

DAN TAULAPAPA MCMULLIN

Artist Note: The standard practice among fa'afafine (MTF) and fa'afatama (FTM)¹ is that one's sexual partners are "straight": fa'afafine will sleep with straight men, and fa'afatama with straight women. Most fa'afafine do not see ourselves as women, but also do not identify as gay men. It is sometimes said that fa'afafine is a relatively new role in Samoan society beginning with the advent of foreign influence, however the role of fa'afafine is prevalent throughout Polynesia and is indicated by indigenous words such as fakafafine in Tonga, and mahu in eastern Polynesia. These indigenous words are without foreign etymology. But have fa'afafine changed with Western influence? How can we tell? Meanwhile people say that fa'afafine introduce young Samoan men to sex. An Apia fa'afafine who has had several long-term partners, gladly parted ways with them, when the partner married a real woman, "Such is the life of a drag queen," she says.²

The One-Eyed Fish

Once upon a time there was a faafafine named Sina
Who lived in San Francisco by a public swimming pool.
Above the swimming pool on the hillside was her mother's grave.
Her father married again into a poor but important family.
Her stepmother was a queen and an ogre.
Her stepsisters Mealele and George were queens too.
Everyone was a queen but Sina,
She was just an ex-football player consigned to household duties.

Everyday, at the sink, she dreamed of taxi drivers and construction workers,
And travel to distant places, like Manu'atele,
Where there was a secret hut, filled with taxi drivers and construction workers. But always in
her dreams before she reached the hut
She was rudely called back by her stepmother
And asked to perform impossible tasks with the make-up box.

Her stepsisters lived lives very different from her own.
Her stepsister Mealele managed a government owned hotel,
She managed to get it named the worst tourist destination in the world.
"But who needs tourists?
They take the best food, the best beaches, the best girls...
So our kids can learn to sell ula?"³

Sina's other stepsister George
Monitored missile launches from Vandenburg to Kwajalein
She also owned a sewing shop.

The stepsisters changed Sina's name to Sinalela,
Which means,
"That Sina!"

THE ONE-EYED FISH

One day, while Sinalela was washing dishes,
Out of the sink popped a one-eyed fish!
It must have swum up the plumbing from the sea.
"One-eyed fish, one-eyed fish, take me to my Prince!"

Suddenly, Sinalela saw eight Heavens, she had turned into a spider.
Her stepmother, who always watched Sinalela, screamed
And washed Sinalela the spider down the sink with the one-eyed fish.
The one-eyed fish swallowed the spider halfway down the plumbing.
"One-eyed fish, one-eyed fish, take me to my Prince!"

At the bottom of the sea the one-eyed fish threw the spider up
And said "Good-luck!"

Sinalela the spider began walking on her many legs towards land,
But she was going the wrong direction
And ended up thousands of miles away in the reef of Manu'atele.
In the sea of Manu'atele live the aiku spirits.
"Aiku spirits, aiku spirits, take me to my Prince!"⁴

It was night. The aiku spirits left their reef places
To dance in the poula,
The night party when human lovers meet
Among the trees after hours.⁵

Sinalela the spider skipped through the branches of the rainforest,
A phantom spark.
She saw a beautiful party boy named Ui
Who was drifting in the water near the shore,
Waiting for his lover the sun to rise.

As the tide receded from the shore, the beauty of Ui
Was revealed in the moonlight
And Sinalela the spider called him Maui,
Because of the receding waters,
Which revealed him.

Skipping over his forearm
She stung his hand and became a tattoo there,
The tattoo of a spider on Maui's hand,
And there Sinalela lived,
Happily
Ever
After.



Samantha Fuimaono and Uati in Sinalela, 2001

NOTES

"The One-Eyed Fish" is taken from writings for a sound installation entitled "The Resurrection of Tigilau" at Galeria de la Raza, a series of Samoan traditional and original narratives of resurrection and transformation. The story of the one-eyed fish is actually a revision of the narrative from "Sinalela" a video short by Dan Taulapapa McMullin shot in Samoa in 2001, a version of the Cinderella story but with fa'afafine.

¹ MTF: Male-to-Female; FTM: Female-to-Male.

² From "Body and Belief", an essay by Taulapapa-McMullin presented to the 2003 Pacific History Association conference in Apia, Samoa.

³ Garland or lei.

⁴ Spirit, ghost, demon, angel.

⁵ Night song or dance party sometimes precursor to forest trysts or bacchanalia/orgy.