Man,

I know that when you meet new people you
wish you could get by just by being yourself

but it won't happen, the paint will drip
from the canvas first, the canvas will become

unstretched, unsized, uncut, unwoven
you wouldn't even be in the room

where the raven roosts with a kingfisher
a soft boy between them on the couch.
Rattan Horizons

From this veranda sometimes one can see behind the usual horizon: the earth becomes concave, mercators broken, and the sea beyond sight lines curls up like a skirt beneath a carress. Nothing there, no islands there, all the way south to Admiral Byrdland. My two-year old son points at it out over the railing as I spread peanutbutter on his toast. I don’t look up. How to explain? How once every so often upon a time the rattan wrapping around a piece of tortured curled world snaps and as if in protest part of the original design emerges.

Common Magic, Cyclone Ofa

Ofa 1

After the storm the whitened limbs of the sea-sucked trees stuck in the reef catch your eyes more than the thousands of others strewn on land

after that day and night of the sky as a limb of the murderous sea pawing over us, its hind legs raking the beach, the screaming.

An open ocean storm upset with the prospect of shores and land its meat. And trees.

Ofa 2

Ko’s exploded and Nofo’s disappeared. The laundromat in Malaeimi left its washers sitting on a concrete slab all alone.

Sometimes Ms. Nature just won’t take oh for an answer. Why is it everything looks burned by her breath?

Such a kiss makes anyone’s knees weak, so helpless.
Vailima

Unidentified flowers all along
the uphill border of the trail,
flowers I've written about before
but never named.
Scientism.
The trail cuts back again
to the right against the slope
and the flowers switch sides.
Anti-something.
On the long way up Mt. Vaea
to Stevenson's grave, you can
stop for awhile, it doesn't matter,
no one will see you pick all the flowers
and chuck them into the ravine.

To:

Those people who
refuse to see how
the sensations they
choose not to have
now and then define
whom they might have
been.

Talofai.
Dance the volcano.

Atu'u

a cannery crew on its break
all eating instant
add-hot-water ramen
on a gray bench

Mea Culpa

Between the rat wire
and
the mosquito screen
two moths are trapped
in the innocent death
of compulsion:

my fault, my light.
Conversation  (for Sinavaiana)

Talk should be like aggregate rock forming,
a subterranean igneous country rock
that will last for billions of years--
your nodules of pure minerals nudging down
next to my, different minerals in
the heated bed,

bound by a molten epoxy
of syntax and imperfect sense that
hardens to hold our secrets forever,
rising up into mountains, rifting,
becoming an island covered with green.
Caroline Sinavaiana

almost home now:
smoke from cookfires rising over southern trees;
time for cicadas to sing, but
alas, their chorus, *tagi alisi*
    muted by traffic / choke & din.

ah then, only *aitu* afoot now
their favorite hour & mine
for marginal beings to patrol our borders,
leaving all others to cluster
indoors, to pray / to wash / to feed
    & beckon us hurry into lamplight.

---

Ed. Note: *aflaft* (fire fire) and *tagi alisi* (cicadas song) are contiguous times of day in Samoa, namely sunset and dusk; *aitu* are ancestral spirits.
married to the moment (for Buddha's birthday)
inchoate again
this late morning
honolulu june
wedding portrait framed
by dormitory window:
through leafy mimosa
venerable tree all girlish
in pink, feathery blooms,
a bride floats by in fluffy white
dress hiked up demurely
small feet crunching gravel
on path to the japanese garden.
groomsmen in white shoes /
and guffaws,
bridesmaids in hooped pink taffeta /
no foolin
i borrow your ceremony
this uncertain morning
of questioning why
i'm alone, at a desk
away from child, husband and friend.
i borrow your ritual
 to re-dedicate my vows
to the present moment:
I am yours
however alone / difficult spicky / and strange
you are, or i am;
i embrace you again /
    with my breath /
i surrender
i do.

aflafi

stroll down vaea street
some sundown evening in Apia
towards the mountain
and away from the sea.

the diagonal light of winter
   & the liminal hour
cressing all in its wake:

sideways glances in the half-light,
even glare of video posters muzzled now;
inside the men's house/ poolhall, that is
brown faces under white neon
the hushed men murmur, ponder
    click clack & whsshh of wooden balls
    into the corner pocket.

keep moving; this town road
a tributary easing back up towards
the thick stream leading home:
mothers, sisters, brothers, sons / saunter west.
dogs keep their safe distance, sniffing.
an eddy of children swirls by from behind/
   then past/ in a footrace, giggling
   on the now-dark shoulder.
great lorries intrude / lumbering
those steel bellies swollen and heaving with cement
loom and hurdle past to some lurid assignation.
Duet For Cyclone Gina  for Michelle

I.

