

The Small Wood

by Lan Dinh (Age 16, Vietnamese)

Listen! The plants are moving. Listen to nature's breath and listen as my feelings rise up for the small wood.

'Small Wood' I name my special place. It's a wild field that hides in the corner of the lake, surrounded by thousands of wild purple petals. And from far away I can see the old tree, which shades the block of stones, grass and part of bamboo's bush, looking like a hen laying her eggs.

One late afternoon, as a lot of afternoons gone by, I was here relaxing in the tree's arm. I like to lean my back against its rough bark with my eyes closed and breathe in a chestfull of smells of wet soil and country air. This breath takes all my anxieties away. The wind is wafting the smell of wild flowers and dry hay, a smell so sweet, attractive and uniquely for me. I feel like all my concerns have sunk down with only me remaining free in this place.

Then I open my view and look ahead at the lake's surface. I quietly sense the smallest movements and the smallest sounds. The wind's beautiful songs rises and wakes up everything that seems to be in rest. The wind runs through the old tree leaves, stirring them as a hen flutters its wings. Dry leaves fall crisply on the stone. The old bamboo wriggles as if wanting to take a dance. The female wind leads some yellow leaves gliding onto the lake. They then continue the marathon, pushing waves to another bank. Right there, in the green water, is a school of fish snatching at coconut roots. The coconut curves its body and frees her hair down by the lake's surface with a rustling sound, as if laughing at the fish.

At another bank, the sunshine crowns the gray reed heads with gold coronets. The sun is setting. I look up at the sky. A white bird suddenly crosses my sky, lonely and flying as if chasing the sunlight. Oh my wings! Why chase a pale flower?

Surrounding me, the purple petal dye sunset. Though a little sad, the sun flashes an extremely beautiful light, then suddenly disappears completely. One day has died and a night begins in the celebration of insects and the frogs' orchestra.

Time goes by. I enjoyed moments like those, restoring something pure and natural, although sad and lonely; in peaceful beauty it touches my soul.

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That was the last afternoon when I said goodbye to my Small Wood, a time that's tearful in my heart. I left to go abroad that evening with my family. I left my special place, the Small Wood.

And now, here I am, thousands of miles away, but it will always be close to me. Because deep down inside of me there will always be a purple sunset and a perfect feeling for the Small Wood, which offered me the passionate images of motherland.

Remembrance

by **Leta Freeman** (Age 16)

Casey shuddered as the cold wind filtered through her jacket. She gripped the railing and looked cautiously over the edge. At the bottom of the rocky face, the surf pounded onto the rocks, sending salt spray half way up the cliff. Casey looked at the car, where her boyfriend sat at the wheel. He looked up and saw her. He smiled. Casey waved back, then turned and stared at the horizon.

Why did you do it, Jewel? Why? She bit her lip, trying not to cry. Trying not to imagine her friend climbing over the rail, trying not to imagine her jump. Trying not to believe that Jewel felt that she had no way out.

Casey gulped down the salty air and wiped her eyes. She bent down, picking up a bunch of flowers lying by her feet. Staring at them, a single feeling swept over her. She didn't want to throw them away. They were like her last memory of Jewel. Keep them forever. Cherish them. She wanted them with her to remind her.

Don't be so damn stupid, she told herself. You've got heaps of things to remind you of her. There's the photos, and the video, and the CDs you never gave back to her and ...

Casey crumpled to the ground, her legs unable to support her. She clutched at the railing, blinded by tears and fearing the fall. Sweeping the ground around her, she found the flowers. Their sweet fragrance filled the air, hiding the salty scent.

Jewel! The seagulls circled overhead.

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“Shut up! Shut up! Just shut up!” Casey screamed.

The car door slammed. Jamie came over and sat down. Casey clung to him, unable to control her sobs. He held her, rocking gently, until she had quieted down.

“Why did she do it?”

“Don’t know. Nobody knows.”

“I could have done something. If only she had told me what was wrong.”

“Maybe. Maybe you could have. But don’t make yourself miserable because you didn’t. You can’t turn back time.”

Casey looked up at him. “What if it was me,” she whispered. “What if I was the problem. Then she couldn’t tell me. She wouldn’t tell me if I was the problem. I was the problem. It was me.” Her words were overcome by tears.

