage into the pisupo and tosses them over and over.
As Sa’ili and I fold a napkin for each plate, we hear a basketball bouncing on the pavement outside. Sasa’e and Sisifo are returning from the playground. Hmm . . . pisupo! Sisifo says, as he opens the kitchen door. By this time, the cabbage and onions have settled into the pisupo giving off an aroma that makes us all restless. Aunty turns the oven to simmer and says, Ua ready fo’i le pisupo! The pisupo is ready. As Mareta and Teria enter the kitchen door carrying their school bags, aunty says, Fai se salati! O fuala’au la i totonu o le pusa’aisa. As she leaves, we finish up the preparations for dinner and breathe in the delicious smell of Samoan taro and pisupo. While cutting the greens, Mareta’s eyes focus on the taro. She mixes the cucumbers, lettuce, carrots, and green bell peppers together, and asks, Where is father’s glass? Here it is, Sa’ili says, closing the cupboard. The drinks, the ice, the glasses for each plate! Don’t forget the soup bowls! Sisifo and Sasa’e! It’s dinner time! Tell everybody dinner is ready! I walk to Uncle Talalelei’s room and tap on his door, Susu mai loa, ua laulau Ie taumafataga. Ua lelei, he says.

When uncle enters the dinning room, he is buttoning his shirt. Sa’ili sets the platter of taro in the middle of the table as uncle takes his seat at the head of the table. Aunty walks in and sits next to him. Matua manaia talo, he says, looking at the taro. Tapu brought it over, she says. He said, Mr. Chang give it to him for a good price. Oh, so generous of them! Did you give him some papa? Ioe. A bag full of papa and wahoo. Good. Good. Mother! You made papa? Ioe. You can have papa for tea.

The fall air is cool outside. The dinning room is quiet and deliciously warm. Uncle Talalelei folds his hands, bows his head and closes his eyes: Let us pray, uncle says. Faafetai le Atua mo lenei aso ua i’u rna Ie manuia. Ua uma feau ma galuega sa faageagai ai. E le muta lava lou alofa. Tele naau lou agalelei i mea ese’es e tauai ai o matou tino. Faafetai i le agalelei o tagata ua maua ai nei mea’ai o le a matou talia. Ia faapaia ma ia saga viia ai pea lou afio. I le suafa o Iesu, Amene.

Aunty passes the platter of taro to uncle and he grabs the baked piece sitting on top. Matua manaia kalo, he says. Nice taro. Tomorrow, aunty’s kitchen will smell like Mexican-American food. The store bought kind. We will all cook dinner. The shells, meat, cheese, and tomatoes are in the refrigerator. I like them. We all like them. Sasa’e and Sisifo will ask for seconds. I might too. Uncle and aunty will be at a church meeting. So uncle’s seat will be empty. The tacos, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, and hamburger will sit in the middle. Mareta will say to the boys: Sasa’e ma Sisifo, say prayer. Sasa’e and Sisifo will shut their eyes and sing softly as they always have since they were toddlers.

Malie pule le tama . . .

Sa’ili, Melia, Mareta, Teria and I will sing along.
Hello Mr. Chang!
Oh, Talofa! Pastor Talalelei and Faletua Moni. Hello. How are you this morning?
Manua lava faafetai, Mr. Chang! How are you?
Good! Good! Faafetai.
Do you have panipopo, this morning?
Yes, Moni! Yes! Panipopo just come in. Over here. See . . . nice and warm.
Oh, yes! Panipopo is nice and warm. You know that lady Sa. She make the best panipopo!
Oh, yes! Sa make the best panipopo. The bun so soft and not so sweet. She put in the right amount of coconut milk and sugar. Just right. That’s why I only like her sell her panipopo here at the market.
Mr. Chang!
Yes, Pastor Talalelei.
Chief Tapu bring nice taro to my house the other night. He said you give him good price. Thank you.
Yes. That taro I just get that morning. Chief Tapu come in and say, Mr. Chang, if you give me good price for minister’s taro, god give you blessing for your store. So first, I give him a good price, but he say too high. So I bring it down, but he still say too high. So finally I give it to him for one tala and ten sene and say, That’s final price! Tapu. Final price! And he finally take it. That Chief Tapu. He drive hard bargain all the time with me!
Thank you, Mr. Chang. Faafetai! We eat the nice taro that night. It was so good.
You know pastor that Chief Tapu. He a funny man. Every time he come here, he say, Mr. Chang, price too high. Bring price down! So I bring price down. Then he say, God above looking at you Mr. Chang. He watching how you set your prices for the people. So I say, this is a business. I need make a good profit so I can give good price. But he keep saying, God watching everything you do Mr. Chang, everything. So I get scared of your Samoan—what his name again? God Tagaloa—and change the price.
Oh, Mr. Chang. Yes, Chief Tapu. He is a funny man. But it’s not Tagaloa who watching you, Mr. Chang. It’s God.
Then who is Tagaloa, pastor?
Tagaloa is Samoan god. He our ancestor. But when we pray, we pray to God above. He the one who is watching us and you too, Mr. Chang.
Oh, so you pray to god above but Tagaloa is your ancestor. You don’t mix them up?
Oh, no! Samoan people never mix them up. We don’t forget Tagaloa. He is part of us. Inside our blood and heart. See this part of me? Near my heart. That is my moa. Like the word Sa—moa. That’s where we feel Tagaloa. Inside our moa.
Inside here, your moa, near your heart.
Yes, inside the Samoan person’s moa.
Mr. Chang?
Yes, Faletua Moni.
We take dozen and a half of panipopo. We have more kids now in our house. My
two nieces here come from Samoa to go to school.
Oh, Moni! Every time Samoan people come to Chang’s Market, their family get
bigger and bigger like yours.
Yes, Samoan families are big.
When Samoan families come shop here at Chang’s Market, they say they have
visitors from Samoa, Hawai’i, California, North Carolina, New Zealand, Australia. All
over the place! I always ask them, why you have so many people in your family and how
come they live in those places? And they laugh and say, big family is good. You always
have somebody to take care of you. How many children you take care of now, Moni?
Oh, I can’t remember. Too many.
What happened to the other two boys . . . I forget their names.
Oh, you talking about Nu’u and Kimo.
Yes, yes. Nu’u and Kimo. They come buy taro and banana all the time for you.
Yes. They graduate from high school. Nu’u join the military and Kimo, he play
football in California. They grown now.
They have sister too?
Yes, Tagi. She married now.
Oh, you take care of so many nieces and nephews.
Yes, and now two more nieces. This is Talalelei’s cousin’s daughters, Sa’ili and
Semoana. But Semoana here is my niece too. She my sister’s daughter. My sister marry
Talalelei’s cousin.
Oh, I get so confused about Samoan people. You have big big families.
Yes and plenty mouths to feed. That’s why we shop here at Chang’s Market for
banana, panipopo, moon pie, and taro.
Taro with good price, Mr. Chang! Good price.
Yes, taro with good price, pastor. Good price from Mr. Chang.
We go now, Mr. Chang. Sa’ili, tago e u’u mai panipopo.
Thank you for shopping at Mr. Chang’s Market, Pastor Talalelei.
Faafetai tele, Mr. Chang.
Oh, yes. Faafetai tele . . . la—va? Is that correct?
Yes, faafetai tele lava.
We come again.
Tofa!
Tofa soifua!

Aunty, the panipopo smells so good!
Ioe, o le manoni ia o panipopo a Mr. Chang.
Oh, look Aunty Moni! Amata’s is here! There’s her car. And so is Uncle Leni!
Yes, of course just in time to eat panipopo. Semoana, don’t forget the other bags
in the trunk.
Hi Amata! Hi Uncle Leni!
Hello Semoana! Hi Sa’ili! Father! What do you have there mother?
Panipopo na faatau mai ia Mr. Chang.
Panipopo! . . . Mmm. I can smell it!
Aniata. Tu’u panipopo i lu’a o ni ipu for you and Uncle Leni. Sa’ili, make some coffee.

Ali’i Leni. Ia...se’i fai se tala! What are you up to this morning?
Well, let’s see . . . I went to the pharmacy to pick up grandma’s fu’ala’au and then I dropped them off at home. When I got home, Nia just dropped off the boys and Melinda. Then Sa’ili asked if I could take her and Melinda to buy chocolate chips to make cookies. So I took them to the store. So now they’re baking cookies and I hope the kids don’t eat up all the cereal I bought from the commissary on Thursday.

Mother, your brother, Uncle Leni says he’s broke. But he wants to play bingo tonite.

Broke! Leni, I thought you just got your check on Thursday?
I did. I paid our bills and give money to the church. But yesterday, Jack called and said that his car broke down. So I go over to his house and help him but his car needed a new starter. So we take the car to the shop on Rainier but I knew the bum didn’t have any money. So I give him two hundred dollars.
Did he say he will pay it back?
Oh, come on Amata! This is Jack the bum!
Uncle Leni!
It’s true! He’s over fifty years old and he doesn’t have a steady job. He never pays anybody back!
So why do you hang around him?
Because he calls me every time he needs help with his car!
All right, Leni. So that’s two hundred dollars! What happened to the rest of your money?
Well, after I dropped Jack the bum off at home I stopped by to visit Aunty Malia and Julia was there. I visit with aunty and when I’m ready to leave I give her some money but Julia was sitting right next to her and I saw her looking inside my wallet.
Uncle, you probably wanted her to see how much money you had inside your wallet.
No! You know how big Julia’s eyes are.
Oh, Uncle Leni!
Amata, Julia’s eyes are big. And they always looking wanting to know everything. So when I gave Aunty Malia her money, Julia was watching me and I feel bad. So I take out some money and give it to her. And then her daughter came in. What’s her name? The big girl . . . the ugly one.
Uncle Leni!
She’s big! Amata.
I know uncle, but you don’t have to be mean about it.
Well, she’s not pretty and that’s why she has no husband.
Uncle. You’re something else. Her name is Cecilia.
Yeah that’s her name, Cecilia. Well, Cecilia the ugly girl walked in and say she
wanted to go to take her son to McDonald’s so I give her some money so she can take her
son to see Uncle Ronald McDonald.
So now you’re broke?
Well, I got a couple of dollars left in my wallet. Let me get my wallet out.
Semoana!
Yes, Uncle Leni?
Come over here! Come count my money for Amata. She don’t believe me when I
say I’m broke.
All right, Uncle Leni, her give it to me. Man! Uncle. You need a new wallet. This
one is falling apart.
See Amata! Your uncle needs a new wallet.
Thanks a lot Semoana!
But he does. Look at this hole. All his money will fall out.
Here Semoana. Count my coins too!
Oh, please Uncle Leni! You’re kidding!
Yuhu! You! Hehehe! Hey you! Pretty Samoan girl!? What’s your name?
Sa’ili.
Do they teach people how to count in Samoa?
Yes, they do!
Please come, pretty girl! Come and take my keys. Go inside my car and get all the
coins in the ashtray. Look under the seats to see if there’s any coins there too. Oh, and
don’t eat any of my minties! I know how many I have.
Mother, your brother is crazy!
Yes, I know that Amata. He’s been crazy! That’s what he gets for living with his
mother. E ataili ai le sososo.
Uncle Leni. You have twenty-three dollars and the coins add up to three dollars
and fifty-five cents.
Semoana, put all the money on the table so Amata can see how broke Uncle Leni
is. We wait for Sa’ili to come back. See, Amata! Your Uncle Leni is broke!
What is going on over here?
Father, Uncle Leni says he’s broke, but he wants to borrow money to go to bingo
tonite.
So give your uncle some money Amata.
The girls are counting my money, Talalelei. E le talitonu Amata ia a’u. She
doesn’t believe that I’m broke.
Here’s all the coins from your car!
Sa’ili, did you eat any of my minties?
No. I didn’t, but I picked up all the candy wrappers.
Oh, good. I always forget to throw away the wrappers. So how much money did
you find?
I counted four dollars and fifteen cents!
See, Amata! Uncle is broke! I have less than thirty dollars on me.
Uncle Leni, that's because every time you get your check, you visit all your relatives and pass out your money! And Jack. That bum! He knows exactly when you get your check. He's probably already trying to figure out how to spend your next check.

Amatamaisaua. Uncle Leni doesn't need that much to play bingo. Give uncle some money!

Oh, father! You're no help to Uncle Leni.

Semoana, hand me my purse.

See, Amata. You're an accountant or something like that! You know how fast money goes.

No, I know how fast it goes when it's in the hands of a fool.

Oh, Amata! You're so kind to Uncle Leni. So kind!

Here, Uncle Leni. And stop passing your money out to everybody! You need to learn how to save money.

I try to, but every time I get my check it seems the phone rings right before I walk out the door. Every time! Amatamaisaua. Every time!

That's because a week before you get your check you visit everybody and tell them, Oh, wait till next week. I get my check on Thursday and then I'll come by and give you some money. And those fools! They literally wait for your car to drive up to their driveways.

Thanks Amata! Amatamaisaua. You're the best niece. I'd hire you to be my accountant but I can't seem to keep any money in my account at the bank. Hehehe! Isn't Amata your favorite cousin, girls?

Yes, Uncle Leni. She is.

Speaking of banks! Mother said you don't like to go to the bank because you don't like the revolving door, father?

What did your mother say?

She said, you don't like the revolving door at the bank because you don't know how to jump in the door.

You mean that door that goes around and around like this?

Yes, Uncle Leni! It's called a revolving door.

Amata, your mother! She can tell long stories. I know how to go inside those doors. What? You think people from Manu'a don't know how to walk inside those round doors!

Father, I didn't say that.

I know who scared to walk to those doors?

Who? Father.

You know Pastor Savali from San Francisco?

Yes, your relative from Manu'a.

Yes. When we were in San Francisco for our pulega meeting in June. His lavalava got stuck in the door!

Are you sure, father? Don't forget. You are a pastor!

Ea? I'm telling the truth, Amata. When we had our church meeting one afternoon, he walked in and we see a hole in his lavalava. So Pastor Mau asked him, Sole, e te iloa o lena e pu lou lavalava? And he said that he knew he had a hole but he didn't care. So
Pastor Mau asked Savali what happened and he said, he was trying to get into one of those doors but it was going too fast. So then he jumped into the door and when he jumped his lavalava got stuck but he didn’t care. He was happy he got into the door.

All right. I won’t ask anymore questions . . . I can see where revolving door story is going!

So Talalelei, did he go change his lavalava?

No, Leni. He walk around the meeting like there is no hole in his lavalava.

You know Amata!

Yes, Uncle Leni.

You know that lady Salome who lives on Cloverdale?

You mean the Samoan lady who brings all her twelve children to the church luau and eat up all the food?

Yeah, that one. Jack told me she got stuck in a door like that.

Uncle Leni . . . you know that money I gave you for bingo? If you continue to tell me that story, I’ll take your money away from you.

Amata. Amatamaisaua! You’re from Manu’a. Your name is a sacred place in Manu’a. It means, it starts in Manu’a. You need to have a Manu’a sense of humor.

I do. I’m just not going to make up all these long stories that don’t have any endings.

But that’s what it means to tell a story from Manu’a. They go round and round like that palagi door.

It’s all right father. I never should’ve asked about that revolving door at the bank.

Amata. I’ll tell you that story another time.

No, Uncle Leni. Please don’t tell me. You go and tell Jack the bum that story.

Thank you for the money, Amata. Amatamaisaua!

You’re welcome, Uncle Leni.
Grandma’s House

Come on Sa’ili! Let’s go inside. Ta o i totonu! My grandma doesn’t bite—well, she won’t if her head is screwed on right. Hehehe! Sau!

Hi little Sa’ili
Hi older Sa’ili

I was wondering when you tama’ita’i would come to visit us? Faapea ua galo mai a’u. I thought you forgot about me.
How can I forget my older cousin Sa’ili! Nevah!
O mai! Come in. Grandma’s in her room.
Where are Sasa’e and Sisifo?
Around here somewhere. Those boys! E ese le ulavavale. They’ve been running in and out of the house all morning.
What time did Uncle Leni drop them off?
Early this morning and I mean ear—ly this morning. You know Uncle Leni. He got paid this week so he’s out spending his money on everybody. He took Sasa’e and Sisifo to the store before he dumped them here. I’m fixing grandma’s lunch so you have a sat. Semoana, vaai sikoni na i luga o le laulau. Help yourself with the scones. Se’i fai atu le mea’ai a le lo’omatua.

Se Malia! I told you long time ago! Ua leva na fai atu ia oe! Your daughter’s husband is a bum! Your daughter married a bum! That’s why she suffering now. O le mea lena ua tigaina ai lau tama!
Semoana! Who’s your grandma talking to?
Her sister. Aunty Malia. She’s my grandma’s older sister, but grandma acts like she’s older. My grandma tells everybody in the family what to do—how to raise their children, grandchildren, how to treat their in-laws. E malosi ia o le leo o le lo’omatua.
She reminds me of Aunty Mili in Samoa.
She means to do good.

Sa’ili!
Sa’ili!

Sa’ili! Grandma is calling you.
Yes, Grandma?
Call Aunty Moni! Vili Moni! Tell her to come and pick up Sasa’e and Sisifo. They’re too noisy for me! They keep running in and out of the house. Ua palapala uma le fale! Oh, and tell her I think they ate all my kofe nibs. The last bag is in the trash.