Lean into rain, laughing
mother and daughter
bow into each next step.
Our umbrellas, shields
thrust against the windy press of storm.

Beaming / surprised / we
survey our sudden domain:
tropical town streets swept
newly elemental
with the rainy squall.

Other shoppers huddle under awnings;
cigarette smoke and gazes drift
out to sea, brown & churning,

where the Rain-queen dances
her wild sīva,
her spinning form everywhere & nowhere too
whipping gray air into marbled gust
splattering earth creatures
both sentient and stone,
etching muscled limb with damp sarong,
these grafitti bouquets of wet color stuck
onto plaster and concrete.

She darkens the noon sky into early twilight
and flings a whirling embrace
around her two splashing daughters
who stamp and hoot with joy.

II. The Rain Queen Dances

So it's you again
out there / in the thick night
thrashing around
thumping it up
w/some strapping dude of a fau tree,
wagging those wide hips
out there / in the dark village;
   lusty trees snatching at
   your wild skirts,
   their leafy fingers clutching only
damp air and fragrance
   in your wake.

Almond trees drop nuts out back
cocoanuts thud and breadfruits brood,
green bananas clenched,
   but willing: this holy ruckus,
   my dear, on your behalf.

All quake & quiver
in vain, however,
as you, wanton goddess
twirl off to islands east
Tutuila and Ta'au /
Ofu and Olosega
shaking your thing / at cyclone speeds
til dawn, that is,
when you seek the embrace
of your lover, the sea
who will hold and rock you
and beckon voluptuous sleep.
war news

small flag of white lace
hangs from barbed wire
fence, which keeps the ducks in
all safe among teuila /
red ginger, and banana trees.

at the lagoon, i wash clothes
on black rocks, bowled lava,
glad for small discoveries:
  if you fold them into quarters first,
your blue jeans won't trail
  in the muddy pebble bed.

radio voice drifts down the early morning breeze:

LAST NIGHT, AN AMERICAN WARSHIP SHOT DOWN
A PASSENGER AIRLINER OVER THE PERSIAN GULF.

beyond the clothesline, a congress of chickens
mill about pecking grass seeds,
one brown hen teaching wee chicks
the art of pecking coconut from the half-shell;
two offspring listen rapt / one foot each
planted in today's lesson

290 PEOPLE DEAD. PRESIDENT REAGAN DECLINES TO
COMMENT. VICE-PRESIDENT BUSH DECLINES TO
ISSUE APOLOGY.
in the mangrove swamp, shadowy wings
disturb the dark air:
  matu'u / reef heron, and once
god of war, now ascending /
his ablutions complete,
to survey the day's grim business
out across the mudflats, where pigs
love to root at lowtide.
ianeta's dance

the young girl treads
    on grandfather's ailing legs.
lying belly down on the coarse woven mat
grandpa murmurs & dreams
    of a time before his leg got big
with mosquito sickness.

ianeta of six years
kneads with her feet & toes
    that veined and buckled path of
the old man's legs
that still after seventy years haul
    coconut / taro / everyday
fish from the sea every day.
they bend to coax earth oven, umu
they kneel to lift the baby, aua le tagi
then fold to sit for evening prayer,
    Lo matou Tama e, o i le tagi....

while grandpa dozes,
ianeta walks his legs,
dancing with her shadow on the wall.
she cries
for the moonlight strolls
filled with laughter,
as the stars immortalized
our bliss
in the galaxy horoscope;
and for the
soft kisses
as she lazily stretches
the morning after,
now discarded
in broken dreams
at her feet.

Why does the mother
of my children
cry?

