

TATAU

Lehua Parker

Uncle Akumu has tattoos. Big, thick *pe'a* lines shout his ancient Samoan genealogy as they crisscross his thighs. On his arms he carries his own story. There's Auntie Lani's name surrounded by vines and *pua fiti*. There's a manta ray and turtle, a bullet with RIP for cousin Ikaika, and something I can't make out that's covered in swirls and shark teeth that rolls over his shoulder and down his back. When I ask Uncle about it, he just says some things are better remembered than displayed.

Uncle Akumu is cool.

When I tell Bishop I want tattoos like Uncle Akumu, he frowns.

"No, you don't," he says. "The Church forbids *tatau*."

But I do.

I say, "I want to be just like Uncle Akumu."

"No, Kilionia," he says. "You want to be like Jesus. Does Jesus have tattoos?"

Of course I want to be like Jesus. We sing songs about how we want to be like Jesus in Primary as he looks down from his poster. Sister Sinaloa says Jesus knows everything, like if you asked him for help with your math homework, he'd know all the answers.

But Jesus also tells you to figure it out for yourself.

Read.

Ponder.

Pray.

I read, ponder, and pray, but I still don't know the answers.

When I ask Uncle Akumu for help, he laughs his great booming laugh. He takes my math paper off the counter and wraps his arms around me.

“Math is hard,” he says and rubs my head. “Good thing you smart.”

He sits next to me and shows me how six times five is thirty. How eleven divided by seven is one, remainder four, and how two goes into eight four times. Pretty soon my homework’s done. Tomorrow when Mrs. Tui calls on me, I’ll have the answers.

Jesus knows all the answers to all my questions, but Uncle Akumu helps me get my homework done.

That’s why I want to be like Uncle Akumu, tattoos and all.

Maybe Jesus is really like Uncle Akumu, only we can’t see his tattoos under his red robes.

Maybe Bishop never looked.

THE END

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