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Nafanua's Family

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TUSIATA AVIA

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Aunty Lapo'a says things behind Nafanua's back:
Ia, va'ai se keige, jus run off into da sunset
Who look after da mother?
Who look after da father?
Nafanua, she always been da kafaovale-run-around one
no good for da kirl be like dat.

Nafanua thinks about her mother
Why was she so mean?
Why did she bend the children's arms?
Why did she tie them to chair legs?

Aunty says she was always like that
and with the boys
walking on the road
knowing all the tricks
hair out
lavalava tied like that.

There is a story about Nafanua's mother as a young woman
there were guests in the house when her father arrived from kua
Palagi guests
Uncle told him what she had done.

Nafanua's mother on her knees in the middle of the room
Nafanua sees her from the back—the sweet angle of her head
she doesn't need to see her face or hear the belt or cane
or whatever it was they used
that is the moment she loves her
that is the moment she loves her the most.

GLOSSARY

Ia, va'ai se keige: Look at that girl
Kua: remote villages
Lavalava: wrap-around garment
Palagi: White people