Sisifo! Sasa’e!

Sasa’e and Sisifo!
Grandma is calling you guys!

O ai na aia a’u kofe nibs?
I didn’t eat your coffee nips, grandma.
Sisifo?
I saw Sasa’e eat two.
You ate some too! Sisifo.
I only ate one.
No, I saw you with three.
Go play outside! O e eva i fafo! And don’t come near my bed anymore! Ua oulua faalogo mai!

Sa’ili! Sa’ili! Vaai tamaiti la! Make sure they don’t go outside the yard!

Semoana! Bring the telephone! Dial Aunty Moni’s phone number.
Ok, grandma! I’m coming. What did I tell you about my grandma!
Dear Semoana. Just make sure your grandma doesn’t chase us out of her house.

Hello! Who’s this? O ai lea? Tu’u le telefoni ia Moni. Give Moni the telephone.
Hello, Mamason.
Moni!
Mamason. Aua e te ee. I can hear you loud and clear. Did something happen?
It’s your boys! Moni. ISasa’e ma Sisifo.
Oh, no! What did they do?
Ua ai uma a’u kofe nibs!
Hehehe! Mamason. Are you sure the boys ate all your coffee nips?
Moni! The bag is in the trash!
I’m sorry. I’ll bring some more later.
No! Come now! Come and pick up Sasa’e and Sisifo now! I got a headache from them. They’re too ulavavale. I don’t want them to here. They bring dirt inside the house. Come and get them now before they eat more of my kofe nibs.
Ok. Mamason. Ok. I’ll pick them up after lotu.
Mamason, are you going to feed the boys?
I’ll think about it.
You scare the children with all your screaming.
If they would stay away from my bed, I wouldn’t yell so much. I don’t know why they come near my bed for. They just want to eat all my kofe nibs. Moni?

Yes, Mamason?
Did your brother Leni come to your house this afternoon?
No. He came this morning when he picked up Sasa’e and Sisifo. But he was here yesterday. Amata gave him some money for bingo.

See! That’s what he gets for being nice to everybody. When he gets paid he gives his money to every pona au he can find. Ese lea alofa faavalevalea! He’s a fool.

Mamason, he told us that he gave Jack some money for his car.
Jack the bum! Jack is nothing but a bum. I don’t know why your cousin Lelei married him. She’s the other fool in this family.

Hehehe! Mamason!
It’s true! Last month at church I told her to dump him but she just laugh. So she suffer now and this fool Leni give Jack money whenever he calls. See! That’s why I’m going to get two telephones. I want one right here next to my bed, so I can listen to everybody that calls the house. Every time that bum Jack calls or any other fool, I’m going to tell them off! I have no patience for fools and bums!

Did Leni give Aunty Malia money?
That’s what he told Amata.
That fool! Leni’s a fool!
Aunty Malia is your sister.
I don’t care. If she can’t handle her children and their children, then she’s a fool too! Wait till we get off the phone. I’m going to call her again and give her a piece of my mind.

You don’t need to do that.
Moni! She’s my sister. Don’t tell what to do. I can do whatever I want. Who brought the family to Seattle? Who? Tell me who? Your brother Falefa did! When he get out of the military he buy a house here in Seattle and then I tell him to bring all his cousins here.

I know Mamason. I know.
Now look! Everybody from Sasa’e lives here in Seattle. What Aunty Malia and her kids doing? I don’t like it. They not living good here in Amerika. She’s valea.

Mamason, be careful about what you say. Your grandchildren may do something you don’t like.

Who? Tell me who? Which one of my grandchildren? Tell me. Your Aunty Malia. She don’t scold her children like how I scold all of you. I call you and Nai up every day and scold you and you’re almost sixty.

Please, don’t remind me.

But Aunty Malia, she’s weak. Her voice is weak. So she not smart! If you have a weak voice with your own children, then you’re matavalea. She’s a stupid fool. I’m going to go call her as soon as I hang up this telephone. She need a scolding from me!

Don’t treat your sister like that!
Moni! You don’t know. Soia le fai mai tala e niniva ai lo’u ulu. You’re giving me a headache. I’m hanging up on you now. Ok. And don’t forget to come get Sasa’e and Sisifo and my kofe nibs. Don’t forget my kofe nibs! I like the choklate ones.
Ok, Mamason. Ok.

Sa’ili!
Sa’ili!
Yes, grandma!
What is Nai’s phone number? Sau e vili le telefoni. Ua leaga la’u vaa’i.
Semoana, who is Nai?
She’s my mother’s other sister.

Hello? Nai!
Hello, Mamason.
Nai!
Mamason. Se aua e te e’e. I can hear you.
Nai, I’ve been waiting for you to come and get your pisupo.
I know Mamason. I got off work late and I was tired. I’ll get them tomorrow.
Nai? Whose voice is that I hear?
It’s Teu’s voice and her children.
Teu’s voice! Teu and the children are here in Seattle?
Yes, Mamason.
Na o mai anafea?
They came on Wednesday.
Is that why you didn’t come to get your pisupo?
No, Mamason.
Nai! You better not lie to me! I’m your mother. You hear me?
I hear you Mamason. I hear you.
Why is Teu here?
Please don’t ask too many questions.
Nai! What do you mean don’t ask questions! You think I’m a stupid mother to sit and not say anything if I smell something not going right? Don’t be a fool ok.
You’re right, Mamason. E sa’o fo’i oe. They came to visit.
Nai! I’m telling you, you tell Teu that I said to go back to her husband. Tell her to stop coming home to Mama every time her and the husband have a fight.
Mamason, please! Don’t say anything.
You listen to me! You tell Teu what I say. Don’t be weak. That’s how children get stupid because the mother’s voice is weak and scared. Tautala sa’o ia Teu.
I will.
Tell her that’s not how to do marriage. If you get married, and trouble happens, you work it out. Not run away. Did he hit her?
   No, Mamason. No.
   Good! Because if he did, then tell me and I’ll give him a piece of my mind. I’ll call his mother and his father and tell them they raise a bad son.
   He didn’t hit her. They’re learning.
   Nai, you tell Teu what I say. It’s for the good for her and the children. A fai le to’alua, ia fai lelei le aiga.
   Ok, Mamason, Ok.
   Nai, don’t forget to come get your pisupu. Oh, and Nai?
   Yes, Mamason?
   Can you pick up some kofe nibs. Sasa’e and Sisifo ate all my kofe nibs today.
   Hehehe! I will. How long have the boys been there?
   Your brother, Leni brought them here. He got paid so he went and picked them up. He probably took them to the store. They’re giving me a headache. I already called your sister Moni to get them.
   Don’t worry Mamason, I’ll bring you some coffee nips. Oh and Mamason, Teu wants to bring the children to see you.
   Bye Mamason. I won’t forget the kofe nibs.
Just Sitting In a Box

Today is the day
I begin the good
education I left Samoa to get

I enter my English class
and sit in the second seat
of the last row

The teacher looks up
and says,
this is your homework
Look at the words
one to twenty

Match the words
on the left with the
the definitions
in the box
on the right

Since this is the first
homework I left
Samoa to complete
I fold my list
and slip it in my school bag

At lunch
I check to see
that my folder is safe

On the bus
I check to see
that my school bag is safe

At home
I place my school bag
with my homework
underneath my bed

When darkness arrives
Uncle Talalelei says
O mai! Se’i fai se lotu
Come! So we can say a prayer

We read the Tusi Paia
sing a Samoan hymn
and listen while uncle
thanks the Lord
for breakfast
lunch
and dinner

At dinner
Melia serves
Samoan sapasui
white rice
and yellow saga

With Samoan sapasui
white rice
and yellow corn
on our plates

We laugh
talk, laugh
and scoop seconds
onto our plates

After eating
we clean
wash and dry the dishes

Then we laugh
talk and laugh
some more

Before we turn
the kitchen lights off
Aunty Moni calls out

Fa’ati’eti’e se vai vevela!
Boil some hot water!

As the teapot
heats on the stove
Initeria opens the organ
and plays a Samoan hymn

Cousin Sa’ili
closes her eyes
opens her mouth
to form a circle
and sings as if
she’s on television

Mareta and I
laugh, laugh, and laugh

Ua pupuna le vai vevela?
Is the water boiling!
Aunty Moni calls out

Fai le ti!
Fix the tea!
so that aunty doesn’t scream again
Initeria hollers

After I place
aunty’s tea next to her night stand
I go to the girls’ room
O le potu a teine
our room and pull out
my school bag
from under the bed

The homework
one to twenty
for my good education
sits inside a box

Who are you?
I ask

Why do you
sit so still
inside your box?

Are you going to speak
to me?

Move
excite
tickle
and take over my body

Or are you
going to sit still
inside your box?

We’d have more fun
If you’d tell me
a story about where you come from?

Sing a song?
say a poem?
show a dance?

No?

Ia, e le afaina
That’s all right

You’re waiting
for me
to do work
all the work
in your world

The world
I came to get
my good education from

Ia, here I come
one to twenty
inside your world
to sit still like a box
Oh, Dear

I want you to say here when I call your name:

Jeanine Cole
Here!
Susan Evans
Here!
Kenneth Gray
Here!

Sah—ee—lee?
It’s Sa’ili, sir.
Sah—ee—lee?
Yes, Sa’ili.

Gah—gah—nah?
It’s Ga—ga—a, sir. The Samoan G sounds like nah, sir.

Gah—gah—gah?
No, sir. Ga . . . like the word gnaw as in gnaw the bone.

Gah—gah—nah?
Hmm. Sure . . . Gahgahgah is good, sir. Good enough.

Why don’t we just call you Sah—ee—lee Gee as in the letter G

Yes, sure
Saheelee Gee is nice. Very nice. Manaia fo’i

Dear! Mareta. You should’ve heard my teacher today trying to pronounce my last name.

Oh no, Sa’ili! How did she say it?
It’s a man, dear, a man. O le tamaloa. He said, Sah—ee—lee Gah—gah—gah. Gahgahgah!
Joe. I almost said to him, Gah! Gah! Gah! Gaea!
Saili, the Samoan G is very difficult for people to pronounce.
Se, ioe Mareta! But still, it’s my name. Ua ou fiu lava e fa’ata’ita’i i ai le G faasamo. I kept saying, the Samoan G sounds like ga as in ping pong, but he kept saying, gah...gah...gah. Then I tried the silent g sound like the word gnaw but he still
said, gah...gah...gah. Finally, he said, we’ll just call you Sah—ee—lee Gee. As in the letter G. So now I’m Sa’ili Gee as in the letter G, not Sa’ili Gagana.

Sa’ili, Samoans mispronounce words all the time. They say,

Pasket for basket
Putter for butter
Ko for go
and Gar for car

I know they do, dear! Everybody does! Samoans say,

Pook for book
Free for three
Hospital for hospital
And Hey papy! for Hey baby!

Well then you can’t be too mad at your teacher. Samoans do it too. If anything, we might be worse.

What do you mean, Mareta?
When Samoan people hear Chinese words, they look at each other and say, Poo a la tala e fai? What in the world are they saying?
Ae sa’o fo’i and then they make fun of the sounds by saying, ching—gong bing—ming king—ding.

Sa’ili, Samoans say worse things.
Ok, papy Mareta! Do you want som putter for your pread?
O oe Sa’ili! You’re such a Samoan ball. Oi! I mean Samoan pall.
Dear! It’s not Sa’ili Gagana. It’s Saheelee Gee. As in the letter Gee.
Ia ua lelei ali’i Miss Gee, as in the letter G.

Hi there! My name is Michelle Robins.
Hi. My name is Sa’ili Gagana.
Saheee, what?
Auoi! Here we ko akain!
Sa’ili—Sa—‘ili.
Sah—ee—lee.
Yes, Sa’ili.
And your last name is Gah—gah—what?
Naw—naw—naw!
You got it! Very kood. Just call me Sa’ili. I’m from Sa—moa.
So—malia?
No, Sa—mo—a!
Say—mow—ah
Yes, Sa—mo—a.
Where’s that?
In the Pacific ocean.
Where?
Look at that map over there on the wall. Do you see that big blue space in the middle?
Yes.
See those sea of islands? That’s where Samoa is in the Pacific ocean.
Oh, you’re Hawaiian!
Oh, Tear!
No! I’m Sa—moan. Samoans and Hawai’ians are cousins, from the family of Pili, but I’m from Sa—moa, not Hawai’i. Teary! Teary! Teary! Samoa is an island in that ocean on the wall. The Pacific ocean!
I know but where exactly in that ocean?
Well, this is good. You actually want to know about Say—mo—ha. Have you been to Hawai’i?
No, but I know where it’s at.
Well that’s kood. If you ever get the chance to go sunbathing or surfing in Hawai’i, tell the pilot to take you to Samoa first.
Huh?
Ioe. Tell the pilot to keep flying the airplane, over Hawai’i . . . like this . . . and keep going south for about five hours. When you see little lights blinking below, then you tell the pilot to slow down and land the plane. When the pilot parks the plane, you will hear a sweet Samoan female voice over the speaker saying,

E muamua ona ave le vi’iga ma le faafetai i le Atua
ua taunu’u ma le manuia la tatou faigamalaga i lenei po.

That’s a Samoan flight attendant thanking the Lord above for a safe trip.
A flight attendant thanking the Lord on an airplane?
Yes, Dear. In Samoa, we thank the Lord for every—thing. I mean every—thing!
Anyway, when you walk out of the airplane, the hot air of Samoa will hit you right here in your face. Your eyeliner will make black lines down your face. But don’t worry because it will be dark outside so no one will see you. So you will walk down the steep stairs and step onto the pavement, ok dear, not carpet but pavement. Once you step onto the pavement, you’ll see all the airport workers standing around laughing and joking in Samoan and looking to see if they are related to the passengers and of course, looking for pretty girls like you. Tala ula! I’m kidding. Anyway, that is the Samoa on that wall over there.

Wow! So I can tell the pilot to fly past Hawai’i?
Yes, you tell him to fly past Hawai‘i. See you’re getting it, but you have to be on the look out because Samoa is a black dot at night so you might miss it. There are only fifteen airport lights flashing at a time.

Fifteen?
Well, maybe ten flashing lights if they forgot to change the bulbs.

Dear Mareta! You want to hear about your cousin’s day at school today?

Oh, no! What happened today?
One girl asked, if Samoa was in Africa. Another one asked if I was Mexican.
Mareta, does your pretty cousin look Mexican?

Ailoga ea oe Sa’ili!

Dear Mareta, look at me. This Samoan hair is black. This skin is brown and pretty but I don’t look Mexican. Another girl said, Oh you’re Hawaiian when I said Samoa was south of Hawai‘i. I almost said, yes, I’m Hawaiian. My father is from Maui and my mother is from the Big Island of Savai‘i.

Sa’ili, a lot of people have never heard of Samoa before. So you have to explain it to them.

Dear! Ua ta fiu fo’i e explain ma explain ma explain! How many times do I have to explain?
As many times as you need to.

E te iloa la, Mareta. Next time somebody asks me if Samoa is in Africa, I’ll say, yes, Samoa is an island in the middle of Africa and when they say, I didn’t know there was an island in the middle of Africa? Then I’ll say, there is now. And if they ask me if I’m Hawai‘ian, I’ll say, Yes. Then I’ll swing my hips this way and that way and say, can’t you tell by the way I sway my hips?

Se, Sa’ili! And what if they say, Oh, I was in Hawai‘i for vacation last summer. Which island are you from?
Then I’ll say, my father is from Manu’a on Maui and my mother is from Manono on the Big Island of Savai‘i.

You are such a Samoan ball!
It’s pall! Dear. Pall! Re—mem—per?

Welcome to PE class! On Wednesday, come to class ready to suit up. Bring blue shorts, a white t-shirt and your running shoes. The girls’ showers are on my left and the boys’ showers are on my right. You will be provided with a towel and you’ll have fifteen minutes to shower, dress and get to class. Any questions?
Shower? Did I hear that teacher say shower as in naked shower?
Yes, Sa’ili. This is America. Remember? Don’t they have PE in Samoa?
Of course, they do! But it’s Samoan PE. We wear whatever we wear to school. That means a lavalava, slippers, long skirts, jeans, anything. And if the sun is too hot, we sit under the pulu tree and pretend we’re reading our fat boring health book.
Why do you sit under the tree during PE?
Because my dear Miss Michelle, Samoans don’t sit in the hot sun. We prefer the shade because we don’t want to ruin our pretty color. See my pretty color?
You’re something else, you know that Sa’ili. So you go to class smelly?
Smelly? Oh, no, deary! We smell kood after PE class but if somebody does say that you smell, then you turn around and say, Are you sure you’re not smelling yourself!
Ouch, Sa’ili! You guys are so raw in Samoa.
Yes, we like to be raw that’s why we like our fish raw.
Well, this is America Sa’ili, remember this is America, and we take showers after PE class. And we shower to—gether! Sa’ili. To—gether!
Auoi! Tele le faalavelave! That is a pig problem for me Miss Michelle!
But why would it be? We’re all girls.
Dear! I don’t want to taele with all these girls!
Tah—ele?
Yes. Taele is shower. I don’t want to taele with these strangers. I don’t want to see their fugu.
You don’t want to see their what?
Their fugu, dear! Fugu. Like you—I don’t want to see your fugu.
But I’m a girl like you, Sa’ili!
Girl, kirl, girl! It doesn’t matter. I don’t want to see their fugu in the shower. Girls in Samoa shower together all the time. But we wear our lavalava and we know each other so we take very long showers. Our showers are so long that somebody’s mother will scream and say, Hurry up! Tape le va’iti! Matua fai tatala tele! A bunch of gossipers! But that’s in Samoa. But taking a shower naked with you and them? Dear, dear. I don’t think so!
But nobody looks at you when you’re taking a shower!
That’s a big pepelo, Missy! If I look at other girls’ fugu then I know they’re looking at mine. Tele le faalavelave! This is a pig pig problem!