She cries
because she sees
the love in
my face
for another
woman.
TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

There is a click that freezes the smile in the
space
of the
tells
it
mind.

It

you

I am.

dead

and

that

who

nothing,

are

it is

what

important.

If

means

and

then

We are only taking photographs.

WHY, MOTHER OF MY CHILDREN

Why does the mother

of my children
cry?

She cries

for the castles

that I promised her,

and the exotic adventures

lived shortly on a
dusty floor mat;

and for the

march down the aisle

filled with hope

and bird-songs,

now hollow

with empty echoes

of falling tears.

Why does the mother

of my children
cry?

She cries

for the glint

of the morning sun

on dew in flowers,

and for the magic

of touching fingers,

even casually,

now frozen by

the wind of time;
carelessly tossed
on marble grave
to hide the stench
and ugliness of
bad dreams

bad dreams
of god
turning away
as the chisel
adzed in blood:
"here lies a beloved brother"

bad dreams of
"lilies"
rhyning
"Uilli"

---

OF BUTTERFLIES AND BUBBLES

Last night,
I watched my son
catching moments
that I missed.
With rompish care,
he tossed my
fears and regrets
into the air,
shrieking with laughter
as they bounced
on the floor
bursting into
brilliant sunshines
of butterflies and bubbles.

For hours,
he frolicked
with my awkwardness
through rainbow vapor
and dancing smiles
while I,
in discomfort,
sprouted impossible wings
only to find that
I was too heavy
for the butterflies
and too clumsy
for the bubbles.
SONG OF YOUR SMILE

Eti Sa'aga

Here I sit
where twilight winds
fan a simmering sun
to gentle sleep
beneath the waves.

And I think
of you across the ocean
that has no rhyme
except for rhythm
which beats my dreams
into empty loneliness.

Love was not meant
to be separated.
You in Apia,
me in Pago Pago.

I send you love poems
wave by wave.
But the rhyming
is against me
and the ocean
tosses them back
line by line
in distorted foam.

Yet still I sit
because I have
to catch the
song of your smile
before I sleep.

BAD DREAMS (memories of Uili)

Eti Sa'aga

there is a door
that refused to open
all these years
if it were not
for the white lilies
with spotted petals
bending in the wind
and rooting into
your body
in bad dreams

bad dreams
of twisted metal
and mangled flesh
in the flashing red lights
blinking blood
now dead
dead to the bone
of a cold spring night
grinding asphalt
on unhealed wounds
from searing pain
and numb souls
in anguish over
soft white lilies
stomped like mumbled promises
patching a leaking sore
belching pus
in the wailing silence
of dark mosaic plastic
and withered wreaths
BIRTHDAY PRESENT

It was the eve
of the new moon
that my daughter
gave me a pebble
for my birthday.
It was gift wrapped
with tiny fingers,
sticky with mango juice.

THE SHY, SUN

I woke up this morning
with the sun standing outside
my window, blocking the night.
She started moving
when she saw
me looking!
HYPOCRITES AND GODS

I have sat
in churches with
hypocrites doing
a fashion show
and
have worked in
an office where
ordinary men grow into
stiff, starched-white gods
who have to wear spectacles
to see their miracles.

BEETTER LIFE

My educated brother leaves today
for overseas
He says, he goes
look for a better life
Many jobs
big pays
small faalavelave
He wants good schools
for his children
He says he'll die
here at home
with less jobs
little pays
no good schools
and plenty faalavelaves
And
soon as he settles
down into nice big house
and many money
he'll send for me
to come drive his
second hand car.
GOVERNMENT

She drinks the national sweat in gulps
while her people
feed on a pile of promises.

She gets so fat and clumsy
everytime she waddles along
she stumbles on
potholed-roads and high
living costs.

At times she gets very sick
and makes quite a number
of unnecessary visits overseas
seeking financial treatment.
(Some people say her sickness
is incurable and that she will
die soon).

I HEAR YOU

What nonsense is this
I hear you whispering, that I –
with my white-collar job
and back-side riding in
fat-cushion official
Limousines – am high and mighty?

How ignorant of you not to notice
That I am fake-wrapped in temporary gold.
Do you not know
that I too have a heart
bleeding at the starving thought
of what my children shall live on tomorrow?