“You weren’t the problem. It was something else, Casey. Jewel would tell you if it was you.”

“Then why couldn’t she tell me what the problem was? Why didn’t she tell me? Why did she jump?”

“Casey, I don’t know the answers. Nobody does. People can guess, and blame themselves, but nobody knows. People can’t turn back time.”

“You’re not helping.”

Jamie was quiet.

“The only thing you can do now is say goodbye, and remember the good things. Don’t focus on her death. Jewel would hate that. She would hate you thinking that there must’ve been something that you could’ve done.”

“Shut up, Jamie. Shut up.”

“No! Listen to me.” Jamie looked at Casey. “It’s horrible. But it’s not what you should concentrate on. Remember when she was alive, not dead. Don’t think there was some way that you could have helped her, and you didn’t. Don’t think that it was your fault that she jumped. It was her decision, Casey. No one else’s. She didn’t ask for help, didn’t show that she needed help. Nobody knew how distressed she was, she didn’t show it.”

“I was her friend! I should have seen it.”

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“Friends don’t always tell the whole truth.”

“We should change.” Casey grumbled.

Jamie smiled a little. “Yeah, we should eh?” He was silent for a moment, “Do you know?”

“Know what?”

“The truth.”

“I don’t know the truth! I wish I did, but I don’t know why she jumped.”

“Not why she jumped. I don’t mean that. Can you tell the truth about her life, the way you remember her?”

Casey was silent.

“Which Jewel?”

“Whichever one was her.”

She hesitated. Then she got to her feet and picked up the flowers. She stared at the sea, angry with it for taking her friend away, grateful to it for ending her misery. She glanced at the flowers, then heaved them over the railing and watched silently as they fell down the cliff and vanished underneath the churning waves. Casey turned around and stared at Jamie. He held out his hand and together they walked to the car.

“Jamie?”

“Yeah?”

“Can I tell you about the Jewel I knew?”

“Sure.”

Just Desserts

Paige Bell

Doing nothing to control her body, she became seamless. In some places there was more than necessary. Flesh spilling over flesh, Leila's hands fought to contain herself. But she couldn't. There was extra instead of contours. Her hollows were hills.

As she got out of bed her feet didn't touch the floor. All of the only thing she really knew to be her had leaked through her head and was flying around the ceiling. Empty. Soft. Muffled. "Come back," she commanded. Get back. And then she was, or more than she had been in any case.

Looking in the mirror at her voluptuous proportions she decided she wasn't an IT girl, but a tit girl, then giggled and decided she had spent too much time by herself today. This morning she'd left home with the intention of arriving at work. It just hadn't turned out that way. Five minutes later at the top of Onewa Road, sitting in the bumper-to-bumper traffic, she did a uwey and went straight back home. Today the world was just too big, or was it she was too big for the world?

She'd told her boss, unconvincingly, there had been a death in the family. It was the kind of encounter that made her blush, sweat even. Uneasily they walked the knife-edge of pretence - they both knew she's just lied, but the boss wasn't into the confrontation.

She spent the day reading an inane romantic novel and surfing on the tele between infomercials, The Young and the Restless and Ricki Lake. The combination of which inspired her to try on too-small-clothes, sucking in her stomach, pretending she hadn't put on any weight.

"But you have, you loser," hissed a voice from above.

And that's when the containers fell around her. The walls came down and she couldn't get out. Her inadequacy welled from her feet to her nostrils and surrounded her. She was hot; her skin could even sense her failure.

The voice of Aunty Nell-who-hated-children echoed throughout the room. A swirling, multi-coloured rubber ball bouncing randomly from wall to ceiling to

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floor and back again with alarming speed. And when it hit, it hurt. Like one of Auntie Nell's pincers, squeezing, saying in that warbling twang of hers: "Aren't you a fat thing, then?" Eighteen years later there was still a sympathetic dent in her arm.

"Why's she bloody well surfaced again, after all of these years?" Leila thought impatiently. "You're 24 years old and you will go to this engagement party and enjoy yourself. They're family, how hard can it be?"