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Oka, se malie fo’i o lenei aso, Mareta!
Never a dull moment with you Sa’ili! What happened?
In my PE class, I found out that I have to taele with all the girls. My friend told me no one looks at anybody, but dear, that is a big pepelo! Everybody looks at everybody!
Don’t tell me you’re shy.
Shy? Me? I’m not shy. I just don’t want to show this here pretty body to strangers! Mareta, I’m too pretty and precious, rememper?
I rememper, Sa’ili. You’ll get used to it. You only get fifteen minutes so everybody will be running around trying to get dressed and get to class. No one will even notice you.
Martha, dear! If I notice them, trust me, they will notice me! Maybe I’ll just act like a Samoan ball and wrap my lavalava around me in the shower.
I don’t think they’ll let you wear your lavalava while you’re taking a shower. But why?
Well, maybe they will. I don’t know. It’s just that everybody will stare at you because you’ll be the only one covered up. That will be more uncomfortable.
I wonder what will happen if I did take a shower with my lavalava on?
You can try it, if you’re brave.
I’ll tell the teacher it’s my culture to shower with my lavalava. I’ll wear my lavalava with the big green pili in the middle and say the pili protects Samoan girls so they better not mess with the pili on my lavalava because it might jump out and bite them.

A pili! Jumping out and bitting them?
How will you ever survive going to school here? It’s only been your first week.
I’ll survive Mareta. I am a sur—vi—vor. Oi, malie ia o le isi teine. Her name was Evelyn Kristo. She’s in one of my history class. Anyway, she didn’t look palagi to me so I asked her about her last name.
O le a le uiga o lau tala e le foliga palagi?
Well, she was fair but she just didn’t look palagi palagi. You know. She looked different. Her color was different.
Fai mai la e a?
She said her last name was Greek. I’ve never met a person from Greece. All I know about Greece are the stories in the bible. When I asked her when she came to the states, she said she was an American. I got confused and I must’ve sounded faavaleavalea because then she said that her great-grandparents immigrated to the states. That she’s never been to Greece and she’s an American.
Well, she is American, Sa’ili. People born and raised in this country—like me—that’s what we say, we’re Americans, Samoans but Americans too. I’ve never been to Samoa.
Yeah, I never thought about it in that way. I can’t imagine not visiting Samoa! Even if my parents left us here in Seattle, I’d still visit Samoa. Don’t you want to visit some day?
Of course, I do! After hearing everybody talk about Samoa and all the crazy things you people do there makes me want to go.
But the girl I met today didn’t sound like she wanted to visit Greece. She looked at me funny when I asked if she plans to visit there.
Well, maybe they don’t have any more relatives back in Greece.
But how can you not have relatives there? Is it because we Samoans have too many relatives?
Maybe. Are you saying that’s a bad thing? To have so many relatives?
I don’t know. It’s so confusing for me coming from Samoa.
What are you girls giggling about?
Oh, hi Teria! Hi Melia!
I’m laughing at Sa’ili. She’s confused about why her Greek friend doesn’t want to visit Greece like how Samoans travel back and forth to Samoa all the time.
Sa’ili, Greek people have huge families like Samoans!
Really, Melia? Then why didn’t this girl want to visit Greece? And she said she
doesn’t speak Greek and that she’s an American.
Well, Mareta and I have never been to Samoa.
But you speak Samoan?
That’s because father and mother speak Samoan to us and we have all these
Samoan relatives that speak Samoan like you, Semoana, and Teria. And we go to a
Samoan church.
Ae sa’o fo’i. E matua confusing tele ia mea! But how can you forget your home
country?
America is their country. They have no connection to the country of their
grandparents. This is their home.
Do you guys feel connected to Samoa?
I don’t about Melia, but I do. I’ve heard so many stories from my parents and all
these relatives that come through this house and sit at this table. This table! This very
table is where I’ve heard all the crazy stories about Samoa.
How come you guys never came to visit Samoa?
I’m not sure. It’s expensive to travel there. I think when I’m older I’ll go there.
Like when I graduate from high school, father will buy Melia and I tickets to Samoa as
graduation presents. That’s what he did for Amata. That’s the only reason why she went
back.
That’s an idea, right Teria? We can go back and you can be our tour guide. We
can stay with your parents for a while and you can give us a tour of all those places in
Faga’itua that you and Fiti talk about.
When did you come to Seattle, Teria?
We came three years ago when I was a freshman and he was a sophomore.
Why?
Like you girls. My parents. My father wanted us to get a good education here in
the states.
Do you miss Samoa?
Of course! But I know that I’m here for a reason—to help my family and for a
good life.
Ea Sa’ili? You miss Samoa?
Just a little pit. It’s so different here. So confusing.
Toeitiiti lava e masani. It’ll get better.
But I’m still pretty though, right Mareta? See my pretty—ness!
Yes, Sa’ili. You are pre—tty! Very very bre—tty!
White Sunday in Seattle

Melia: I can’t go with you guys this Saturday.

Kadissha: Watcha talking bout you caint go?

Melia: We have White Sunday practice.

Kadissha: Yall got what kind of practice?

Melia: White Sunday!

Kadissha: And what the heck is White Sunday?

Melia: A special day for Samoan children.

Kadissha: Girl! Yall ain’t no child! Yu an old woman! Yall gonna graduate in June and here yall calling yoself a child for White Sunday!

Melia: In Samoan culture, as long as I ain’t married, I’m still a child. I’m Ruth in the play.

Kadissha: Who’s Ruth?

Melia: A woman in the bible. She was a foreigner. Do you know the story?

Kadissha: Yall know I don’t know them bible stories. Hell! The only ones I know are the ones you be telling me!

Melia: Ruth’s husband died, so she followed her mother-in-law back to her hometown.

Kadissha: She did what?

Melia: She followed her mother-in-law!

Kadissha: Now why she wanna do something like that after her husband gone and died?

Melia: She loved her mother-in-law!

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Kadissha: Lynette! Come ova here! Listen to this Samoan woman. She ova here telling me she caint go on Saturday cuz she got some White Sunday thang going on! Now she telling me she playing some woman named Ruthie in the Bible. Tell me Melia, whatcha do in that White Sunday play of yaz?

Melia: I sneak into the house of a rich man and while he’s sleeping, I crawl under his blanket and sleep at his feet.

Kadissha: You what? Oh, Lod have mercy! See! I knew yall was doing some funky stuff in that Samoan church of yaz! Hmmm! Now yall got me wanting to know about this Ruthie woman. Hmmm! She a naughty woman! Crawling under a man’s blanket.

Lynette: Kadissha! I know what Melia is talking bout. Yall need to come to Capitol Hill Baptist Church if yall wanna see the holy spirit move, then . . . Girl! Yall gotta come to my church! The holy spirit be moving in my church!

Kadissha: There go Lynette! Talking bout that holy spirit! Yall scare me and ya holy spirit thang! Stop messing with me girl! I wanna hear Melia and this Ruthie woman. So what Melia? Did that Ruthie woman get it on with Bozie or what?

Melia: Kadissha! His name is Boaz! Not Bozie.

Kadissha: Bo—az! Boozie! Boz! Whateva! I’ll call him whateva I wanna call him. So did she spend the night with Boozie or what?

Melia: Well, she did slept under his blanket at his feet, but I don’t think she was with him, but she did sleep there at his feet. She was just doing what her mother-in-law told her to do!

Kadissha: Whatcha talking bout? Her motha-in-law told her to crawl under a man’s blanket?

Lynette: Kadissha! That’s what the story says happened. She had to. Jesus Christ was born from that line.

Kadissha: Girl! There yall go! Talking bout Jesus like yall know him!

Lynette: Girl, I do!

Kadissha: Lynette! Whatcha ya know ‘bout Jesus!

Lynette: Girl! I is going to church now with my grandma!

Kadissha: Since when!
Lynette: Since this summer! And let me tell you girl! The holy spirit be moving in our church! Like this girl! And like this! Y'all need to check it out some time!

Kadissha: Nah! Das alright. Y'all can bless me after ya go to yall church. Hell! There's two of yall and one of me. I caint run away and hide. Y'all got some wild stories at your churches. Motha-in-laws telling they daughters to sneak under a man's blanket. If that ain't wild, I don't know what is. So Melia, whatcha gonna do on White Sunday? Y'all going to crawl under a blanket?

Melia: Yes, I am, girl!

Kadissha: Girl! Maybe I'll come to yall church just so I can see Melia crawl under a man's blanket. I hope y'all got a sweet looking man to play Boozie the Boz! If they make me crawl under a man's sheet, he bettah be worth crawling for! Y'all all wild. Ya know that! Y'all got some wild religion. But it's cool. It's cool.

Lynette: So Melia? Y'all gotta wear something special on this White Sunday thang?

Melia: All white! Girl. All white!

Lynette: Do you mean as in... all white... dress, shoes, earrings, and all!

Melia: From head to toe, Girl! Head to toe! That's why we Samoans call it... White Sunday!

Kadissha: Y'all Samoans got some funky thang going on at yall church! Shoot! If my Mama caint get me in no white dress, that good Lord of yaz caint do no bettah!

Melia: That's cause you need a Samoan motha Girl! A Samoan motha! You need one who can scream from morning till night.

Kadissha: Nah! Thas alright! Y'all can keep ya Samoan motha. Hell! I got enough with my own black motha and her mouth. She can probably out scream ya Samoan motha.

Lynette: I don't know about that, Kadissha! I've heard Melia's aunt scream. And dang! That woman can scream!

Melia: You talking about my Aunty Sulia?

Lynette: Yeah! That one! She crazy as hell!

Melia: Yeah! She is. She's my father's sister. And yeah, when she get mad, she can scream her Samoan mouth off!
Lynette: I hear you! Yall Samoan women they like black women. When it’s time to scream, they know how to scream!

Kadissha: So Melia, back to this Ruthie lady ya goin to play at ya church.

Melia: Kadissha! If you so interested in Ruth and her man Boaz, you should come to church. Hell, I’ll give you a bible if that’s the case. We got tons lying round my house.

Kadissha: Nah! Thas alright. I’ll just wait for yall to tell me on Monday. Like I said, I caint run away from you and yo man Boozie!

Melia: Ok, Kadissha. Hey! I gotta go. There’s my cousin Ria, we gotta go to . . . you know . . . White Sunday practice.
Her Name Is Initeria

One morning while mother made koko Samoa for father, I grew to the size of a large breadfruit inside her stomach. O le teine le pepe lenei—This baby is a girl! she said, pouring koko into father’s cup. After father finished his koko Samoa, he grabbed his school ato, drove to Faga’itua High School, and walked into his classroom. When the bell rang, the girls and boys hurried into the classroom and sat at their seats.

Ua a ali’i Vai, a boy asked?
E le’i lava le moe, Vai said.
Elena! a girl asked, Who braided your hair?
Ea—e nice? Elena answered.
Joe, dear! the girl said.

When the girls and boys were ready, father stood up and asked, Who knows the story of the birth of this beautiful girl named American Samoa? No one knew the answer so everybody sat still. Woof! Woof! a dog barked outside the class window. Sh! Halu! Halu! Taeo, the janitor, screamed while throwing a rock at the dog. Father straightened his lavalava and gently asked again, E leai lava se isi e iloa le tala i le fanau mai o le tama’ita’i lalelei lea o Amerika Samoa? This time a short guy named Sakaio moved in his seat. I think she was born in 1900, he thought to himself. Sakaio wanted to raise his hand, but he was too shy, so he sat still and stared at father. Well, father said, se’i faamatala atu la le tala i mea na tupu i le va o . . . e tusa o le va o le 1860 ma le 1900. I will tell you a story about some events that took place . . . around the late 1800’s. The story goes something like this. E faapea le tala . . .

Sa iai ni teine malolosi lava e to’atolu e igoa ia Iunaita Setete, Siamani, ma Peretania. There were three very, very strong girls named United States, Germany and Great Britain. One morning, these girls decided to swim to the Pacific Ocean to look for some Samoan boyfriends. Oi! Hehehe! I mean islands. Germany wanted to buy some land to set up some plantations, Great Britain wanted to add more islands to her faaputuga — collection — and the other girl — United States — well, she was looking for some island to build a refueling station for her ships. Anyway, these girls didn’t really like each other for all kinds of silly reasons. Germany thought she had the thickest braids, Great Britain said she had the softest braids, and the United States, well, she thought that braids were out of style! She wanted long hair down to her waist. You know. Down to here. Ioe. Hehehe! Anyways, the girls tried their best to . . . teu le va . . . keep the peace between them. While swimming in the Pacific Ocean, the girls kept running into each other. For example, when Germany landed on one island, Great Britain would go there too. They tried to avoid each other but it was hard because the islands were near each other and they were related to each other too. You know us islanders here in the Pacific. We’re all one big aiga. But that didn’t stop the girls from looking for boyfriends. I mean islands! The mountains were so pretty and green, the beaches were sandy white, and their oceans so blue and beautiful.
One day, the girls were swimming near a group of islands called Samoa. As far as they could tell, there were about seven to ten islands in this Samoan family and they looked so nice and beautiful. So the girls started to check-out the islands to see what they looked like inside. Germany and Great Britain stopped on the islands of Upolu and Savai‘i and they noticed that there was a lot of fighting going on between the matai over who was strongest, who would own the land, and who would be king of so and so village or itumalo. But instead of leaving, Germany and Great Britain decided to stay in Upolu because there was a lot of land to grow plantations and there were coconut trees everywhere—where! loe, lots of coconuts trees to make copra. So they stayed and pretty soon, Germany started talking to some of the matai there about buying land to make plantations. And that is how Germany got involved in the local wars between the matai in Upolu and Savai‘i and ended up staying there.

While all of this was happening on the islands of Upolu and Savai‘i, United States was watching from the ocean. There’s too much riff-raff going on over there, she thought to herself. I think I’ll swim to that other island, Tutuila and see what he’s got. Besides, three girls on one island is a crowd and I only want a place near the water to build a safe refueling station for my ships when they pass through this big ocean. So United States swam and swam to the island of Tutuila. She was a good swimmer, don’t you think? I mean swimming all the way from Upolu to Tutuila like the Samoans girls of Taema and Tilafaiga who swam to Fiji and brought back the art of tattooing. You girls and boys know that story? No. Auoi! We’ll, I’ll tell you another day. Anyway, when United States reached Tutuila, she found what looked like the mouth of a harbor. Could this be a harbor? she thought to herself. She got excited and started to swim further into the inlet. As she kicked her feet behind her and swam further into the inlet, she said to herself, Wow! This water is so deep, so wide, and so so safe! Look at those high ridges! They would protect my ships from hurricanes and even attacks from enemies. United States couldn’t help but feel that she had found exactly what she was looking for. A Samoan boyfriend, I mean, a harbor. The mountains along the water were green and high, the mouth of the harbor was wide and the water was—well, as I said, very, very loloto. It was the perfect harbor for United States and all her ships to get their fuel or whatever when they cross the Pacific Ocean.

Meanwhile, things continued to heat up on the islands of Upolu and Savai‘i. The German business people were buying up fanua—and I mean lots of fanua—and setting up copra plantations so that they could send the copra back to their factories in Germany. Now remember boys and girls! These were strong and powerful. In fact, at this time, they were the most powerful tama‘ita‘i in the world. But, they did not see mata-to-mata on what was happening on this family of islands called Samoa. Can anybody guess what happened next? Sakaio, the short boy moved again in his seat but he still didn’t raise his hand. They went to war? another boy shouted. Well, not exactly, father said. This time a girl raised her hand and father called on her. They decided to try to work things out, she said. Ioe, father said. Sa taumafai latou e fofo faafitauli nei ua amata ona tutupu. They tried to resolve things without pulling each other’s braids out. Before father could continue the story, the bell rang. Ia, toe faauma la tatou tala i se isi aso, he said. We’ll
finish our story another day. So the students packed up their tusi a’oga and left for their next class.

That afiafi at home, mother said to father, E ese le migoi o lenei pepe. This baby sure does move a lot. Maybe she’s tired of being inside your stomach and wants to come out and play, father said, laughing. Leai, mother said, masalo ua fia ai. Ua manogi tele le kale moa. No, she must be hungry because this chicken curry smells so good. She’s growing fast, father said. Ioe. I feel like I’m carrying two breadfruits instead of one, mother said. Toteiti lava sau i fafo, my father said. Not soon enough, mother answered.

