

The Village Beach

by Tanya Muagututi'a



Scene. Sāmoa. A village beach. **SINA** and her cousins **POPO**, **LA'AU**, and **ELIOTA** have been swimming. They are chatting in the shade of some coconut trees. **SINA** has a bottle of coconut oil.

POPO. Hey, Sina. My skin's dry. Can I borrow some of your coconut oil?

SINA hands **POPO** the oil. **POPO** puts some on her arms.

LA'AU. It's sad we won't be able to hang out here much longer.

POPO (surprised). How come?

LA'AU. There's a new building coming.

ELIOTA. A building coming? Where from?

LA'AU. It's being built here, you egg.

ELIOTA. Who's building it?

POPO. What are they building?

LA'AU. Guess.

ELIOTA. A burger bar?

SINA. A dive shop?

LA'AU. No. A new hotel!

ELIOTA, POPO, and SINA sigh and grumble.

LA'AU. What's the problem? It's a good thing.

ELIOTA (considering the idea). I guess. It depends.

Will the hotel have a big restaurant – with burgers?

LA'AU. That's what I heard.

ELIOTA. Yes! I'll be able to go there for my birthday.

POPO. But why do they have to build it here? This is our beach.

This is where we grew up.

ELIOTA. You mean it's going to be *right* here?

LA'AU. Yep. Right here.

They ALL look down at the sand, out to sea, and then at each other.

POPO. Stink!

LA'AU. But my brother's going to work at the hotel, and it's going to be really flash. Famous people will come. We'll be able to get their autographs.

SINA (unhappily). Lots of other people will come, too. Lots of not-famous people.

GRANDAD enters.

SINA. Hi, Grandad.

GRANDAD. Tālofa, Sina. I've come for my breakfast.

ELIOTA. Are you going fishing?

GRANDAD. No, I'm much too slow these days. I'd be eaten by sharks.

I have a better plan (*pointing at a coconut on the ground*) – there's my breakfast.

POPO picks up the coconut and passes it to **GRANDAD**.

POPO (to **GRANDAD**). We're talking about the new hotel.

GRANDAD. Yes, I heard about that.

ELIOTA. There's going to be a restaurant. I'm going there for my birthday.

POPO (*still grumbling*). But why does it have to be here?

GRANDAD. This spot has the best views. It's paradise. People like paradise.

POPO. But where will we swim? And what about our trees?

SINA. Do you remember that story you used to tell us, Grandad? When we were little? The one about Sina and the eel and the coconut tree?

GRANDAD. Of course.

ELIOTA. I don't know that one.

LA'AU. I do! Sina was a beautiful girl who –

ELIOTA (*interrupting*). It can't have been you then, Sina.

SINA. Very funny!

POPO. Sina played in the rock pool with her friend the eel.

ELIOTA. Eww!

LA'AU. They grew up together, and then he fell in love with her.

ELIOTA. Eww!

SINA. But Sina had to marry a man, and the eel was jealous ...

GRANDAD. That's right. What happened next?

POPO. Sina told her brothers and father about the eel, and they got really angry. An eel, in love with their sister!

SINA. So they went after the eel and killed him. As the eel was dying, he told Sina's brothers to cut off his head and bury it.