Nervous energy translating into I'm-going-to-look-damn-hot-tonight intention, Leila kicked her too-small pile of clothes into the corner. In her black velvet panelled skirt and bust-enhancing (sales-girl speak) stretch top she took hold of the mascara wand, lifting it high in the air.

"Tonight let the wind clean out Auntie Nell, let her feel her inner hell. Let her spiteful intentions slap her own face. Let her stumble to find some inner grace," she paused, a bemused smile playing at her lips.

"Let the mirror to her soul be open tonight. Let her demons be the only fight she'll fight." She breathed the incantation with mysterious verve whilst looking out of the window to a full moon that seemed to be smiling directly at her.

Feeling as if she'd just woken from some particularly gripping dream but couldn't remember what it was, Leila jumped into the car. Graunching into reverse she backed down the driveway as the normal sense of the world shimmered around her to make one small adjustment.

Nellie Smith adjusted her calf-length brown tweed skirt around the waist. Breathing in, her massive bosom rose like some great ship casting out on the horizon. She stretched her chinless face higher to tighten the errant folds of her neck, then turned from the mirror, satisfied she was presentable for her daughter's engagement party. After all he was a doctor, his people were, you know, quality.

Lifting her head up for an instant Nellie spied the moon. Suddenly a flash of white light hit her smack between the eyes. Reeling backwards she crashed to the floor. And when she got up, some minutes later, she was not quite the same as before.

At Sam and Suzy's, Leila was just getting familiar with the chips and green onion when Nellie crashed through the door. Warbling in her highly exaggerated soprano, "Hello darlings," she air-kissed the happy couple.

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“Still watching your weight I see, Lei-la,” she cooed sweetly, all the while jealously eyeing Leila’s curves. “With that name, well, I always thought you could be a stripper, a scarlet woman...” she trailed off, not finishing the thought that had been well worn by time.

Leila said nothing, caught unawares as she was, processing a mouthfull. She just looked on in curious fascination as Aunty Nell’s face, neck and hands swept a beetroot shade of scarlet. In an instant the clothes on her aunt’s body were pasted to her with sweat. “Ahhhgrhh,” shrieked Aunty Nell, careering around the room, bashing into furniture and people as she began tearing at her clothes. Stupefied, Suzy and Sam looked on. They tried to pull her out of the room but it was no use.

It was almost as if Nellie Smith was determined to be naked in front of them all, they said later. Throwing her clothes off in an almost, yes, the manner of a stripper. Perhaps it was that repressed childhood, that Catholic upbringing, they analyzed.

Just desserts, Leila thought with a smile, as she tucked into her chocolate mousse with double cream and cherries. “This is the life,” she said, smiling lazily like a black cat soaking in the sun. “A stripper I am not. But a witch, well...” She didn’t finish the thought. It too had been well worn by time.

Shame!

by Mary Tipoki (Age 15, From the Cook Islands)

My mum, my family and I went to the mall to do our shopping. Man it was embarrassing!

I saw my boy friend there.

My mum was yelling at me: “Go buy some toilet paper.”

My face went red. My boyfriend looked me right in the eye

“What are you doing here?”, I asked

“Doing shopping for your birthday”.

He knew I was shamed.

He went off to the toilet. When he was gone I ran into Deka and bought the toilet paper.

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When I got to the counter he was waiting for me. And he could hear my mum yelling.

It was the worst day of my life.

So I dumped him.

I ran away because it hurt and I was shamed. I hid for four hours.

I waited for the mall to close when I knew my family would be looking for me.

I decided that day that I am never going shopping with my mum again.

Home Away From Home

by Susan Lin (Age 15, Taiwanese)

I walked into the school counsellor's office for the third time that week. Since the last two times I had refused to speak one word to him.

"Look, Susan, I think you really should make an effort in adapting to life in New Zealand. I know this is hard for you, I can understand that. But I..."

He never got to finish.

"Oh, you do understand, do you?" I cut him off.

"Have you ever been in a room full with people laughing and joking while you stand there amongst them feeling loneliness crushing you? Have you ever woken up at night and found your face flooded with tears, because you just dreamt about your friends back home that you might never see again? Have you ever wished upon a star for a friend who can laugh with you, and not at you? So, have you? Have you?"

