

Vili Mai

The telephone line is tinny with distance and many silent months.

It sends your quivering voice

From a place that I have never been.

“Hello?”

It is the same voice that had *consumed* me—

Thick, like *suafa* 'i, with remnants of composting jungle.

Yet, different.

For the first time, your voice makes me nervous.

“Is that you?”

I can feel the ice of the cold *Palagi* place that has claimed you in the thin air you exhale.

And I can picture it; reflecting off the pores of your blanching skin

Like the gloss of a snow-peaked tourist brochure that I would have flicked through:

New Zealand.

“How is it?” I inquire, fearfully.

You tell me of the blonde girls and of the blue-coloured mountains and of the red box-houses and of the opportunities.

You tell me like I don't already know about these places,

About these suited men and high-heeled women with wallets packed full of prosperity and used movie tickets.

You tell me. And I try to listen.

But, I can't help it: “what about Samoa?” I ask.

What about the *ma'umaga*— that need you— what about the *aiga*— that loves you— what about your sisters weaving endless *fala* on the floor — what about your mother devoted to the *falesa*— what about those nights spent laughing in the sticky heat on wide-set verandahs. What about that?

“I don't miss it,” you say. But I know you are lying.

And when you hang up, *I see you*

Walking to the factory where you work now, concrete beneath your enclosed feet;

Those gloriously wide feet that loved to run bare across rain-dew rugby fields.

“I'm proud of you,” I whisper to the darkness.

I close my eyes and picture you— *lo'u pele*— walking down the palm-lined road to your family's plantation with your empty wheelbarrow ready to be filled with prosperity.

And I hold you there. Still hoping you will come back home.