

SOUTH WIND

An original play by

Michael Johnston

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Michael Johnston
2 Woodfall Avenue
Barnet EN5 2EZ

CHARACTERS

PAUL

PUA

SUE

MATA

The parts of the OFFICIAL and the RECEPTIONIST are played by MATA and PUA respectively. The offstage voices of AUNTIE and the TANNYOY are played by SUE

Running time: approximately 80 minute

The stage is dark, then moonlit. After Polynesian drumming swells and fades, we hear the sounds of a large aircraft approaching, landing and taxiing away. A spotlight reveals a tall desk with a uniformed Polynesian official sitting behind it. As a loudspeaker announces the arrival of a an Air New Zealand flight from Auckland, he stands up, picks up a rubber stamp, inks it and holds it poised ready. He reaches out his hand. Paul, late forties, bespectacled, somewhat tousled, wearing a short-sleeved sports shirt and slacks and with a garland of flowers round his neck, enters and walks towards the desk putting down his case.

OFFICIAL (*taking and examining Paul's passport*): Kia orana. Welcome to the Banks Islands. Is this your first visit to the beautiful island of Rangimanea?

PAUL: No ... I think I've been here before, but in another life.

OFFICIAL: Oh, really! Then are you here on business or pleasure?

PAUL: Unfinished business perhaps, but I've come for a holiday ... I don't know really.

OFFICIAL: May I see your plane ticket, please? Where are you staying?

PAUL: The South Wind Hotel. (*Looking at his watch.*) If they're open at two in the morning. What a crazy arrival time.

Paul hands him the ticket and the Official walks off stage.

PAUL: Why *am* I here? It's a legitimate question. One week ago in Christchurch, I had no plans that I was aware of. So, alright, maybe I needed a bit of a holiday or just time off. There was more than enough to do fixing up my new flat; in a strange city, in a strange land, amid a strange people, amid the alien corn, or in my case, the alien sheep. Friendly? Of course the natives are friendly ... I haven't approached the sheep yet ... The trouble is I've rather been sending out the signal that I keep myself to myself, so nobody's actually been volunteering to assemble the flat pack bookcases, or paint over that awful stain on the wall in the dining room. And of course, I didn't put 'running away from problems back in England' as one of the reasons for applying for the job, but that was surely part of it. But in this life, if you tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but, especially to yourself, you don't get the job. And yet, when I saw that beautiful Maori girl in the travel agent's window it was almost as if she'd stuck her leg out and tripped me up. I, of all people, ought to know better but, five minutes later, if that, there I

was paying for a week on Rangimanea, knowing full well it was a mistake. Knowing full well I *had* been here before. Knowing full well that was thirty years ago. That was the first time. The first time for so many things. Maybe the last time for quite a few of them. Why on earth should I want to come back here: to try and enter the same river twice, like the man said?

The smiling Official returns, stamps Paul's passport and hands it to him along with his ticket.

OFFICIAL: I have given you a visa for seven days, Mr Wilson. With only an open return ticket I cannot make it any longer, but the South Wind have confirmed you are booked to stay for a week. They have a car waiting for you outside the Arrivals Hall.

As Paul takes the passport and ticket and picks up his case; the spot goes out, the Official exits, [taking the desk]. A second spot illuminates a small table. Paul slowly walks and talks his way round the stage towards it and a smartly dressed, bespectacled Receptionist, her hair covered and confined, takes her place behind the table. She is Polynesian, perhaps a year or two younger than Paul.

PAUL: I did think of popping over to Sydney; just to have a look around; maybe go to the Opera House. Then again, I could just have stayed home, or maybe done a tour of the South Island, but what I really wanted was to get to one fixed place, sit down there, put my feet up and have a damn good think. I've plenty to think about. Who hasn't? Plenty to be grateful for as well, come to think of it. A good job, doing what I know something about when people all about me, back on Britain's burning deck are losing theirs. (*Shouts*) *Maggie, Maggie, Maggie!* But I was the one who got out, out, out; not her. A good job I didn't think I was going to get, but of all the daft coincidences, I turn out to be the one applicant who had actually worked on lanolin and *they* have gallons and gallons of it; thanks to fifty million greasy sheep all over the country. So why on earth, on the whole of Planet Earth, did I come here ... come *back* here?