Seeing the counsellor's face suddenly bursting red with humiliation, I knew it would be the last time for me to step into his office. It was.

That was my attitude to anyone who attempted to help me find a new way of living. Before I came to New Zealand, I did not know what it was really like. Yes, I knew it was green, there were lots of sheep, it was seven times bigger than Taiwan, and they spoke English. But that was as much as I knew about New Zealand, which really did not help in settling here.

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I remember agreeing to my parent's suggestion of immigrating to New Zealand though. For an eleven-year-old child who did not even fully understand the word 'immigration', visiting a foreign country was pretty fascinating. And so I packed all my belongings, had a big farewell party, shed a few tears, and left in a big hurry. It was not that Taiwan was such a horrible place, but at that time all I could even think of was new place, new people, and heaps of fun!

A week after our arrival, I hated this place. I wanted to go back to Taiwan. New Zealand was nothing like what I thought it would be. Yes sure, it is green, there are lots of sheep, it is seven times bigger than Taiwan, and they speak English. All of that was true. The problem was that I thought we could just come here, settle down, meet new friends, go to school, and carry on with our great life. I thought it was like moving to another city, and we could just go back at anytime if we wanted to. I thought there was not much difference between New Zealand and Taiwan. I was wrong.

The first thing was that I missed my best friend. I missed her a whole lot. I often break into tears just thinking about the precious times that we spent together. I missed that time when we barbecued on the beach and overcooked every slice of our meat but ate it happily anyway; I missed the times that we shared secret jokes; and I missed all the sleep-overs when we shared our fears and sorrows and talked about the dream life we both wanted. I couldn't stand the thought of not seeing her again.

And then there was the language barrier. I thought English would not be hard. I went to an American school for three years when I was very young, so I thought English here would be the same and everything would be a piece of cake. I was wrong again. I went to school, and I had no idea whatsoever of what the teachers and students were talking about. It felt like I was from another planet.

I have been living in New Zealand for four years now. It is a long time, and time could change things. English is not so hard now, although sometimes I still have difficulties understanding specific words. I still miss my best friend, but not as desperately as before. We have been writing to each other since the day that I came, and I am pretty sure we will keep writing. I still want to go back to Taiwan, not to live, but for a visit. All the fear that I felt when I first came has long gone into the night wind.

Yes, New Zealand is still green, it still has a lot of sheep, it is still seven times larger than Taiwan, and the people here still speak English. What changed was, I have some idea of what New Zealand is like, and I like it.

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The Fingers of the Blackberry

by Naomi Clarke

(Age 21, NZ European)

In a world of sports I couldn't quite get the hang of, size twelves I just could not fit, and a constant string of average marks, it was a huge relief to find something I was really good at.

From a young age I was christened into the world of sex. My first experience was not a night of blood-stained horror, as many of my friends filled me in on. Instead, I was in love, the way only a fifteen-year-old woman could be. With energy and blind imagination I loved him. Fiddling around in his mother's satin sheets was more comical than anything. We did it like the book, missionary position, condom and cuddles.

But he ran away when he thought I was pregnant. I was a day late. This flee of a rejection just left me craving more. I wanted to be good at this.

I could not say no. I was horrified at my first blowjob, the sight, smell and taste. My second I closed my eyes and tried to think happy thoughts, and by my third I was so distant I did a splendid job.

Distant. I went from boy to boy. I felt proud. I felt popular. Sex gave me love injections that were short, sharp and painful.

One night sticks out like a sore bleeding thumb. It was a party at the squash club. I was going out with Hayden Moore. He was the coolest most popular boy in the world, as far as I was concerned. I wanted to show him off to the world. But when he arrived he proceeded to ignore me wholeheartedly. I was humiliated. I knew all my friends would doubt as to whether I was lying about Hayden. Hayden was quite a catch after all.

I began plotting and planning all the ways I could snap Hayden back into wanting me. My obvious choice was to turn to the other thing I was extremely good at. I had started and learned about drugs early on. They didn't mean much to me. I did not crave them, only used them as a tool to get exactly what I wanted. I approached Hayden. I told him what I had. That got his attention. He had never done drugs before. I beamed. I rolled a joint and smoked it with Hayden. He wanted another and another. Then he kept drinking.