Back in his classroom, father said to his students, se’i fa’aauau la tatou tala i le fanau mai o le teine lalelei lea o Amerika Samoa. Let’s continue our story on the birth of this beautiful girl named American Samoa. Where did we leave off? father asked. Germany was buying up land in Upolu and United States decided she wanted to build a fuel station in Tutuila for her ships, a boy said. Ioe. That’s right, father said. But before they could get all of that done, they wanted to set up a malo or something like a government so that they could do all of that. Ae sa iai latou fesili sa fesiligia ai latou. How would they do that? Who would they ask for permission from? Well, father said, that is the messy part of the story. There were three girls, not one or two but three. Great Britain was also in Upolu. Aua ne’i galo, these girls were not best friends. Because they each wanted something from the islands of Samoa, things started to heat up between them. Ua amata ona vevela Ie mea. In fact, they almost got into a braid fight on the island of Upolu but something like a vavega happened. Can anybody guess what happened? God made something happen, a girl said. Well, that’s how many Samoan people like to describe what happened in the story. The three girls had ships in Upolu and anything could’ve happened, but God sent a afa to Upolu and this hurricane blew and blew until all the ships got caught on the reefs or were destroyed except for one British ship. So instead of fighting over the Samoan islands, the girls realized that they should sit down and talk about things. So they had a fono, but they did one thing that was disrespectful. Can anybody guess? No? They didn’t invite the Samoan matai to the meeting. What do you think of that? Not inviting the matai to the fono? No one said anything. Sakaio shifted in his seat again. What do you think? father asked again. A matai’s son, Sakaio could no longer remain silent. He finally raised his hand. E le’i faaaloalo teine nei i matai Samoa, he said. Ioe. That’s correct, father said. These girls did not respect the Samoan matai. Remember, girls and boys, in Samoan culture, you always have to respect your parents, your elders, your minister, teacher, but especially your . . . What? Your matai, the girls and boys answered. Yes. Your matai and by the same token, matai should not become greedy and arrogant with all that respect. Anyway, these girls didn’t respect our matai. Why didn’t they invite the Samoan matai to the fono? a boy asked. Well, let’s think about that. They were the strongest tama’ita’i in the world at this time, so whose going to tell them what to do? Right? father said. The students shook their heads but didn’t say much, so father continued. Anyway, United States said, let’s sign a piece of paper to split the Samoan islands? But Great Britain said, Paper? We’re in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Where are we going to get paper? But Germany said, I have an idea! Why don’t we carve our agreement on a rock and then take the rock to Germany or Washington D.C. and then copy our words on a piece of paper? The tama’ita’i looked at each other and agreed to the
idea. So they went looking for a rock. They found a big, big rock and began to carve some big words on the rock. After they carved the words on the rock, Great Britain said, All right, I will read the words on our rock. So she read it out loud:

Germany!
Here!

You take the islands of Upolu and Savai’i and those little islands in between.

United States!
Here!

You take the islands of Tutuila and that tiny pretty island of Aunu’u.

And Great Britain!
Hehehe! That’s me!

You return home. You already have so many islands and lands in your faaputuga of land collection.

So Germany swam west while United States swam east towards Tutuila. But as United States was swimming, she realized nobody said anything about the islands of Manu’a. So she swam back to the rock and called out. Rock! Rock! Wait! she screamed out. What about those other islands? The Rock answered, you mean Manu’a and her three islands of Ta’u, Ofu, and Olosega? Yes. Manu’a and her three islands. I’d like them too since they are on this side of the ocean. Why do you want them? Rock asked. They look so . . . so . . . mysterious. Well, you might want to watch your step United States. What are you talking about Rock? United States asked. Manu’a is a sacred place. Many Samoans believe that Tagaloa—the Samoan god—lived above those islands in the ninth heaven. So it is a sacred place. And guess what, the Rock whispered? What? United States said nervously. Come closer, the Rock whispered.

Manu’a has a king.
His name is Tui Manu’a.
And I got word the other day that Tui Manu’a likes to think things over and over.

How did you get word from Tui Manu’a? United States asked. You’re just a piece of rock! Tui Manu’a’s bird the sega flew by a few days ago and said that Tui Manu wants to think about things. Think? United States asked. Yes, think, Rock answered. What! You think Tui Manu’a doesn’t know how to think about things? I didn’t say that Rock! You know what United States? What? He wants to let the chicken sleep for some time while he thinks about things in his mind. Oh, yes of course! Faamoe le toa. Let the chicken sleep. I know about letting the chicken sleep in these islands. How do you know? You’re
just a palagi. Hey! Believe it or not but I’ve got some friends here in Tutuila. A chief. His name is Mauga. Mountain. He told me that in Samoa when people need to make important decisions they let the chicken sleep. Faamoe le toa. So people can think about what is right. I’m impressed United States! I’m impressed! You are hanging out with the people and you even have a friend named Mauga. Wink! Wink! Tell me Rock, How long will Tui Manu’a let the chicken sleep? Oh, for as long as he wants to. Well, then . . . I’ll take Tutuila and Aunu’u while the Tui Manu’a sleeps on the chicken. United States! It’s not sleep on the chicken. It’s letting the chicken sleep so he can think about things. Oh, yes, of course, thinking so that the chicken may sleep. Oh, dear! the Rock said, rolling his eyeballs at United States.

So while United States was swimming with Tutuila and Aunu’u, she asked them? Hey you two! What name do you gals want? What do you mean? We have a name. We are from the family of Samoa. I know that. I mean what other name do you want now that I adopted you. Adopted us? Yes. Ding Dongs! I adopted you. That’s what we wrote on the Rock: United States adopts two girls named Tutuila and Aunu’u. You mean two pretty Samoan girls named Tutuila and Aunu’u, Tutuila said. See? Aren’t we pretty! Wink! Wink! Toe wink! Oh, yes. Of course. Two pretty Samoan girls.

Gees! Is that how you palagi say that word? Tutuila asked . . . GEEZ! That’s correct, United States answered. Well, geez, we don’t know, Tutuila said. What do you think, Aunu’u? What should our other name be? I don’t know, Aunu’u answered. Wait! I want to trying saying that palagi word. . . . Cheese, Tutuila. Is that correct? That’s correct. GEEZ! Tutuila, I don’t know. Is that how you say that palagi word? That’s right. . . . Frankly, . . . United States answered. Frankly, . . . Aunu’u said, . . . I don’t want a new name. We are Samoa. We’ve always been Samoa. From the Sa—Moa family. As god Tagaloa called us. But Aunu’u, Tutuila said, Now that we’ve been adopted by this very strong girly girl here, we should get another name. You know what I mean? Wink! Wink! Aunu’u. Oh, yes. I guess, you’re right, Tutuila. What do you Samoan gals think about Samoan? United States asked. Samoan? Sa—moana? Where did you get that name from? I don’t know, United States, answered, I heard it in a song one night while I was hanging out with my friend Mauga and them. You’re friends with Mauga? He’s a high chief. A big high chief. Yes. We were just hanging out. No big deal. Doesn’t Samoana sound nice? No. No. It’s too Samo—anaish! Tutuila said. Yeah. It’s too Samo—anaish! Aunu’u answered. What about Amerika Samoa? For A—meri—can Samoa. You know because now that I adopted you girls. Now that sounds like a nice name, Tutuila, Aunu’u said. You like that name, Aunu’u? Tutuila asked. Yes. I do. It sounds so Amerika—ish. You know . . . Amerika Samoa. Well, I guess Amerika Samoa it is!, Tutuila said. American Samoa. Amerika Samoa. That’s our name. I mean that’s our other name. Besides Samoa. From our ancestor Tagaloa from the family of Sa—Moa. Sa—Tagaloaalagi.

So girls and boys, father said, that’s the story of the birth of this beautiful girl named Amerika Samoa, E iai ni fesili? Any questions.

So when did Tui Manu’a wake the chickens up and make a decision about joining the family of this new tama’ita’i named Amerika Samoa?

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Not for a while. Tui Manu’a let the chickens sleep for four more years. You know those people in Manu’a. Time is different for them. Everything is different in Manu’a, but they won’t tell you about it. That’s how they are. They don’t say much. They’re silent on a lot of things.

Any other questions, father asked?
Why did United States want to adopt Tutuila and Aunu’u again?
Auoi! Father said. Where are your ears, Vaelua? Didn’t you bring them to school today? The next time you girls and boys drive to Fagatogo with your family, tepa i le fagaloa, glance at the harbor. Le Fagaloa o Pago Pago. I mean Pago Pago harbor. That woman United States wanted that harbor for her ships. That’s what they carved on the rock.

Tutuila didn’t get mad?
About what?
Being adopted?
Well, the story I heard is that she didn’t. But who knows. I wasn’t there. This is the story I heard. She didn’t get mad because she got to keep her land and her culture. But she also wanted some protection from outsiders. All kinds of strange things were boiling in the Pacific during that time. She wanted to be safe too. Just like anybody else.

Aunu’u didn’t get upset?
I don’t think so. Anybody from Aunu’u here? As far as I know she didn’t but who knows. Go ask the people of Aunu’u. They can give you a better answer. She got to keep her land. Any other questions? That’s the end of our story for today.

So while I was in my mother’s stomach, Tutuila and Aunu’u gave birth to this girl named American Samoa in 1900. At night, I grew to eight pounds and the next day, father asked his class, Are there any questions from yesterday’s story? Sakaio raised his hand. What happened to the rock? Oh, yes the rock. Germany took the rock back to a place called Berlin in Germany. There they copied the information carved on the rock onto a white piece of paper. They named the piece of paper, The Berlin Treaty of 1900. Does anybody remember what happened in 1904? One guy moved in his seat, but he did not answer. He wanted to but he wasn’t sure he was right so he waited for father to tell the class the answer. My father said, well, this is the second part of the story. The United States sent her navy people to Tui Manu’a but he kept saying, My chickens are still sleeping. Come back another time. Finally after the third try, Tui Manu’a, the King of Manu’a said to his bird the sega, Come and take this message to those palagis out there on the water. Tell them the chicken is awake and that I’ve decided that it will be good for the people of Manu’a to join the new girl named Amerika Samoa. So I agree for the United States Navy to come and protect my islands of Ofu, Olosega, and Ta’u, the islands of Manu’a. So that’s when Manu’a became part of the family called Amerika Samoa. That was in 1904. Are there any questions?

What happened to Germany and Upolu and Savai’i? That is a different story. Germany brought back many of her people to live in Upolu and Savai’i. Those people set businesses and bought up the good land in town. They called those islands Germany Samoa for a while. Things got pretty messy over there for our Samoans living there. How did the people feel?
They didn’t feel so good. So they tried to push Germany and her people out. It was hard.

Did United States bring people to live in Amerika Samoa?

No. They left the people alone to do their own thing. So people went about their own way.

Two days before I was born, my father asked, his class, what happened in the 1950s? No one knew. Again, a boy moved in his seat, but he didn’t speak. A girl spoke, is that when? No, father answered. Isn’t that when? No, father answered again. In the 1950s, the U.S. Navy gave up American Samoa to the Department of Interior in Washington D.C. The Department of Interior is now the guardian of American Samoa, father said. The United States is our parents, but the Department of Interior is our guardian. Guardian of Amerika Samoa. The beautiful tama’ita’i born in 1900.

That evening as father prepared for bed, mother said, Ua tau tiga mai lo’u manava. My stomach hurts a little. Se tala mo’i? Father asked. Tatou o i le falema’i? No, mother said, I can wait. Father lay down on the bed, but he could not sleep. So he got up and woke up my sister Iunaite Setete. United States. Iunaite Setete! father said, check your mother’s ato. Make sure all her things are in there. My father looked at his watch. Two hours had passed. Ea? Father asked mother again, tatou o i le falema’i. Yes, mother said. Let’s go to the hospital. I think this little girl is ready to enter this village. This motu. Her home of Amerika Samoa.

So here I am today living in Seattle with Uncle Talalelei and Aunty Moni and going to an American school and getting the good education that my father wanted for me. For us. For Amerika Samoa. I guess I’m getting a good education. My English is good. I’ve learned a lot of things about this United States, the parent of my home of Amerika Samoa. But I’m still waiting to hear the story of the three girls swimming around the Pacific Ocean. I’ve never heard that story in school. I want to see what they carved on the Rock called the Berlin Treaty of 1900. I’ve been waiting to hear the story because I want to know how my birth connects to the birth of Amerika Samoa and how her birth connects to this country that I live in now. But it’s taking so long for someone to tell me in school. I wonder why? I’m about to graduate and still there’s no sign of somebody saying, All right, who wants to know about the time the United States was swimming in the Pacific Ocean looking for boyfriends from the Islands? Oi! I mean islands! I wish somebody would tell me so I can feel safe in knowing the connection. I feel so left out because I don’t know my connection to this government that has a building called The Department of Interior somewhere in Washington D.C. An office that must’ve been important to my father because while the nurses were wrapping me in a warm blanket after I entered my motu of Amerika Samoa, my father wrote Initeria on my birth certificate. When he went in to see my mother, she looked at him and asked, what did you name her? And he said, Her name is Initeria. She will one day go to the United States and go to a good school to get a good education. My mother nodded and said, Ua lelei.

If I never hear the story of the birth of American Samoa, then one day I will visit Washington D.C. so I can visit this office called the Department of Interior that my father named me after. I want to see the building. What color is it? What street is it on? Will
they let me, the girl from Samoa named Initeria go into the building? Who works in the building and what do they do? I want to know because my name is Initeria. Teria or Ria for short.
Jill

Jill is my
hill partner

When we get
off the school bus
we zig and zag up the hill

While we zig and zag
up the hill
we open up to each other

Jill talks
and I listen

I talk
and Jill listens

Jill tells
and I listen

I tell
and Jill listens

At the top of the hill
I zig my way
and Jill zags her way

I never zig Jill’s way
and Jill never zags my way

If Jill did
Jill will see things
Samoan things
that don’t jive
in her world

That’s why
at the top of the hill
Jill zigs her way
and I zag my way
Jill Didn’t Understand

Jill asked me why she heard people singing over the telephone when she called me last night. I told her that Samoan families say lotu in the evenings to thank God for our blessings. Jill listened but she didn’t understand.

Then Jill asked me why so many people live in my aunty’s house and why so many cars park in front of our house and what in the world do these people do in our house. I told her that Samoan families include first cousins, second cousins, third cousins, and these cousins have other cousins who visit and must park their cars somewhere near our house. Jill looked and listened but she didn’t understand.

Jill took a deep breath and then asked why I don’t come to her house on Sundays. I told her that we go to church on Sundays, and after church we go to to’ona’i for lunch, and after to’ona’i we go to pese for singing, and after pese we go to autalavou for youth. Jill listened but of course she didn’t understand.

Then she asked why I didn’t come to Tessie’s birthday party on Saturday. I told her that I only go to family and church parties and that even though Tessie was my friend in math she wasn’t my family and she didn’t go to my church. Jill looked at me and I looked at her. Then she smiled and said she understood. So then I tell Jill the reason why we wear white to church on Sundays is because white is the color of Jesus. Jill nodded her head to say she understood. So then I tell Jill the reason why I don’t call her on the phone is because telephones in Samoan homes are for important adult things, not for teenagers to chit and chat on. Jill smiled more because she understood.

Then Jill folded her legs and asked why Sa’ili and I spoke Samoan when she was around. I looked at her and said I didn’t understand. So she looked at me and asked again. I stared at Jill because I was confused. She said she didn’t like it when we spoke Samoan because it made her feel funny—that we giggled and laughed a lot. I looked at Jill and said that we spoke Samoan because we are Samoan and Samoans speak Samoan. Jill said that made her feel left out because we laughed out loud like we were laughing about her. I told her that we don’t laugh at her only that Samoans laugh all the time—and I mean all the time and maybe she wanted to laugh with us but the Samoan language was in the way. Jill nodded her head and said that yes, she wished she understood Samoan because when she listens to us laugh it was the kind of laugh she wanted to laugh. So I asked Jill if she wanted to learn how to speak Samoan and she shook her head and said she didn’t know. So I said it was ok that I understood. Jill smiled again and said it was good that we understood.

These are the things Jill asked me and I explained them to her, each Samoan thing, and I saw Jill listen, look, and nod her head to say she understood, but as I sit here
thinking and thinking about Jill and her questions I now know that Jill didn’t understand and maybe I don’t understand either.
That Is Not History

In history class, Mr. Taylor says, your assignment is to write and present a history report to the class. The history must have events, years, and dates.

So I think about history. What’s history with dates, years, and events? The history of the United States has dates and years. That’s history. But I want to write a different history. History that’s connected to me and my family. My family name of Fesili’ivae from my great-grandmother’s village of Laloifi. That’s the history I want to write—history without years, and dates. But there is a problem. Mr. Taylor might say that my family history isn’t history. He may not see that it happened only that no one cares when it happened. So that’s my problem.

But I really want to write my family history, the history of the family name and where it came from and how it came to be this name, Fesili’ivae, which means, ask the feet. It’s such a bizarre name. Ask the feet. Who in the world would think of such a name? Fesili’ivae, ask the feet. Yet, that is the name and it’s an important name in our village. It is a matai title from the village of Laloifi, belonging to the aiga in the entire village. It’s such a bizarre name, Fesili’ivae. Ask the feet. That’s why I want to write about it because it’s so bizarre, so brilliantly bizarre. Even the story behind the name is odd so beautifully odd. That’s why I like it so much. It’s not flat like so many histories in books that I’ve learned and can’t remember because there’s no strange shapes in them and put me to sleep. E oso ai lo’u fia moe, especially when I take tests.

