

Tuālima

Today is Sunday the twenty-seventh of October.
One year since my pa died.
All the women are here:
my granny, my aunties, my mum's friends –
and my friends, Malia and Masina.
Everyone is waiting.

Tyla, the tufuga tā tatau, sits across from Mum.
She draws patterns on Mum's hand.
She talks to her quietly.
Everyone is watching.
Then comes the sound of the tatau.

Tap, tap, tap and wipe.
Tap, tap, tap and wipe.

Malia squeezes my hand. *That must hurt.*
I look at Mum.
She is quiet, her eyes on the au.
My mum is strong, I say.
My heart swells with pride.

Tap, tap, tap and wipe.
Tap, tap, tap and wipe.

Aunty Ana starts the tatau song:
'O le māfua'aga ...
Everyone sings, even Mum's Pālagi friends –
they Google the words on their phones.
Mum doesn't sing.
The tuālima grows across her hand:
dark-green malu,
shapes like diamonds,
like birds and fish and the sea.

Tap, tap, tap and wipe.
Tap, tap, tap and wipe.
Masina squeezes my other hand.
Your mum is crying.
Mum looks up at me, then turns her head.
Standing next to her is Pa!
His hand is on her shoulder.
He is smiling.
I shake my head, close my eyes.
I open them again, and Pa is gone.
It is just Mum and Tyla.

Tap, tap, tap and wipe.
Tap, tap, tap and wipe.

Mum is smiling at me, nodding.
I know she is telling me not to worry,
Pa is here with us, too.

Tap, tap, tap and wipe.
Tap, tap, tap and wipe.

When Tyla is finished, everyone sings again.
Aunty Ana calls out for Mum to dance.
Everyone is calling.
Everyone is smiling.

She bows to us and dances a graceful siva,
the beautiful new tuālima on her hand.

Tusiata Avia



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by Tusiata Avia

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