

Silauni'i

Jacinta Galea'i

Her name is Silauni'i
She was named after the village of Launi'i
Her parents added—*Si*—to *Launi'i* to make *Silauni'i*
Ministers do that
Samoans do that
Name their children after places, events, and things.

Sifitiuta

Petesa

Leone

Simalua

San Diego

San Francisco

Seattle

Silauni'i is my friend
She - the village minister's daughter
I - the hospital chaplain's daughter
We live in the village people's eyes
setting examples for village kids' lives

“Ministers' kids,” the village people whisper. “Some of them are the worst.
Owned by Satani.”

A'o le teine e tusa ma ona ala,
aua a o'o ina teine matua o ia e le toe te'a ese ai o ia.

Silauni'i is quiet, but I saw her through her saveveveve hairdo. This meant she got up in the morning and entered the village without combing her hair. During those days, I walked beside Silauni'i and asked myself a lot of questions. I wanted to sink my teeth into her answers. To gnaw on them. To tear them into bits and pieces. Other days, she entered the village with one pigtail hanging on the left or right side of her head. The sides were different each time. They provided me food for thought. Food about her. Me. Us.

One day, Silauni'i had two pigtails on the top of her head separated by zig-zag lines. One pigtail was bigger than the other. When Silauni'i wasn't looking, I stared at her pigtails and asked myself, "Don't the flyaways bother her? What about the zig-zag lines and uneven pigtails?"

Stuck on Silauni'i's zig-zag lines, I couldn't see that Silauni'i was free. Free of straight lines and even pigtails.

Silauni'i constantly blew her nose on her school uniform, t-shirt, fingers, and hands. On those days, I stayed quiet.

But if Silauni'i didn't like to comb her hair, she sure did make up for it with her white teeth.

Whiter than white
Whiter than mine

Zig-zag lines, white teeth, and uneven pigtails
Silauni'i—the minister's daughter—is my friend
We live in village people's eyes
setting examples for village kids' lives.
Maybe not for hair or snots
but for white teeth
Whiter than white.

Ask Silauni'i a question and she answered with a smile. Provoke her and she answered with another smile. Call her names—bad names—and she smiled whiter than white.

That summer, Silauni'i and I moved to level three in A'oga Samoa to learn Samoan Grammar. "O i le fale e malolo. Faitau mai le itulau e tasi e o'o i le luasefululima. E fai le su'ega i le aoauli," the minister told our class. I marked chapters one and two for the quiz.

The house was empty when I got home, so I fixed a sandwich. On one slice of bread, I spread butter and on the other I spread peanut butter. In the middle, I sliced a ripe banana. Then I poured milk from a can of Darigold into a glass, scooped in four spoons of Fijian sugar, and added water. Then I went to my sister's room and lay on my mattress. I liked eating while lying down. My mother said that only old ladies ate in bed, but I ate my sandwich

the way I always did. I folded it in half so I could get to the middle. Because my father always said that there were children starving in the world, I learned to eat all the hard parts of my sandwiches. The bottom before the top. I also liked drinking while lying down, but I could never get the sweet milk to go down right. So I was always forced to raise my head off the pillow. I looked at my sister's clock: 11:00 am. Three hours to study for the grammar quiz.

While rolling back and forth on my mattress, I drew a straight line and then a curvy one on the wall with my dirty feet. Satisfied, I opened my grammar book. My book was thin like most of my books for A'oga Samoa. Nobody had ever told me that Samoan Grammar existed. The first page read: London Missionary Society. They had translated Samoan language into Roman script and missionary Pratt wrote the first Samoan Grammar book.

That afternoon, I didn't realize how starved I was. I ate and ate the naunas, veapes, soanaunas, and soaveapes, finishing the two chapters that afternoon.

That afternoon, the minister quizzed us on chapters one and two.

"Ia sauni mai. O le a fai le su'ega," he said to us. I waited for him to read the questions.

Fesili muamua. O le a le fuaiupu?

Fesili lona lua. O le a le nauna?

Fesili lona tolu. O le a le soaveape? I wrote everything I had memorized earlier about Samoan grammar.

After the quiz, Silauni'i and I played in our seats while the minister corrected our work. The seventh-grade boys sat two cement poles from us. Their closeness was intoxicating. Catching the seventh grade boy look my way, I flipped my right pigtail and pretended to read my book.

"Ia, soso mai i luma," the minister said, passing out our notebooks.

O le tama poto e fialia ai lona tama,
a'o le tama valea e fa'anoanoa ai lona tina.

Slap.

Slap.

Slap dance.

Backhand.

Tu'i

Po

Her head slammed against the back wall and then the cement pole
tears dripped and then poured
her tears

my tears
our tears

Po!
Slap!
Po!

Her body shook
My body trembled
Our bodies rattled
Uncombed hair
zig-zag lines
uneven pigtails
dripping snot
white teeth

Whiter than white got a beating in front of everybody at A'oga Samoa that afternoon.

Somebody got a 100 pasene on their Samoan grammar quiz. But it was not the minister's daughter.

S-E-T-E-X-A-M-P-L-E-S-F-O-R-V-I-L-L-A-G-E-K-I-D-S

The Bible says, when one part of the Body suffers every other part suffers.