But this history isn’t dull. It’s odd because the main character had no body, only feet. A man with with no body, only feet. Who would think of creating an important name in the village from a story about a man with no body, only feet. See how bizarre this story is.

This man
with no body
only feet
lived in the mountains

Every evening
he came down from the mountain
to bring food to a blind man
who lived with his wife in the village

When he brought the food
he left it at this couple’s house
and returned to the mountains
without saying anything
because he was
only a pair of feet

One day, the blind man
asked his wife

Who brought the food?

The wife said
A pair of feet
O vae
walked from the mountain
and placed food here
and returned without saying anything
because he is
only a pair of feet

The next day
and the day
after that
and the day
after that
Lata, the pair of feet
brought food for this couple
and returned to the mountain
without saying anything

The blind man
after eating the food
again asked his wife
O ai ea na aumaia mea’ai nei?
Who brought this food?

Ou te le iloa!
I don’t know!
the wife said
A pair of feet
O vae
walked from the mountain
and placed food here
and returned without saying anything
because he is
only a pair of feet
Impatient,  
with his wife,  
the blind man said,  

Next time!  
The pair of feet  
comes down  
from the mountain  
and sets food here for us too eat  

Ask the pair of feet!  
Fesili i vae!  
Ask the pair of feet!  
Fesili i vae!  

O ai oe?  
Who are you?  

We are eating his food  
yet we don’t know  
who he is  
only a pair of feet  

So that’s the odd story from my village and my family—a man with no body, only a pair of feet. I can’t get over it. A pair of feet! So neatly bizarre! Today, the blind man’s words, Ask the feet, Fesili—i—vae, has become the matai title in my father’s village. That’s the history of my family name of Fesili’ivae that I wanted to write for my history report because it is my history. But I will choose another story. A story with events, dates, and years so that when I turn in my paper, Mr. Taylor won’t say to me, That’s a good story, but it isn’t a history report. A history report is not a story like your story. It has years, dates, and events that are connected to each other. So I think I’ll choose something like this story here in my history book. It is about the Oregon Trail. These people traveled from the east to the northwest. Something odd had to have happened to them too. That’s a long trail from east to west. But so far I don’t see anything odd. It has dates, years and events all connected in a line. That, I know will be a history report. It might be a boring history report, but it’ll be a report.
Sa’ili Returns

When summer arrives, cousin Sa’ili returns to Samoa. Her father said, ua lava lena nofo i Amerika, your vacation is over and come home to Samoa to do chores and to pull the weed on the plantation. So Sa’ili has retuned to Samoa. I am sad, ua ou faanoanoa lava because I know she’s in Samoa laughing and laughing and pulling weed with her brothers, sisters, cousins, aunties, and uncles, in our village of Laloifi.

This week, ua ou toe fiafia fo’i, I am happy again. I get a letter from cousin Sa’ili.

***

E Dear Semoana,

O a mai oe? How are you? Ia lea ua toe fo’i lava le uso i le mea tuai. Your sistah has gone back to the life of Samoa. Pulling a lot of weeds, dear and doing the family laundry. Last week, my father took us up to the plantation in the mountains and left us there for a whole week to live, sleep in mosquito nets, cook our food on the open fire, bathe with rain water, and bull, bull and bull the vao. Ioe, dear! Pull the weed! A’o le mea manaia, ua lusi pauna a le uso. So your sister has lost weight. Dear! Ua moku le fika. My figure is slim.

Ia alofa atu ia aunty ma uncle. My love to aunty and uncle, Teria, Mareta, Melia, and Uncle Leni when he comes over on pay day . . . (smile), Sasa’e and Sisifo, Fiti, and Sa’ili when she comes home from college. Oi, E! How is your friend Jill? Alofa atu i ai. You know she never really liked me, but that’s all right. Fai i ai e soia le fesili so’o. She asked so many questions about everything. Sa ou le leva tali ana ia fesili her questions were just too much for me. Anyway, say hello to Jill, she’s still a nice person.

School starts next month. Can you believe we have one more year before high school? I can’t wait! I’ll be going to Leone High School where I will become a Lion. Roar! Roar! Roar! Hehehe! Your father said you should come home next year for high school. I hope you do even though I know you’ll be going to Samoana High School and become a Shark. O le Malie! Swim shark! Swim! See if you can catch the Lion!

Anyway, my father let us come down from the plantation now. Now we’re home pulling the weeds around the house. Ioe, dear! Ua leaga uma o’u nails! My nails are all broken now. Auoi! I hear my mother’s siren, which is as loud as ever. Sa’ili! Sa’ili! Sa’ili! Can you hear her voice? Hehehe! I gotta go before my mother comes in here and gives me a ticket for not doing the chores.
P.S. Here are some mints from Australia for your grandma. Fai i le lo’omatua, e le’i taunu’u mai le va’alele e aumai ai coffee nips. The airplane from America with the kofe nibs hasn’t arrived. Tala ula! Joke!

Tofa deáry
See you next summer!

Alofa atu,
Cousin Sa’íli

For the summer, na’o lo’u nofo lava i le fale, I hang out at aunty’s house. My sister Sa’íli comes home from college. She has a job at a restaurant downtown, and one day I go with her to pick up her check. Faato’a ou va’ai lava lea i se siaki mo’i. It is my first time seeing a real check. Cousin Amata stops by when she is off work. She takes Sasa’e, Sisifo and me strawberry picking. Faato’a ou alu fo’i lea e fa’ata’ita’i lenei mea o le tau o setiraperi. Ioe, pei uma lava o le faasamoa lena o le strawberry, o le setiraperi, faamamafa le ‘ra. Picking strawberries is a different experience from throwing rocks at mangos or climbing guava trees. My hands are red and the strawberries don’t look like the ones on the cool whip box. E ese le pepelo o la ia ata i luga o atigipusa mea’ai. The strawberries I pick are dirty and sour, very o’ona but nevertheless, I’m happy to experience picking strawberries in America.

Melia, Mareta, Initeria and I help aunty clean the house. Ioe, ua fai le spring cleaning a le lo’omatua. Aunty wants us to wipe the dirty spots on her walls. My cousin John stops by the house as we are wiping the walls and asks, Why are you wiping the walls? We say we are wiping the dirty spots. Cousin John laughs and says, That’s why palagi made paint for! I look at Initeria and she looks at me. Pei lava e sa’o ea le tala a John, but Initeria and I continue to wipe the walls because that’s what aunty told us to do. After we wipe the walls, aunty tells us to clean the attic. Ioe, ua o’o i luga o le potu e ta’u o le attic le spring cleaning a le lo’omatua. We move all of Aunty Moni’s ie togas from the attic. Aunty has so many fine mats! The ie toga create a lot of dust in the air. Melia, Initeria, and I sneeze, sneeze and sneeze inside the attic. Ua tiga matou isu i le pefu. I tell them if I live in America I will not store fine mats in my attic or anywhere else in the house. They create so much dust that will make me sneeze.

Jill is in California for the summer visiting her grandmother. Fai mai e toe fo’i mai ia Aukuso. Uncle Leni still comes over every other day. But Sasa’e, Sisifo, and I don’t complain because when he walks in he winks and says, Uncle McDonald is waiting for you to come to his house! O le mea lena e i luga lava points a Uncle Leni. Grandma still calls looking for him when she runs out of coffee nips. Other than that, I wait for
Jill's return in August, I wait for school to start, I wait to be in the eighth grade and then I wait and wait to be in the ninth grade.
The Disorderly Bus

This is a nice school bus! E ese le manaia o lenei pasi! It is a nice school bus because the bus driver is always on time. He arrives at 6:45, not 6:55 or 7:05 but always 6:45. Ioe! O le on-time ia o lenei pasi!

A'o pasi i Samoa, Ia! They arrive at 6:30, 7:30, 8:30, and even 12:30. Ta te fiu e faatali le pasi i nisi taimi, ae le sau lava le pasi e ave ta ita i le a'oga. If my parents or neighbors drive by on their way to work and see me standing under the ulu tree waiting for the bus they ask, E le'i sau lava le pasi? That's when I know the bus driver isn't driving his bus in order so I jump in my parents' car, my neighbor's car or even the aiga bus in order to get to school.

O le mea lena e manaia ai lenei pasi! There is so much order in this bus! Even the students sit in order, like two in a seat, never three or four, but always, always, two in a seat. O le isi mea lena e manaia ai le pasi lenei, e ta'ito'alua i le nofoa. E leai se isi e si'i pe tu i le auala po'o le fai'oto'a. Everybody on this bus gets a seat, so there is no disorder on the bus. If the students stand up, the bus driver says, No, standing in the aisles! No standing up while the bus is moving! So the students maintain the order in this orderly bus by sitting in their seats.

A'o pasi i Samoa, Ia! There is no order only disorder in Samoa. Students pile in and pack the bus in a disorderly way. They sit three to a seat, four to a seat, even five to a seat! After the students pack the seats, they create disorder in the aisles, the doorway, and behind the disorderly bus driver. This makes the bus driver yell out, Soso i tua! Soso tele i tua! Nonofo ta'itoatolu! Tasi'i tamaiti laititi! So the older students squeeze into other students, the younger students jump on the older students' laps creating so much disorder in the disorderly bus. That's why I like this bus. I leave aunty's house to wait for the bus, and it arrives when it says it will and then I walk in and sit on a seat, not on top of somebody's lap, but on a seat. It is so nice to sit on a seat in this orderly bus.

But now that I'm sitting on this orderly bus with these orderly students, I'm beginning to miss the disorder in Samoa. The disorder that makes me sit three and four to a seat, the disorder that makes me squeeze someone in the aisle, but especially the disorder that makes the bus driver scream out, Soso i tua! Soso tele i tua! creating more disorder in his disorderly bus. So while I'm sitting in this bus, I'm thinking, maybe ua sese a'u! Maybe I do like disorder. The disorder the bus driver creates when he doesn't pick me up, the disorder in my neighbor's car but especially the disorder the passengers on the aiga bus create. That's the disorder I miss. The disorder that keeps me in order!
FLYING
Father’s Corner

My father wanted me to receive an education in America this northwest corner of America

But as a minister in Samoa he still needed us children to minister with him in his corner in Samoa

So now that my eighth grade is complete it is time once again to return to father’s corner in Samoa

So here I am at the airport, Seattle International Airport thanking Aunty Moni, Uncle Talalelei Amata, Melia, Mareta, Uncle Leni, grandma, Uncle Falefa, Aunty Nai, Sasa’e and Sisifo for weaving me into their lives

As we embrace a part of me tears precisely the way my mother intended when she let me come two years earlier

From the air I peek out to see Jill my hill partner
one last time
before I turn
southwest to face
the Moana
and father’s corner

From the air
I look over the Moana
and retrace patterns
criss-crossing patterns
connected to a past
and pointing to a future

I arrive in Hawai’i
Honolulu International Airport
my mid-point to Samoa
my family and my home

In my mid-point Hawai’i
I remember my last point
the daughter of a
hospital chaplain
and imagine my next point
the daughter of a
village pastor
on the island of Tutuila

What is my role again?
I’ve forgotten

Who will help
me remember?

Pele?
my friend who threw
rocks at mango trees
has flown to her mother’s corner
in California

Fale and John?
my brothers
cornered in
father’s corner
for years now
How do they play
their roles?

How will I play
mine?

Same or
different?

I’m in the air again
this time crossing
a black Moana

Where are the lights of Samoa
in this vast black Moana?

There they are!
barely visible in the distance
in the dark Moana distance

Auoi!
I’m touching the ground now!
Touching Samoa’s ground!
where my brothers
Fale and John wait
there below
for me to join them
in our father’s corner
PART III: SAMOA II
My First Papaya

It’s my first morning in Samoa and I’m hot and sticky. I jump in the shower, dance in the water, and cool off as I grab a ie lavalava. As I enter the kitchen; my mother says,

Don’t hang your hair!
Pull it back
or wrap it in a bun
Tu’u i tua
Pe faapatu i luga

Hungry and jet-lagged, I grab a ripe papaya, slice it in half, and sit across Fale.
Ua leva na tu le mata o le la, he says, smiling.
That’s a nice way to say good morning to your sister, I say, pulling my hair behind my ears.
I only said the sun has been up for a while.

Your hair looks nice
When you put it up
E manaia lou lauulu
Pe’a tu’u i luga

My mother says again, as I scrape black papaya seeds into a bowl.
Ia, ua lelei. Let me eat my first papaya in Samoa and then I’ll put my hair up, se’i ai la’u esi muamua i Samoa ona tu’u lea i luga lo’u lauulu.
That papaya, Fale says. Your first papaya in Samoa, looks very sweet.
Well, I hope it is, I say, winking.
Did you know that the sugar in your first papaya in Samoa will help you survive this place?
No, I didn’t know but I’m glad you told me because it looks like I may need all the sugar I can get around here. Was your first papaya sweet when you returned from Seattle five years ago?
Yes. O le matua sweet lava! But I ate two papayas and that is how I have survived this place . . . what do you call this place? . . . Boot Camp. Yes, Boot Camp. That’s what this is. So you might want to eat two papayas so you don’t go crazy. Wink! Wink!
Well, since you’ve brought up the topic of surviving, do you think I should cut my hair short like yours so I don’t hear how I should wear it every morning?
Semoana, you’ve been in the states too long. You don’t have enough Samoan suka in you. That’s a simple matter—to put up the hair or to put down the hair?
I’m only asking a question.
Yeah and your question has a simple answer. But maybe your answer isn’t so simple.
Maybe not.
Take it easy. Faifai lemu. It’s your first day in Boot Camp.
You know what? This papaya is sweet. I think I will have another one.
That’s good. Because trust me, you’re going to need a lot of sugar in this place. I graduate from Boot Camp slash high school in a year. Wink! Wink! And then I say, Sayonara! Adios Amigos! Tofa Soifua! How many years do you have?
Four.
That’s a long time to be in Boot Camp. So relax and breathe a little. You’ll fall into a rhythm. We all do and when you do, you’ll look like the rest of us Samoan papayas on this Rock.
Fale!
It’s true! Look at me. I look like that papaya right there on the table and you’ll soon look like that too. A Samoan papaya!
What if I don’t want to look like a Samoan papaya?
Well then you can go and ... Then you can go and jump! John says walking into the kitchen.
Sole, John! Fale says. Poor Semoana. It’s her first morning in Samoa and you’re already starting on her.
John, I can’t believe you said that to me. Go and jump!
Good morning sister Semoana! Johns says, slowly.
John, what does that mean again?
Semoana. Please! You know what go jump means.
No, really, John. I forgot! Tell me.
Now you’re really showing how much brain damaged you got in the states. You know what it is.
If you don’t tell me I’ll ask mother. Mother! Mother!
Oh, no Fale says. Now you’re really asking for it.
Mother! John says for me to go jump! What does go jump mean, again?
Ea ea Semoana?
John said for me to go jump! What does it mean again?
E! se, Semoana.
What does it mean? I forgot.
Semoana! Go jump means, Go and jump!
I know Mother, but where?
Ask John and Fale.
See, even mother doesn’t want to say what it means.
Semoana! Johns says. You had to ask mother where? O lena fo’i e te faata galeiloa.
Really, John! I forgot. But never mind. I’ll just focus on my papaya and make sure I get enough suka in me.
You’ve been gone too long, Fale says. We’ve missed you.
Yeah, yeah ... I’ve forgotten how sweet you were.

As I scrape my second papaya, father enters the kitchen and says,
Don’t forget!
Tonite is the deacon’s meeting
Make some coffee and tea
And some round pancakes

Aua le galō
O nanei le fono a tiakoño
Fai se kofe ma se ti
Ma ni panikeke lapotopoto

Looks like Boot Camp has started for you, John says, spreading paka on his masi.
Yeah, in more ways than one.
Just keep eating those papayas. They’ll keep your head screwed on tight so you don’t lose it.
Yeah, if I haven’t lost it already. By the way, where do you guys work?
You really want to know where we work? E ese le taua o la ma’ua galuega. Right John?
Yes, o le taua ia.
What’s so important about your jobs?
Our job is to collect sisi Aferika, Fale says.
What the heck is sisi Aferika?
African snails. Some fishing boats came into Pago Pago Harbor to get fuel and to unload their catch and while they were refueling, these snails crawled to shore. Once they made it to shore, they multiplied and started eating all the bananas and taros, especially the taros. Atu’u and Satala were hit the worst. You know Felela Marist Brothers, my elementary school?
The boys’ school on the mountain?
Yeah, that one. That entire area was infested with African snails. They ate up all the taro and banana plantations belonging to the Marist brothers. Now they’ve spread into other villages like Ili’ili and Tafuna. So we collect them and kill them in Tafuna.
Are they poisonous?
Well, you can’t eat them for lunch this afternoon. There’s some sisi Aferika not too far from here.
What?
They’re all over. They come out in the morning when it’s cool, so if you wake up early tomorrow, just walk out the back door, near the grass over there, and you’ll see them.
I don’t think so.
Just don’t smash them cause you’ll end up spreading their eggs. Just flip them over and pour salt on them. They don’t bite.
Do they smell?
A little especially when it’s been raining. They’ve done a lot of damage especially with the taros. A lot of taro plantations near the harbor have been destroyed.
How did they figure out the snails came from the fishing vessels?
The Department of Agriculture tracked them and most were found in the villages near the fishing canneries. Atu’u and Satala especially.
The seawater doesn’t kill them?
I guess not. They’ve traveled thousands of miles over the ocean to Samoa.
You weren’t kidding when you said that you had the most important jobs on the island.
It’s actually interesting work. I like watching the Feds track the snails.
Want to join us? John asks.
Leai lava faafetai! I’ll stay home and figure out how to make perfectly round Samoan pancakes for the deacons’ meeting tonite.
Well, don’t think too hard, John says. You might hurt yourself. We’re just breaking you in.
Yeah, Yeah.
Va’ai e mamao le ala i Tamaseko, Fale says. The road to Tamasekos is very far.
I’ll keep that in mind. Go collect your snails.