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It had worked. He let me sit on his knee and kiss him in front of everyone. Proof. I felt good.

He suggested we go outside. I followed him behind the squash club, away from the party. It was a beautiful night. Behind the club long grass grew and fell down a tall bank into a small creek.

Hayden pushed me up against the building. He attacked me with kisses. He murmured strange drunken sounds. I felt him grow hard.

Suddenly he lost his balance and fell, taking me with him. He laughed and pushed us down the hill. It was dark at the bottom, strange bushes pushed at my skin. Hayden was working faster now; he was pulling up my shirt and pulling down my pants. I had my period. I had a tampon inside. I did not want sex.

I said I did not want sex. But when I looked up I saw it was not Hayden anymore. He had gone. His body, primal, drunk and mad was now thrusting and huffing above me. I was nameless.

Fear. A cold spanner smashing every inch of my skin.

Abandonment, weakness and fear.

I said no again, loudly this time, with all the drama and force I could muster. The body above me did not stop to hear anything.

I had just enough time to pull my tampon out before Hayden entered me.

I lay stunned and alone. I couldn't find my shoe. My buttons had been ripped off. I crawled up the hill like a crippled dog. I sat at the edge of the squash club. I heard Hayden's voice. My head peered around shaking but needing to see. He had Sarah pinned up against the wall now. Kissing wild wet kisses.

I came back into myself in the shower, the next day. My eyes noticed a red river of blood running off my skin into the plughole. I was not shaving and my period had now stopped. I turned my head as far as it would go to stare at my back. Scratches. Five long sheets of red. All with small criss-cross for design.

Detached. How did they get there? A flash of blackberry bush. Lying bare and exposed on the thorns. Skin slicing slowly; pain a distant hallowing sound.

I fainted.

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It was Joanna Simons who found me. Sweet kind good Jo. She picked me up, wrapped me in towels and listened to my soiled song. It was Jo who came with me to the 24-hour doctors, a weightless arm around me.

The doctor was a man. Of course. This disturbed me more than I ever would have thought. He looked like every other man I had ever seen and yet was like no other. From an inhuman height he prodded and poked at me. Hard. With cold fingers. He created a silence for me, icebergs in my throat. Yet I let him. He told me I was silly. The chances of me being pregnant during my period were minimal. I was numb, frightened, confused, but silly? No.

I asked for a prescription of the pill. He looked at me then; Dracula, King Kong and Captain Von Trapp, all the men wrapped in one.

“Yes, you sure need one.”

Today those blackberry bushes and Hayden Moore hover in my vision, long thorny fingers. I still find it hard to say no. But I can.

I don't do anything that I don't want to. I always take control. I protect myself from getting hurt at all costs. This is not necessarily a good thing. I never fully open up to anyone. Anyone who touches me, in any form, I suspect.

Yet I do live in optimism. I am a well-educated, strong, beautiful and independent woman. I carry with me a warm space, in which I hope.

Once Upon a Time

by Seven O'Shay

To think, two years ago I was an unstable teenager, with no role models, no direction in my life, and living in an environment not even fit for your own dog. Time and time again, I've tried to write down and tell you my story. A story that started off with hopeful dreams, new beginnings, new experiences, meeting new people and making it. A story I have shared with so many people, so unlike me, they don't have to go through the experience to learn the lesson. So I will cut the story short and portray this to you. My story. My life.

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I had been in my new school for ten months. It sucked, I hated it. It was too crowded, it had too many rules, and it was four times bigger than my old school. I just couldn't handle the big jump, from a secluded girls' private school, to a rather large co-ed state school. I used to go to a Maori girls' boarding college, for two years. I decided to leave this small controlled environment for bigger and better things. I had found my cultural identity, now I was in search of my academic ability. Don't get me wrong. I was one of the top students in my year, yet I needed a wider range of opportunities in my education, something the old school lacked.

So I enrolled at an out of town state school, but eventually I didn't even go to school.

There were bigger and better things life was offering, alcohol, sex, drugs! You name it, I did it. It was just one big party after another. This was my life.