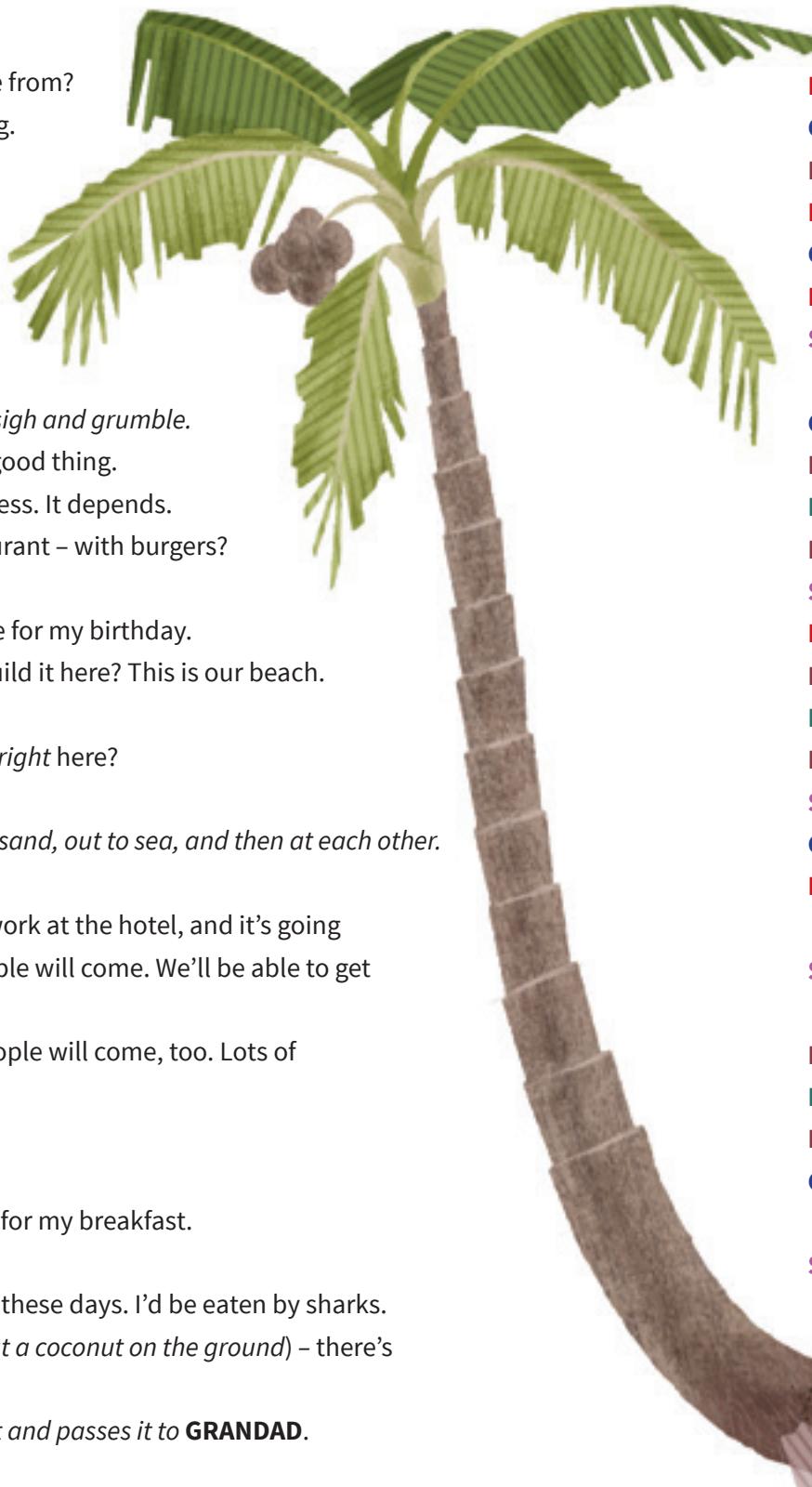
ELIOTA. Why would he say that?

LA'AU. And he said to water the spot where his head was buried.

ELIOTA (exasperated). What has this got to do with the new hotel?

GRANDAD. Be patient, Eliota. Sina watered the spot every day, and what happened?

SINA. The eel grew into a coconut tree.



GRANDAD. That's right. The very first one. And what do you see?

He holds up the coconut.

ELIOTA (*looking closely*). Umm. A coconut?

SINA. Those dark spots are two eyes and a mouth. It's the eel's face.

GRANDAD. The coconut tree was the eel's gift to Sina. That way, he knew she would always be looked after. 'O le niu lava ia, 'o le olaga fa'a-Sāmoa: The coconut itself is Samoan life. My mother taught me that. The trees give us so much.

SINA. Leaves for making mats and baskets.

ELIOTA. Trunks for canoes.

SINA and POPO. Coconut oil.

GRANDAD. Yes, all of that – and coconuts for my breakfast.

ELIOTA. You won't be getting your breakfast here once the hotel's built.

POPO. It's not fair. The trees were here first.

LA'AU. What about my brother? He needs a job.

GRANDAD (*nodding*). Yes, we all need money to live.

POPO. But you said the coconut is Samoan life!

GRANDAD (*nodding*). It is – but the hotel's coming, and maybe more hotels after that. If you kids are so worried about the trees, you should do something.

POPO. Like what?

GRANDAD. Start a group. Have a meeting. That's how our people have always done it.

SINA. We could start a conservation group!

ELIOTA. A what?

SINA. A group to look after the trees and the beach.

ELIOTA. And the eels?

GRANDAD (*laughing*). Yes, and the eels! You could invite the owners of the new hotel to the meeting.

SINA. Maybe the hotel people will sponsor us or something.

GRANDAD. Good idea. I'll look forward to my invitation, too. Now, all this talking has made me extra hungry. I'm going to need two coconuts for my breakfast. Someone climb up and get me another one.

The Samoan saying and translation is by Muagututi'a Pulusila Meafou Sagapolutele.



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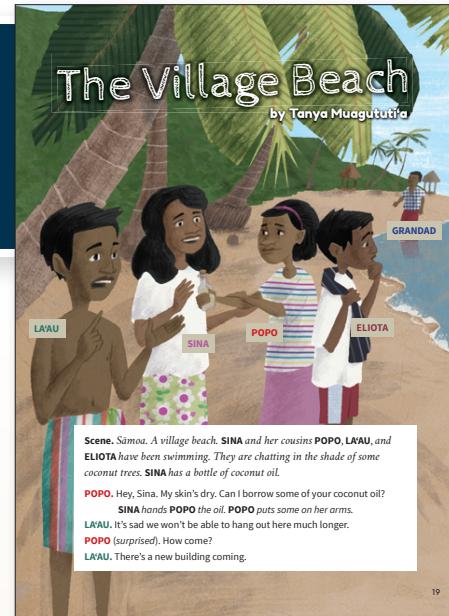
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