After Fale and John leave for work, I clear the table and wash the dishes. I hear the telephone ring and then my mother calling my name.

Semoana!
Semoana!

Telefoni!
O Sa’ili.

I’m coming!

Hello, Sa’ili!
My dear cousin Semoana!
Sa’ili.
Deary! Deary! Welcome back to the Rock. Girl!
You mean Boot Camp.
My poor, poor cousin. Ua amata fo’i na porona le uso? Your first day in Samoa and already you’re being treated like a maid in your own palace.
Please! Sa’ili. I walk into the kitchen and my mother tells me to put my hair up, and then Johns walks in and says if I don’t want to look like a Samoan papaya then I should go jump
John said what!
Ioe! O le leaga ia o le faiga o si ou uso. Then my father walks in and says there’s a deacon’s meeting tonite and I need to make ti panikeke.
Dear Semoana. You are being treated like a maid on your first day. My poor cousin! Welcome to the Rock!
I don’t even know how to make round Samoan panikeke.
Well, you have your first problem as a maid on your hands. Are you worried that your pancakes will come out lumpy like kopai and when the deacons eat them, they’ll look at the panikeke and say, These don’t look like panikeke! They look like footballs! Stop it Sa’ili.

Semoana, dear. Your problem as a maid doesn’t stop there. The deacons will joke about your panikeke and before you know it, the entire church will be saying, the faifeau’s daughter went to Amerika to get her good education but she didn’t learn how to make perfectly round Samoan panikeke.

Sa’ili. Give me a break.

Give you a break! My dear Semoana. You’ve been on vacation in America, remember? America, the place that is so pea—u—tif—u and so bre—ty! Where you don’t have so many meetings like here in Samoa with so many deacons and matais always wanting to drink tea, coffee and eat panikeke!

Come on Sa’ili! Semoana, we make plenty panikeke here in Laloifi too. Remember? My father is a matai, so they have meetings all the time and yes, they eat plenty banikeke and more. Much more, girl!

Yes, I forgot. I knew there was a reason why I was itchy in Hawai’i.

You were itchy in Hawai’i? Semoana. That was the banikeke aitu, whispering in your ears,

Se—moana!
Se—moana!

Get ready to make panikeke Samoa, the round ones, when you get to Samoa!

You never change.

I called to see if your maid services have started. Looks like they have! I gotta run! My mother’s red light just went off akain. Call me when you can and don’t burn the panikeke tonite.

Bye Sa’ili.
Bye cousin Semoana who wished she never returned to Say—moah!

I get off the phone with Sa’ili and finish clearing the table. Then I go to my room. It’s hot and sticky, so I stand in front of the mirror and scoop my hair up in a faapatu, not because my mother told me to, but because in Samoa, in my father and mother’s corner, things can get very, very hot!
Perfectly Round Pancakes

I don’t make the round pancakes for the deacon’s meeting. I don’t know how to. So mother makes the panikeke while I watch as she heats the oil, mixes the batter, scoops it with a tablespoon, and flips it carefully to keep its perfectly round shape. I watch carefully because I know the next time the church calls a meeting, mother will say,

Semoana!
Se—moana!
Fai se ti panikeke!

Make them exactly the way I made them. The batter, the oil, the correct amount on the spoon, perfectly round, not losing their shape while they fry in the hot oil, and onto a plate for the meeting.

Tonite, while I serve the panikeke on a platter, along with coffee and tea, the deacons thank me for making the panikeke.
Semoana! Thank you for the coffee! Ma le panikeke! They’re very good!
Oh, you’re welcome, I say.
Ioe, Semoana! Faafetai mo le panikeke! Your hand is good at making round panikeke!
Malo, Semoana! I didn’t know you could make perfectly round panikeke!
Oh, you’re all very welcome, I repeat again. But mother made the panikeke.
That’s why they’re perfectly round. All I did was watch.
Still, Semoana, they taste so good! Thank you! Faafetai mo le ti panikeke!
Oh, you’re very, very welcome!

I’m in the kitchen cleaning, but mother calls my name for the fourth time.

Semoana!
Se—moana!

The meeting is over! Come collect the coffee cups! The deacons are leaving! Sau e ao atu ipu ia!

I’m coming! I say.
Semoana! Thank you for the panikeke! E ese le manaia!
Oh, you’re so very welcome! I say, not knowing what else to say. As I collect the coffee cups, I stop and think, well, maybe I, Semoana, did make the panikeke. But there are so many coffee cups before me, so I keep going, placing each one on the tray.
I’m walking to the kitchen now carrying the tray of dirty cups and I see John and Fale sitting at the table. So John, I ask, did you collect a lot of African snails today?
Oh, yes. I collected barrels and barrels of African snails today. Look at my hands!
Let me see?
Va’ai!
You did work hard!
Ae a oe Fale?
I did too but there’s more snails crawling on the bananas trees and taros.
Semoana, John says, these pancakes taste good. O oe sa faia panikeke nei?
Are you kidding! No! Mother made them. Round Samoan panikeke are hard to make.
What’s so hard about making round panikeke?
Keeping them perfectly round! That’s what.
That doesn’t sound hard!
Well, it is for me!
Do they have to be round? Why can’t they be square or short like a banana? Who says they have to be round?
John, Samoan people eat only two shapes of panikeke—flat or round. They won’t touch any other shape of pancake.
Then maybe it’s time for Samoan people to try something different. I myself am bored of these two shapes, flat or round. Matua boring tele na shapes!
Will you eat a panikeke shaped like this ulu?
Of course! I’ll eat any shape as long as it tastes like a panikeke.
What about you Fale, will you eat a panikeke shaped like this ulu?
That looks like a cucumber, not a panikeke. I’m not sure if I’ll eat it.
Semoana, if you make something that isn’t round, then it’s not a panikeke.
Then what is it?
A panikeks! John says.
A what?
A panikeks—take away the e and add a s to make, pani—keks!
Sole John, Fale says. I didn’t know you were a linguist.
What’s wrong with the word panikeks?
John, Samoan words end with vowels, not consonants.
Se Semoana! You need to open up your mind a little bit. I thought you were smart. Fai mai fo’i e te poto. You can change language just like how you can change the shape of panikeke. See that’s the problem. Samoans need to stretch their minds, and their mouths to things like panikeks. If they keep eating panikeke, they’ll die knowing only two shapes.
Sole, John! Now you’re a philosopher.
You guys aren’t listening to my point. E le’o faalogo mai oulua i la’u point! My point is you Semoana can’t make perfectly round panikeke. You’re scared people will tease you, so make them the way you know how to. Tell Samoan people that you’re now serving panikeks, not panikeke.
Man! You’re a linguist and a philosopher.
Fale, there are a lot of things you don’t know about me.
Yeah I know, but I didn’t know that language was one of them.
I think I’ll play it safe and watch mother make perfectly round panikeke, just the way Samoan people like them.
See, you don’t like to take risks.
I like to take risks John, I just won’t take that risk—people teasing me about my panikeke. I’ll wait for the pancake revolution to happen and then I’ll switch to panikeks.
But you already know how to make panikeks, Semoana!
Keep teasing me and see if I cook anything for you tomorrow.
See, that’s what happens when you stay in the states too long. You lose your Samoan sense of humor.
I haven’t lost my Sa—moan sense of humor.
Then relax. Va’ai oe i tupu se patu i lou ulu.
I see you haven’t changed much. I think I’ll go to my room, read a book or meditate for a little while.
Be careful, Semoana. Meditating at night isn’t good. That’s when all the ghosts come out. O le taimi le na e o mai ai aitu.
Well, maybe that’s what I need! Samoan ghosts to visit me in the po.
Thank you for the panikeke, Fale says.
Yeah, sure. Anytime.

I don’t know whether to laugh or to be mad at my brothers, especially John. He’s such a teaser, taufa’alili, ever since we were children. I can’t have a conversation with him. O le taufa’alili ia. A philosopher! A linguist! Pani—keks! What kind of silly word is that? What kind of language person makes up foolish things like that? That’s what John is—an imperfectly shaped panikeke, but a perfectly shaped pani—keks. A big Samoan panikeks.
Three Times a Week

Today’s my first day at choir practice. Choir practice takes place three times a week, the same days every week. So here I go holding my black pese in my hand and wearing my ie lavalava. I’m at the church now waiting outside for pese to start. People are walking towards the church.

Hello Semoana! I’m Iulia.
Hello Iulia.

Talofa! Semoana! O a’u Tuloto!
Nice to meet you Tuloto.

I’m Se’emaia.
Talofa Se’emaia.

O a’u Sulu.
Hello Sulu.

I’m Vaiola!
Talofa Vaiola.

People at pese know my name. I want to call them by their names too, to say hello, but I feel awkward asking people their names, so I just say talofa and try to remember the faces and names.

Here, I sit in the alto section with the church girls. Everybody is waiting for the teacher to walk in. I’m feeling awkward now, like people are staring at me, even though they’re not. Where does this feeling come from? From being told that a faifeau’s daughter is expected to act, dress, and speak properly? These people don’t look like they care. Maybe only I care or only my parents care. Maybe that’s why I’m feeling awkward while I sit here on this pew.

There comes the a’o pese who will teach pese to the aufaipese. He’s a tall man, a very tall man. He’s walking towards us, girls and women, and standing in front of us now, speaking to us. He’s loud, speaking so very loud here in front of me:

You girls and women!
when you sing
I want you to open your mouths
like this
not like this
but like this

You old women!
you can’t reach
the high notes anymore
you’re too old
no matter how loud
you scream
you can’t reach the high notes

So stop screaming!
ua tiga a’u taliga
my ears hurt
from your screaming

You girls!
if you can’t hear
the person next to you
that means you’re
not singing
You’re screaming
E iai le difference
between singing
and screaming

You didn’t come here to compete!
to see who can scream the loudest
to show off your singing

You’re here to sing!
to God
so sing from here
not here

The a’o pese is looking at the floor now, pulling out a handkerchief and wiping his forehead. He is looking out the window and now to us, the aufaipese, and saying,

Go home!
Choir practice is over!

That’s choir practice
Three times a week
every same day
three times a week
Cornered

In Seattle, Uncle Talalelei preached from the podium. He, like all Samoan faifeau, preached softly and then loudly because the words, the message, needed to be preached.

This morning, my first Sunday morning in Samoa, I sit here in the church pew, listening to my father preach from up there, the podium. The words begin softly, then loudly, and then uninvitingly loud.

Thou shall not covet!
Thou shall not measure!
Thou shall not lie!
Thou shall not judge!

Thou shall not!
Thou shall not!
Thou shall not!

Thou tries to listen but the thou doesn’t feel safe in loud words. Thou fears it will reach out, grab and punish thou. So thou dreams in order to escape loud words, but the loud words follows, reaches into thou dreams and demands that thou turn and listen.

What does thou do?

If thou is unwilling?
to turn and listen?

What if thou is unprepared?
unfit?
unsure?

Of loud words!

Thou escapes
in dreams
from the loud words
shifting
regulating
in the corner
corner of the pew

But the words
the loud words
stay
never fade
they stay
every day
to thou’s dismay
Laloifi

It’s Friday, and I’m spending the night in Laolifi with cousin Sa’ili. Like Aunty Moni and Uncle Talalelei’s house in Seattle, Sa’ili’s house is full of cousins—distance cousins, adopted cousins, annoying cousins, kissing cousins and thieving cousins. Tonite, we’re in Aunty Elei’s kitchen with twins Cheyenne and Sirocco, my father’s brother Filiupu’s sons and Sa’ili’s brothers, Faatui and King Rex as he likes us to call him. King Rex is cooking Samoan chicken, the kind that’s very fefeu to chew, but makes people tell very funny stories that may not be true but are good to tell while waiting to eat tough Samoan chicken.

Where did you guys get your names? I ask, Cheyenne and Sirocco. They’re unusual names.

When our father was stationed in California, he named us after two navy ships. Semoana, King Rex calls out. Do you know what Uncle Filiupu did in the U.S. Navy?
No.
He blew the saxophone in the band for thirty years.
Wow! My father never told us that. He only said that his brother Filiupu retired from the navy but he never said that he played the saxophone. Does uncle still play?
Not really, Cheyenne says. He’s too busy raising pigs.
So Sirocco, Faatui asks? Is that why your old man does this with his fingers when he sits for a long a while?

My father doesn’t do that with his fingers.
He does! Tala ma le mo’i, ali’i Sirocco. E le’o sa’u tala pepeo. Next time, your father is sitting there doing nothing, look at his hands. He moves his fingers like this, pei lava la e tala lana sax.

Faatui. Man! E ese lou pepeo. My old man doesn’t do that.

Sirocco. I’m not kidding. Go home and watch your old man. E umi loa na nofo lou toeaina, ali’i Man, then he moves his fingers like this.

Sole, Faatui, King Rex says. Where in the world do you come up with all your stories. E matua unbelievable lava o au tala!

I’m not kidding. Honest to God! See, I’m raising my hand in front of God.
Faatui, Cheyenne says. You’re not even afraid to use God’s name. Sole! Matua le fefe lava o oe, ali’i tama.

No, Cheyenne, I’m not kidding. Honest to God. Your old man does that.
Poor Faatui, no one wants to believe you.

Semoana, you don’t know Faatui. He’s the champion of making up stories around here. O le matua siamapini o le tagata lenei o Faatui i le mea o le faiitala’ole.

You guys are just jealous cause you guys don’t know how to tell a good story. You mean a crooked story, King Rex says.
So Faatui, do you want to know what your old man does with his fingers when he’s not doing anything?

See, Sirocco. Now you’re jumping sideways to get me back. That’s what I call, o le oso faalava ma le oso fia fusu.

I’m not trying to pick a fight with you.
Then why are you asking me if I know what my father does with his fingers when he’s not doing anything?

Can’t I ask a question?
Joe, you can ask a question, but your question is coming out sideways. Oso faavalava! See, you’re looking for a fight.

I’m not looking for a fight. I’m asking a question. You’re the one who’s picking a fight by raising your voice.

I’m not raising my voice!
Then why are you yelling? I’m only asking a question, and you’re raising your voice.

Ok, Sirocco, ok. If you’re just asking a question then, O le a lau fesili?

My question is, if you know that your old man does this when he’s sitting there doing nothing?

Why would you ask a question like that for?
See, Faatui! You’re turning this into a fight. It’s only a question!

You both have a problem. King Rex says. You both want to win. E le fia to’ilalo le isi i le isi. E fia malo uma oulua! You guys can’t talk without getting into an argument.

It’s Sirroco’s fault.
My fault? It’s yours too! You’re not answering my question.

I don’t know why you want to know about my old when you already know that he is an artist! Sirocco. An ah—tist! O le matua atisi lava o lo’u old man.

Oh, yeah, so what kind of ah—tist is your old man?

A master ahtist! A master ahtist like me. You guys don’t know all the things I’ve mastered.

All you’ve ever mastered is becoming a master conartist! That’s what you are. A master conartist!

Sirocco, Faatui asks, what are you laughing at?

What do you mean? I’m laughing at what Cheyenne said about you being a master conartist.

Do you even know the meaning of the word con?

A conartist is somebody like you Faatui. Somebody who cons other people.

I know that, but I’m asking you if you know the other meanings of the word con?

Faatui, the word con means to con somebody and it can also mean con—vict like you.

See, Faatui! You always get yourself into trouble. E sisi lava e oe lou ua, ali’i uso,

King Rex says.

See, Sirocco, you can’t even explain the meaning of the word con!
All right you two, Cheyenne says. Stop it already. Con means to con—clude your stupid conversation! Ua tiga matou taliga. My ears are filling with conwax from all the bull coming out of you two.

Semoana, you have to get used to your cousins Faatui and Sirocco. They like to blow a lot of hot air around us, Sa’ili says.

Well, what else are we suppose to do while we wait for Samoan chicken to be ready. You have to blow a lot of ea vevela e faavela ai le moa Samoa!

Yeah, King Rex, Sirocco says, when will that chicken be ready? Next year! I’m starving!

You guys know Samoan chicken is very tough and it takes a long time for it to cook.

Well, that’s why we blow a lot of hot air because your Samoan chicken takes so damn long, Faatui says, laughing.

While King Rex stands up to stir the fefeu Samoan chicken, Uncle Falesau calls out from the potu tele. Come, let us say prayer! O mai se’i fai se lotu!

We all get up and disperse to find bibles for lotu.

Come! Come! Uncle Falesau says, as we enter the potu tele. You girls sit on this side and all the boys sit on that side. Where are the older boys? Fogo i ai e o mai. Tell them to come. We say our prayer.