One day I found my reflection staring me back in the mirror. It wasn't a pretty sight. My face was drawn; my eyes were bloodshot, with dark saggy circles underneath them. I looked a fright. Then it was as if reality come up from behind and hit me on the head. I had wasted a whole year, for what? I had nothing to show for it. No education, no certificates and no knowledge of doing extremely well. Only reports that said, "...your daughter does not attend class enough to get a passing grade" or "...she is more than capable, however..." It was things like that, why my parents never laid eyes on any of my report cards.

Then I thought of my home environment. My father was a student himself, so he was forever taking his moods swings out on my sister and I, he was a druggie, he did it around us all the time, since we were young, it was like his way out. So I thought if it's his way out, it should work for me too. That's when drugs entered my life. He had no idea.

Then I stopped. Why? Mainly because I didn't want to end up like my father. He would verbally and mentally abuse us, on the odd occasion he would hit us, and for what? Really we didn't do anything wrong, but if he took all his frustrations and problems out on us, then he didn't have to blame himself. Why was he like this? Because of drugs. They had got to him and he couldn't get out, and I refused to end up like him and follow his path in life. I had no role models. My sister wasn't much older than me, I never went to school so I never looked up to any teachers, and my mother lived nearly two hours away. Really my only role model was my father, and look where that got me.

Two years later, believe it or not I'm still in school. I am in my seventh form year, with four months to go. I did, however, end up repeating my fifth form. It was hell, but when I moved back in with my mum and was surrounded with my family I knew I would be able to make it. It was the best decision I had made for myself in a very long time. It's not a fairy tale ending, with 'they lived happily ever after'. I still struggle with life's obstacles thrown at me, but I deal with it my way.

I believe that young women of today need a lot of tautoko (support) from everyone, friends, family, and teachers, anyone who is willing to be there for you. Because when you're a young women everything seems that little bit harder, everyone wants to take what they can from you and not give back. I know. I've lived it.

You don't have to go through life thinking no one cares for you; it's one of the worst possible experiences life has to offer. If you find yourself getting into a position similar to myself, I advise you to seek help and support, because you are not alone!

Cheeky Monkeys and False Fangs

by **Rehana Sadiq**

(Age 15 - Samoan, Fijian Indian)

“Ie lavalava teoteo fa’a samoa.”

Every time I hear that I think of my grandmother. She listens to her Walkman all day. The volume so loud you can hear it from the kitchen. She is 89 years old; her name is Mele Vaele loelu and is part Samoan and German. She stays with us in her own room. Her walls are filled with necklaced photos of her brothers and sisters. Their faces look pale because of the black and white contrast.

All she does to occupy herself is listen to 531 P.I. And her daily routine is to check her Lotto tickets to see whether she has marked the “laki numeras” as she calls them.

She used to stay with my cousins in Ponsonby. When I was five years old I went there to stay the night. I remember it clearly. When Grandma Mele ate dinner we imitated her because it looked like she couldn't chew her food. She got angry and

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scared us by taking her clean fangs out and pretending she was a hungry monster. All we could hear while we ran through the hallway was “Clatter! clatter! clatter!” We ran through the door of my cousin’s room and hid under the bed. We felt like we were being hunted by a bear that’s after honey.

“Don’t push me!” I said, trying to whisper.

“Shut-up! She’s going to hear us!” My cousin Imrana said.

“You shut-up!” I replied.

My cousin Aleem said, “Why don’t you both shut-up?”

When Grandma Mele fell asleep we sneaked in her room like burglars. Her teeth were drowning in a glass of water by her bed. She woke up ‘cause she heard us snickering like animals in the corner of her room, snapping at her fake teeth. She slowly reached for the lamp and switched it on. The light snapped on frightening the socks off us. She got a big grin on her face like Krusty The Clown. She jumped out of bed with her holey mouth and chased us down the hall, back to our rooms and back under the bed. She was pretty fast for an old lady - like a cheetah sprinting after an antelope. When she got to our room she commanded us to get into bed and go to sleep.

“Tatou tafao taeo. Moe loa Fa!”

“Fa!” we said in a fa’ali’i way.

She turned the light off and we pretended to sleep. What she didn’t know was that we got the last laugh. We crept back into her room and played with her teeth