As soon as everybody is seated, uncle says to one of the younger boys, Atali’i! Superman! Go get my shirt for lotu.

Who’s superman? I ask Sa’ili.

My adopted brother. My father has a nickname for everybody who lives in this house.

Why is he called Superman?

Because he’s quick on his feet.  
What’s his real name?

Peniamina, but we all call him Superman.

My father also calls all the boys as, atali’i for son, so when he calls their names, he’ll say, Atali’i Sirocco or Atali’i Faatui like that. Welcome to Laloifi.

Superman returns with Uncle Falesau’s shirt and after uncle slips his shirt over his shoulders, he says, tonite we will begin our worship with dancing from the children. I believe God wants us to praise him with our Samoan treasures. So tonite the children will do that for us. Semoana, I’m not sure that your father believes in this type of worship, but I believe it. Our culture is the most sacred thing we have so we should use it to honor God. You three boys, Spiderman, Moses, and Superman. Stand up! Tutu uma i luga! I want you to do the slap dance that Sale taught you for our po siva. And dance your very best because this is our worship to God.

Superman, Moses and Spiderman stand in a straight line. Superman looks at the other two boys and says, Ready! Start!

Atogi atogi atogi e!
E atogi e!
Atogi atogi atogi e!
E atogi e!
Hey! Hey! Hey!

Slap! Clap!
Slap! Slap!
Clap! Clap!

Very good. Very good. Uncle says. Now Ana, you come and do a solo dance for God while we sing. Sau oe e siva, ae pepese atu matou. Alu e mo’emo’e mai i totonu. Uncle calls to one of the boys to sing a song we all know. To mai se tatou pese. Ioane begins the song.

*Manu o le vaveao!*
Ready! Sing!

*Manu o le vaveao!*

As we sing, Ana dances slowly, moving her feet graciously across the floor and keeping her hands close to her body, all the time making sure that her eyes follow the movements of her hands.

Very nice, Ana. Very nice. Everybody clap for the children and their beautiful dancing. Clap! Clap! Now we’re ready to read the word in the Tusi Paia. Let’s read from the Psalms of David. God spared his life when Saul was going to kill him.

After lotu, Uncle Falesau says, tomorrow we will all wake up early, before the sun rises to go up the mountain to work on our plantation. The new taro heads need to be planted, the old taro patches need to be pulled, and the new area needs to be cleared for next month’s banana shipment from Upolu. E tele tatou galuega ma e mana’omia uma tagata taeao. Semoana, uncle asks me. We go up to the mountain to weed our family land?

Yes, I’ve never been up there before in my life, I say.

It’ll be good for you to dig your hands into the land that belongs to your aiga. I know you pull weed at your church and the minister’s house that you folks live in, but there’s something powerful about digging your hands into the dirt that’s a part of your flesh. Land that’s part of your identity. You don’t get to experience this because you live in nu’u ese, what we call foreign land. But here in Laloifi, this is your land, our village. Tomorrow you will experience this. Ok?

Yes, of course.
So tomorrow we all wake up before the sun rises and we go to the Lata.
After we serve uncle Falesau his meataumafa o le afiafi, we gather in the kitchen again to check on King Rex's Samoan chicken.

Man, Cheyenne says to King Rex. Your old man is an ahtist!

What do you mean?

Telling Semoana that working her hands into the land is part of her Samoan identity.

Was he wrong?

No, but it was a very ahtistic way to get us to go pull weed on the plantation.

I told you my old man was an ah—tist! Fa’atui says.

Semoana, Cheyenne asks, what do you think of uncle saying that we should use Samoan treasures to worship God?

Yeah, you’re the faifeau’s daughter.

Well, he’s right when he said that my father would disagree, but I suppose if your heart is true then there shouldn’t be any wrong in using our culture to worship God. He did create our culture for us to experience his significance.

No one says a word.

Hey! If it enhances our worship to God, then it’s all right. Right?

Semoana, Sirocco asks looking into my eyes, are you always that serious?

What do you mean?

Are you always that serious when people ask you questions?

Did I use too many words?

Se ua loloto tele au faamatalaga. Can’t you answer using one or two sentences?

The reason why Sirocco is saying that is because he didn’t understand a thing you said.

Faatui, I understood every word Semoana said. I just think she’s too serious.

O a la upu na e iloa ai le loloto o mafaufauga a Semoana? Which words show her being serious?

All her words, pei o le upu lea o le signficance ma le upu lea o le en—hance.

Why can’t she use eight words instead of thirty to answer the question?

See! You guys are trying to see who can win this stupid argument. Soia ia! Our ears hurt from all the ea vevela in here.

Yeah, Cheyenne says, a lot of hot air that makes the rest of us vevela.

Well, that’s what you get for taking so long to bring that fefeu Samoan chicken to the table! How long have we been waiting now? Almost three hours!

Yeah, Cheyenne says, we’re starving! Bring that Samoan chicken on the table!

It’s coming! It’s coming! You guys know how tough Samoan chicken is. It takes a long time to cook the meat.

Hey, that Samoan chicken looks pretty good.

Have you ever had Samoan chicken before? Sa’ili asks me.

Of course, but it’s been a while!

Well, I hope you brought your teeth with you cause you’re going to need it trying to chew this Samoan chicken.

Here, King Rex says. Let me put some on your plate Semoana.

It doesn’t look too bad!
It’s not the looks that matters. It’s whether or not your teeth can bite and chew the
damn thing!
Sirocco, Faatui says. I think it’s going to be a long night.
That fefeu, huh?
O le matua fefeu lava o si tama lea!
Sole King Rex! Are you sure you cooked this bird? It’s fefeu Man!
Sirocco, that’s part of the experience of eating Samoan chicken. You have to
experience the fefeu meat in order to appreciate it.
Are you ok there, Semoana? Cheyenne asks.
Yes, of course. Nothing like eating fefeu Samoan chicken.
This Samoan chicken will help you understand your identity. You eat chicken at
your father’s church, but you’ll never understand your true identity unless you feel the
pain in your teeth trying to eat Samoan chicken bred on the land of your ancestors.
Yeah, I’m feeling it just about now!
Yeah, says Faatui. Eating tough Samoan chicken from Laloifi will en—hance and
let you experience the signi—fi—cance of being Samoan!
I didn’t know you and Sirocco were so in-tuned with my words. I’ll use shorter
words next time.
Faatui and Sirocco like to blow air. That’s all. Nothing but hot air from these two
kuku heads.
Yeah, Cheyenne says, the kind that makes Samoan chicken more fefeu.
Man King Rex, Sirocco says. This is some tough Samoan chicken! I don’t know if
my teeth can tear this bird apart.
Sirocco, King Rex says, it will en—hance your Samoan identity!
And your Sa—moan teeth, Cheyenne says.

After we eat King Rex’s tough Samoan chicken, Sa’ili and I clean up. The boys
retire underneath Aunty Elei’s pua tree. Under the pua tree is Mirror, Faata in Samoan,
our older cousin who works as a crops inspector for the Agriculture Department. Mirror
is knowledgeable with taros and bananas. According to Uncle Falesau, Fa’ata can see
everything and anything on a plantation.

Tonite Mirror is sitting under the pua tree with the boys from the village. They are
puffing a bit of pakalolo and sipping the home brew or faamafu that Mirror is famous for
in the village.

***

Kood evening everybody! My name is Mirror. Faata in Samoan. I’m the Mirror
be—cause I can see anything and everything.
Sole, Mirror! Faatui says. You speak English good when you drink home brew.
Yes, sir. Faatui. The Mirror speak kood English when Mirror sib the home brew.
What else can Mirror do? Sirocco asks.
The Mirror can grow kood taro and panana on the plantation tomorrow. But the Mirror need to sib more home prew, so Mirror can woke up early to go up the monten to krow taro and fa’i. But tonite, ladies and gentlemen, oh I mean gentlemen, Mirror like to say a speech. Mirror like to say the jenealogy of all of Samoa, from the island of Savai’i to Upolu, then the island of Tutuila, and ending with the sacredest island of Samoa, the islands of Manu’a! Here’s the Samoan jenealogy:

- Tumua and Pule
- Ituau and Alataua
- Aiga i le tai and
- Va’a o Fonoti
- Sua and Vaifanua
- Fofo and Aitulagi
- Le Launiusaelua
- Chiefs of Manu’atele
- Fa’atui and the ‘auva’a
- To’oto’o and the Fale’ula

Jentlemen! Das my Samoan jenealogy. Now I want to say another sbeech. I want o say the jenealogy of my village of Laloifi. My jenealogy koes like dis:

- Tulouna le Faatui o le Motu
- Tulouna le Falesau o le Fale
- Tulouna a le Ati Maopu
- Tulouna Tuiteleapaga ma Save
- Tulouna le Tama a le Malo
- Tulouna a Taumafa alofi
- Tulouna oulua Matua
- Olo ma Le’oso
- Tulouna Vae a oulua To’oto’o
- Tulouna le matua o Salave’a
- Tulouna le Aitalaluma
- Tuloun ‘oe Fofo

Sounds like it’s going to be a long night for the guys, I say to Sa’ili. Will they get up when it’s time to go to the mountain?

Dear! E leai rna se isi e moe umi taeao. They’ll all get up when my father honks that horn! He’ll honk and honk until everybody is in the truck, pakalolo, home brew or not, they will all come running—with their bad breath—ready to go pull, pull and bull da weed! Ta o ta’ua e momoe. We have a long day tomorrow. Faitalia ai latou e fai le valea ma Mirror. We have to get your hands in Laloifi’s dirt, so you can experience the land of your an—zestors.
Yes, so I can experience and understand my identity. My Laloifi identity.

Ei—o dear! Your Laloifi identity!
Shoot it Down

Fale! The phone is ringing!
O lea e fai a’u galuega. Can you grab it?
Ok!

Hello.
O ai lea e saunoa?
Semoana.
Semoana, this is Alofaiva. How are you?
O lea e manuia.
Alofaiva, what are you laughing at?
I’m laughing at you Semoana.
Why? What did I do?
You’re supposed to say, manuia lava faafetai when somebody asks how are you.
Oh, right. I forgot.
I hope you’re not upset?
About what?
About me correcting you.
Oh no, of course not.
Good. Cause some people get mad when I correct them. I’m glad you’re not of them.
No, leai.
Good. Anyway, o lea ou te valaa’u atu pe o’o se fono a le autalavou nanei?
I don’t know. Let me ask Fale. Hold on a second?
Fale, Alofaiva is on the phone. Fai mai pe fai se fono a le autalavou nanei?
Tell him that Sulia called to cancel it. She was supposed to call him.
Alofaiva?
Fale said Sulia called to cancel and she was supposed to call you.
Ia e le’i vala’au mai se isi. Masalo toeititi vala’au mai. Thanks for the message and Semoana?
Yes?
I’m glad you’re not upset.
No, of course not.

Well, I just got my first Samoan language lesson for the day!
Oh, no. What did Alofaiva say?
He asked me, how I was doing and I said, o lea ou te manuia or something like that, and then he said that I forgot to say, manuia lava faafetai.
That’s Alofaiva for you.
Policing people’s Samoan?
Don’t take it personally. E faiga o ia. E tago faasa’o le faasamo a so’o se isi. And I mean anybody. He still corrects mine.
Well, I think he’s a bit weird. He asked me if I was mad.
Are you?
I wasn’t until he asked me a second time.
Just make sure you don’t have to pray or give a sermon when he’s around.
Why? Does he stop you in the middle of your prayer to point out your mistakes?
Hey, I’m just telling you what people expect.
You mean what people like Alofaiva expect!
Don’t get mad at me. I didn’t make up these expectations. They come with the package—this house. The faifeau’s house. I think it’s different in a village, I mean living in a traditional village.
What do you mean a traditional village? Isn’t this a Samoan village?
Yeah but this is a faifeau’s house, I mean a church community not a traditional village, e le’o se nu’u.
And what does this have to do with Alofaiva, the language cop?
I’m just saying this church community is different. The people are different.
People who live here bought these lands. It’s not communal land. It’s a church community and things are different in this minister’s house.
Well if they don’t have Alofaivas in traditional villages, then that’s where I want to move.
He knows a lot about the faasamo. You should get to know him.
No thanks. I’m sure he’ll be monitoring every word I say, so he can show how much he knows and how little I know. I love people like that.
He’s not that bad.
So in addition to learning all that Samoan, we have to get up tomorrow morning and go to school to perfect our English.
By the way, o a au vasega na e ave?
I’m taking regular classes. I went to pick up my schedule and the counselor looked at my transcript and checked on something called proficient English. O le a lena vasega?
That’s the highest level of English.
The what?
When you walk into class tomorrow, you’ll know what I’m talking about. John and I took that English too. John tried to get out by not doing his work.
Why did he want to do that?
He said it was boring. He didn’t like reading Beowulf, Shakespeare and all those palagi guys.
And you liked them?
It wasn’t all bad. I liked reading Lincoln’s Gettysberg’s Address, The Road Less Traveled. I could relate to them. I really liked Langston Hughes’ poem something called English B where he says to go home and write a page and let it come out of you and then it will be true to you. I really liked that! But Shakespeare and that woman what’s her name Dickons. I didn’t get her.
But isn’t that an English class?
Yeah, but it’s hard not mention boring when you don’t understand. Maybe it’s the
way they teach it. I don’t know. You know how Samoans teachers are always cracking
jokes in the middle of class. You’ll probably like that class.
I hope I do.
I liked it when they told us to write papers. I liked shooting things down.
Shooting what down?
Ideas, people. You can shoot at anything with your pen.
Between you and Alofaiva—I think I’ve had enough for the day.
You’ll understand what I’m talking about when you go to school. I think. I hope.
So are you ready to be a shark, a malie?
Do I have to grow some fins?
After your first day tomorrow, you won’t have a choice.
The Aiga Bus

The next morning, Fale, John, and I go to catch the aiga bus to school.

John! Fale says. Stop the bus! Stop the bus!

No! John says, it doesn’t play my music.

Who cares what music it plays, John! Stop the bus!

You guys stop your own bus!

Letioa a tuai oe ia i le a’oga, Fale says. Come on, Semoana. Let’s go on this bus.

John, I ask, e te sau?

No, it doesn’t play my music.

I grab my ato and follow John on the bus with a bright red hibiscus painted on it’s side. Why did John make such a big deal about the bus?

He thinks he’s too cool for this bus.

What’s wrong with this bus?

It’s for old farts.

What are you talking about?

In Samoa, there’s this thing high school kids call the bus riding culture—ti’eti’e pasi. The wanna-bees ride the buses that play cool music. If you ride a bus that plays traditional Samoan songs, then you’re a F.O.B—fresh off the boat. But if you ri—de a bus that plays Prince and Madonna, then you’re hip and kool like John.

Ea ea?

Se, ioe! It’s how they create their image, their Ameri—gan Sa—moa image. So what kind of bus is this?

Just give the bus driver a few seconds and then you’ll know.

Oh, my goodness! It’s Dancing Queen by Abba!

What did I say?

Fale, this is funny! This is really funny!

Keep riding the bus with me Semoana and you’ll see how old the music and the passengers get.

But how do the kids know which bus you ride?

They see you jump off the bus. Don’t forget the speed limit on this ROCK is twenty-five.

Yeah, I forgot. So John will wait for a cool bus even if he’s late to school?

Yeah. Him and his fia-tama-autu friends.

You know music isn’t allowed on buses in the states.

That’s why the aiga bus is unique. One time, Father had friends visiting from California and we took them bus riding around the island. They tripped out watching people tap the roof to stop the bus.

So when do these kids go bus riding?

Mostly after school or when they’re cutting class.

Ae e le feitai avepasi?
No, the bus drivers don’t care. As long as you pay your pase, they leave you alone. They like it when girls go bus riding.

What?
Yes, look at our bus driver. He’s young like most bus drivers. They don’t have to go looking for girls. The girls come to them.

For a guy who doesn’t care about image, you sure do know a lot about the bus culture!

Se, e leai lava se tamaititi a’oga e le’i alu e ti’eti’e pasi! Everybody in high school does it. It’s so easy to get bored on this small rock.

How big is Tutuila again?
Small Semoana small . . . like this.

So how small is that?

Less than sixty square miles like . . . Rapa Nui . . . Kaho’olawe . . . I don’t know. E la’ititi lava si motu. With one main road that goes around the whole island. Look! Mountains on our left when we go into town and ocean on our right when we come home. That’s it. O le mea tauloto. You memorize every pothole, breadfruit tree, dog, and the kind of cars people drive. That’s why people like to tint their windows to protect themselves from the sun and from spying Sa—moan eyes. Do you see those boxes near the front door?

You mean the speakers?
No, they’re called woofers.

O a na mea?
Mo woofers. They make the music louder. Bus drivers use them to make their buses look cool. When you have a bad sound system, then you’re ba—ad! And the students want to ride your bus. Wait until there’s a holiday.

Why, what happens?

Oe! O aso na e matua vevela ai le ti’eti’e pasi. School gets out early and students pack the buses. The bus drivers crank up the music and it’s like a party on the bus. The kids bop their heads up and down up and down like this.

Matua malie!
Se, ioe! O aga lava a tamaiti a’oga. See how our bus driver is dressed?
A Samoan t-shirt that says, ‘Samoan Warrior’ and a ie lavalava.

That’s pretty conservative. But some wear the funkiest outfits. I saw a guy wear a pair of leopard skin tights one time.

A’e! Se, soia le pepelo.
No, I’m not! E iloa fo’i e avepasi express latou personalities.

Matua e observant tele.

We had this palagi teacher one time. He rode the aiga bus and said it was the most colorful experience he ever had on a bus. He started telling us about it, how he almost missed his bus stop because he didn’t know you had to tap the roof and he didn’t know you had to wave the bus down. You know how Sams are? We laughed and laughed and this poor palagi didn’t know how to stop a bus. Anyway, we started telling him how to stop a bus so he asked our class if we wanted to do a project on the aiga bus culture.

Manaia fo’i lena vasega.
That guy was really cool. He started wearing ie faitaga to class and he asked why we didn’t wear ie faitaga to school. We told him that we wear them to church every Sunday so we like to wear our jeans to school.

To ex—bress yourselves?

Joe! To ex—bress ourselves our Amerigan selves! That guy was cool. Sometimes, he knew more about Samoa than we did.

Fale, you weren’t kidding when you said there’s only one road on this island.

Se, ua pei oe faatoa e sau i Samoa.

Well, it’s been a while since I’ve been on the aiga bus. How long is this ride to town?

About thirty to forty minutes. There’s traffic, you know?

Yeah, I know. But everything is so pretty! The ocean. The view. Look at how this road wraps around the mountains, like a snake crawling along shore.

I never noticed that before.

Look at the waves. They start from the reef, first they’re blue, then green, then blue-green when they crash onto the shore. Look at all the white foam on the water. It’s so pretty!

Matua ro—mantic tele na faamatalaga.

But look! If you focus on how the waves break and then change colors, you can almost forget you’re going to school. Now I can see why kids go bus riding. It’s relaxing.

Well, don’t focus too much on those waves because our ride is over. We’re here and the bell just rang. See all the sharks swimming to class? Let’s go. E iai sau pasese?

Fifty cents right?

Ah—fifty cents!
My English Class

Here I am sitting in my English class at Samoana High School. There’s my teacher, a man with a beard, a palagi man with a beard—o la’u faia’oga o le palagi e fai lana ava. He’s sitting on the teacher’s desk, smiling as students enter the classroom on this first day of class. O lo’o ataata lava la’u faia’oga a’o solo mai tama ma teine i totonu o le potu a’oga. It’s a good thing our palagi teacher is smiling on this first day of class—ona e fiafia ai tama ma teine a’oga—it makes us think about smiling to each other on our first day of high school.

So here we sit, facing our smiling teacher who’s looking at a list of names registered in his English class, not any names, but names of students whose English was considered proficient when school officials looked at our school transcripts. These students, whose names appear on the list, speak proficient English and I wonder how they came to speak proficient English living in American Samoa.

O lea ua fai le tauvalaa’uga a le vasega e iloa ai po’o ai o a’oga. The teacher is smiling and calling our names. Now I’m smiling because he’s smiling. Oh, look! The boy over there is smiling, and the girl next to him is smiling too. It seems the entire class is smiling on our first day in class. It’s a good thing we’re all smiling. Io! E lelei le mata ataata. E faaali ai le fiafia o tama ma teine a’oga, aemaise lava le susuga o le faia’oga.

As I look at that girl next to me smile, I wonder, where she learned how to speak English so well that made school officials decide to place her in this class? Did she fly on an airplane like me, over the Pacific Moana, and live in a corner in America? What about him, the boy sitting in front of the faia’oga? How did he come to speak English so well? Did his father go to college in America and start to speak English in his house as he was growing up here in Samoa?

And what about you, the girl there, the one with blonde hair? Is it true that you speak English because you, like our teacher, are a palagi living in Samoa? Of course. In fact, out of all of us, you claim this class because it is your language. Even the stories, poems, and plays are yours. So this is your class more so than ours even though we, according to our school records, say that we speak proficient English.

What about that girl? The palagi and Samoan one. How did she come to learn English so well? Is it because her Samoan father married her palagi mother and they spoke English in their home because her palagi mother didn’t understand Samoan, yet when she played lape in the yard she spoke Samoan with her cousins? Yes, that’s it. You’re in this class too because this culture is yours, more so than ours.
Va’ai! O la lava e ata le faia’oga palagi. Ae pe ata la e ea? Look! Our palagi teacher is still smiling. I don’t think he’s going to stop smiling today. I wonder if he’ll smile tomorrow and the day after that. How long will his smile last? How long will our smiles last? I hope his smile lasts because as I sit here looking at this thick, thick English book and the stories in it, I have a feeling that we won’t be smiling the way we are today even if our teacher continues to smile. I have this funny feeling that when the faia’oga says, let’s read this story or that story, many of us will not understand the stories. So we may not smile. I don’t know. I could be wrong. I’m only saying that I have a feeling.

But tomorrow has not arrived. This is today and today the teacher is smiling, the boy next to me is smiling, the girl next to him is smiling. We’re all smiling so let’s smile on our first day in class and face tomorrow when it arrives in our English classroom here in Samoa.
Lunch Time in Samoa

Lunch time in Samoa!
Where to eat?
Who to eat with?
What to eat?
Cafeteria!
Lunch Wagon!
across the beach
or Tula’s Hamupaka Shack!

There’s that girl!
The one from class
The one the boy called
palagi pepelo

She’s waving!
waving at me
Ua fa’i sau lunch?
Let’s go!
Let’s go buy lunch
at Tula’s Hamupaka Shack
behind the school
where the kids whose parents
give them tala go

Here’s Tula’s Shack!
There’s the short
short storekeeper

What’s your order?
he asks
O le a lau ota?

Fa’atali!
Wait! Wait!
Let us read the menu
The menu behind you

Tula’s Hamupaka Shack
Bowl Saimini .35¢
Hamupaka $1.50
Ham & Cheez $1.50
Egg & Tuna Deluxe $1.50
Fa’i Chips .50
Taro Chips .50
Ulu Chips .50
Bongo & UFO Chips .50
Choc. Chip Kuki .50
Panipopo .50
Cinamoni Bun .50
German Bun .50
Panikeke .50
M&M, SNICKERS, KITKAT .50
COKE, PEPSI & MOUNTAIN .50

What’s your order?
Tailo!
What’s yours?
Tailo!

Hey!
You!
Is your name Semoana?

Yes!
Weren’t you the one who didn’t know the Samoan alphabet?
That’s me. The one who didn’t know the alphabet!

Do you remember me?
Who can forget!

E te a’oga i Samoana?
Ioe
Me too!
Va’ai o lena ua tau galo lau faasamo

What?
O lena ua galo lau faasamo!
I haven’t forgotten my Samoan!
O lea ou ta faasamoatū, a’ō lena e te nanu mai!

I just forget!
Forget to switch from English
to Samoan!
I don’t know why?
Why I forget?

Leaga ua leva ona e alu i Amerika
What?
Leaga ua leva ona e alu i Amerika
Toeitiiti lava te’a lau manogi fa’aamerika

Semoana!
Your order!
The short man wants your order!

You know that guy
The one I was talking to
He did it again!
Did what again?
Said I forgot my Samoan
But I haven’t

I only forget to switch
Forget what?
Forget to switch
from English to Samoan
and from Samoan to English
I don’t know why!

Oka! Look at that girl!
Fea?
Over there!
Sole! That’s Jane
Who’s Jane?
Se, o Jane!
That’s not her name!
Yeah! That’s not her name
Oka! Look over there!
Where?
Over there
That girl
No! That one
She looks like a kolila!
No she doesn’t!
She does look like a gorilla!

Here! I’ll show you my girl!
There!
Where?
Right there!
Man! Look at her teeth
She’s got no front teeth!
Sole! E le nifoal e teine a oe, ali’i kama

Here, I’ll show you my girl
Wait! Fa’atali se’i su’e atu la’u teine
There!
Where?
Across the beach
O la e ofu lanumumu
No! The other one
The one in blue?
No! The other one!
I can’t see her!
See where my hand is
There’s no girl over there!
Yeah! There is!
Right here! Here in my eyeball!

Tam you!
Tam! You too!
Let’s go! The bell just rang!
Ua ta le logo!
Fia Palagi

Falesau guess who I saw at lunch today?
Who?
Tavita. That boy from a’oga Samoa—the one who teased me because I didn’t know my Pi Tautau.
He remembered you?
Apparently so. He was a jerk then and he’s still one today. He embarrassed me again. Said that I forgot how to speak Samoan. O la e ma talanoa te’i lava ua fai mai, ea? ua galo fo’i lau faasamo.
Did he say you were fia—palagi.
No, he didn’t say that, but that’s how I felt. No, wait a minute! That’s not how I felt. I just forgot. Forgot to switch to Samoan. It’s hard, you know—to switch.
Like now Semoana?
Yeah, like now.
Did you notice the English-speaking Samoans in your English today?
The what?
The English-speaking Samoans in your class today? Did you notice them?
They’re going to become your best friends.
How do you know?
I know because that’s been my experience. You’re all going to be tracked together. You’ll take advanced math, science, English, join National Honor Society, student government, year book. You’ll be known as the ones who’ll go to college!
Huh?
Yes Semoana, you’re cornered. E fiu lava oe, o le lalolagi lena e te ola ai. You’ll start thinking like you’re a palagi, but you’re not.
But that’s not how I feel.
But people will see you that way. They’ll think e te fia palagi.
But that’s not right. I mean, their thinking that I want to be a palagi—e sese. Is that how you feel?
No.
So you’re saying that I’m fia palagi?
No, that’s not I’m saying.
But that’s how you sound.
Semoana, e le’o fai atu a’u e te fia palagi oe.
Ok so now I’m crazy?
Why are you getting mad? I’m not saying e te fia palagi.
Then why did you ask if I noticed the English speaking Samoans in my class?
I only asked because I wanted to see if you noticed something?
Yeah, I noticed I was one of them and they were one of me and so are you!
You don’t need to scream. O lea e fesili atu le fesili. Go check your sugar level. Alu e siaki lau suka. I mean your Sa—moan sugar level. A low, then eat a fasi talo. A high ia, then you’re ok. But don’t get mad at me.

Maybe Fale is right. Pei lava e sa’o Fale. I am becoming more and more like a palagi, tracked in those classes with the English-speaking Samoans all because we speak English—a little too much English.

Becoming more and more palagi.
Auoi!
So what will I become—a prawn kokonut?
Brown on the outside and white on the inside?
Auoi!
I don’t think so.
I really don’t tink so.
I hope not.
I hobe not.
Se'i falo lo'u vae. Let me stretch my leg. Auoi! It’s sleeping again from sitting here weaving and creating new patterns for this mat. The alisi are crying! Fefe ua fetagisi mai alisi and it’s evening—time for worship. Time to put away this mat and gather the family and children for lotu. The fala is nearly complete. It’s been so difficult weaving and connecting the old patterns to these new ones. I hope the aiga like the mat. I hope the woman likes it. Let me look at it . . . Leai! O lea lava e manaia mamanu o le fala. They will be pleased. It’s a beautiful mat now that I’m looking at it more carefully. It is a Samoan treasure, measina a Samoa. I especially like this new pattern. It’s a nice blend of the old and the new, and it will connect her to our ancestors. Talofa e! How hard it must be living in a palagi world but determined to keep the faasamoa, not to mention le gagana Samoa. Ou te onosa’i lava e lalaga faauma le fala taeao. I’ll be patient with myself but especially this mat. Tomorrow morning, I’ll rise early to weave the last few strips and then it’ll be ready to be given to this young woman’s aiga.

A’o le taimi lenei, se’i fono tamaiti e o mai. I wonder where the children are. I don’t hear their voices. It’s time for worship. Let me go and see where everybody has gone. Oh, my! Fefe . . . I have been sitting for a long time. Ua matua pe lava lo’u vae taumatau. My right leg is really sleeping.

Sina! Sina! O fea tamaiti? Where are the children? Come! Sau! Put away the laufala strips and call the children. It’s time to say prayer. O mai loa! O mai se’i fai se lotu. Fefe ua alu le aso!
Closing Remarks
Only a few more loose ends before the mat is finally complete. Toe lava o ni nai laufala ona ma’ea lea o le galuega. I must be very careful with these last laufala strips because if I don’t tuck them in firmly, then this entire mat will come undone. E tatau lava ona lalaga ia mau laufala nei, aua a le mau, e toe matala atoa le fala. Malo le tapua’i! Malo le onosa’i!—Thank you for your support and your patience while I tuck these final laufala strips under the stronger ones.

Weavers of old say it’s very important to tighten these final strips. That’s why I’m taking my time here. Fai mai lava le aulalaga, e tatau lava ona sulu lelei pito laufala mulimuli nei ia mau. As I secure these last strips, I look at the different criss-crossed patterns, and the entire mat as a whole. A’o tau sulu mau pito laufala nei, o lo’o ou tilotilo toto’a i mamanu ese’ese, aemaise le fala atoa. O a’u fesili. E lagona leo Samoa i mamanu nei? Ae a le aganu’u, talafaasolopito, ma olaga o tagata Samoa ua fefilo ma uiga faapapalagi? Do the patterns reflect Samoan voices? What about our genealogy and culture? What about our identities as Samoans—American Samoans? Am I, Semoana, rooted to my ancestors? I see the connections, and I hope you see them too.

I’m pleased with the mat, but I know there remains tension in my mat, my story and me—right now as I tighten these last strips. E ui lava ina ou malie i mamanu o lo’o taatitia mai, e mamafa lava lo’u loto, ona e le uma ai le faigata o le ola i gagana ma aganu’u e lua. The tension exists because I live in two cultures and languages that oppose and translate each other. It’s the reality of many Samoans and other diverse groups living in America, moving in and out of Samoan culture and this strong papalagi culture and its language. But I refuse to stay here and cry over it. Samoans from the family of Samoa
don’t like to cry about things. Like our ancestors, we continue to paddle our canoes no matter what. But where do we paddle to? What new things must we explore about ourselves and conquer? What new patterns will be woven by future Samoan weavers, living perhaps uncomfortably and invisibly as Samoans across America? Let’s wait to hear from them for there are so many wanting to express themselves and connect to our Samoan roots, measina but especially our gagana Samoa. Don’t hold back. Push out. Toss your nets out to the deepest, deepest part of the Pacific Moana. Tu’utu’u lau upega i le loloto! E maua lou malosi mai le Atua!

Only a few more strips and then I will be done. But since I have a little time, let me share the words of Gloria Anzaldua, a Mexican-American writer. Visitors, it’s good that you listen too. Anzaldua wrote these words about her people and their language in America:

*Los Chicanos*, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us. We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we’ve kept ours.

O la’u fesili—are we patient like Los Chicanos? Fai mai Anzaldua e tumu tagata Chicano i le onosa’i. E ui lava ina tu’u e isi tagata latou gaganamoni i Amerika, o lo’o tumau pea latou i la latou gagana. Faapeafea oe ma a’u? Do we share our Samoan culture and language with our children, so we don’t rob them of experiencing this powerful Samoan spirituality. If we don’t, we’re helping strong people hammer away our Samoan identity—our identity from God. Give it some thought.

I’ve reached the end of the fala. Visitors, I apologize for that left turn off the road, but you did come to my house to listen to our stories. As you can see, our culture and
mother tongue is very important to us. In Samoan culture when you say too much or do not stop when you say you will, it's a sign of disrespect. I don't mean to show disrespect. I hope you're still here and have witnessed our many Samoan patterns, which explains and connects us to our Samoans roots and to America, our adopted country, where many of us live now.

With all due respect, I'd like to say—ia malu le vai—may the water soothe those who I may have offended—e poto lava le tautai, ae sese sese lava le atu i ama—I'm only a weaver of words, and as any captain of a ship is knowledgeable about his task she nevertheless makes mistakes. Faamagalo mai le nei lalaga upu, forgive the weaver for her misspoken words.

Now I'll sing a song for you. Singing a song to please the audience and to express appreciation at the end of any celebration is a Samoan tradition. I'll sing the same song I sang in the beginning, but this time I wish to sing the last verse of my village Laloifi—known throughout Samoa as the mother of love. Love for Sa—moa, love for Samoan people, love for people no matter what their stories, culture, and language—that is Samoan love for you! If you'll join me here in this Samoan practice, I ask that you put your palms together like this . . . now rub them like this. Rub them more! Are they hot? Then rub them some more. All right, now I ask you to clap. Clap one time! Two times! Now three times! Very good! Now we're ready to sing. You may mumble along if our Samoan voices inspire you.

(Clapping instructions in Samoan)
Mili mili mai! Toe mili mili mai!
Pati mai! Talua mai! Tolu tolu fa!

Afai o le a tatou
Tatou ta ape'ape
Ia matafi o ni gasegase
A ia'i o ni mala
Faatafe'a aua ne'i afe
Ia lagimainia le Faatui o le motu ma le Maluolefale

O singing! Tra la la la la
Oi Samoa e! Fiafia ma osana

O le tala moni lena ia Samoa
O Laloifi o le tina o le alofa

When we disperse
May sickness remain afar
If there are any omens
Send them away from our path
As for the matai of this village
May Faatui o le motu and Maluolefale remain safe

O singing! Tra la la la
O Samoa! Rejoice and osana

This is the truth in Samoa
Laloifi is the mother of love!
Laloifi is the mother of love!
REFERENCES