RECEPTIONIST: Kia orana. Welcome to the South Wind Hotel, Mr Wilson. Is this your first visit to Rangimanea?

PAUL (*thinking aloud rather than replying*): Why does everybody ask me that? Why can't people say, 'How are you?' No point in saying 'Lovely weather we're having', I suppose. It's always lovely weather here, isn't it? Between typhoons, anyway!

RECEPTIONIST: May I see your passport and your plane ticket, please? Thank you. (*She reacts to the passport but Paul does not notice.*) We've put you in the room we call *tumu tipani*. That means frangipani tree. You can walk straight out onto the beach. Now, I see you haven't yet made your onward reservation. It can be difficult, you know, especially if you leave it to the last moment. Would you like me to ...?

PAUL: Not yet, thanks. I don't want to think about leaving until I've got over the feeling of having just arrived.

She hands him a key with his passport.

RECEPTIONIST: I shall bring you a complimentary glass of fruit punch in a moment.

The spot goes out and both exit. [The table is cleared and a bed is placed in centre stage with a small bedside table on which is a phone. A small chair is beyond the table].

The stage lights go up and Paul enters, putting his case on the bed. He opens it and takes out a clean shirt and a pair of shorts and puts them on the bed. Then he stares hard into the case and draws out a small stone tiki (a carved idol). He looks at it with a puzzled expression and puts it on the bedside table before closing the case, putting it on the floor, picking up the clean clothes and exiting. The sounds of a power shower mingle with the offstage voice of Paul singing 'Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside'.

The Receptionist comes in quietly, carrying a tray, and places a cold drink on his table before glancing obviously towards the shower room then adding a couple of drops of liquid from a small bottle which she draws from her bosom then hides away. Then she picks up the tiki that puzzled Paul and puts it under the pillow. Glancing again towards the shower room, she exits. After a moment or two, the shower stops and Paul enters, wearing his clean clothes, with his hair sleekly combed. He registers the drink.

PAUL: I think I need that. I hope there's more in it than just fruit. The sun is so far over the masthead it'll soon be time for breakfast. A sun-downer perhaps; or maybe this is a sun-upper. Cheers. Down the hatch. (*He sinks the whole glassful and puts the empty glass on the table before turning with his back to the bed.*) Now that really hits the spot. Like that first glass of coconut milk I had all those years ago. Right then, where's the beach?

Suddenly, however, Paul seems to feel dizzy and falls back awkwardly onto the bed, struggles feebly to rise again before lapsing into sleep or even unconsciousness. Polynesian drumming is heard. After a short pause, the Receptionist re-enters from the beach but now she is barefoot, without spectacles and has flowers in her free-flowing hair. She is dressed like a Polynesian woman. She walks over to the bed and looks down at Paul for a few moments. Then she straightens him up on the bed, moving him over to one side. She brings the tiki out from under the pillow, kisses it and slips it back again. After another look at him, she stretches his arm across the bed towards her and, smiling for the first time, lies down beside him in the crook of his arm. After another pause, she props herself up on one elbow and kisses him lightly on the cheek but, a moment after that, she gets quickly off the bed saying 'No!' and, taking the tiki from under the pillow again, she throws it on the floor then runs out of the room towards the beach. The drumming fades out. The lights dim slightly. Pausing between each movement, Paul alters his position on the bed, turning onto his side, then his back and then his side again. After a short pause, the lights go up again. Paul stirs, wakes, stretches and stands up, clearly feeling somewhat groggy, and sits down again on the bed.

PAUL: Jiminy Cricket! I must have been tired. Went out like the proverbial light. What time is it? Hell! I've missed the rosy fingered dawn. It must be mid morning.

He takes a step towards the beach entrance as the Receptionist/Pua enters and walks towards him. This time she is dressed in a nursing sister's uniform and cap. As they see each other, both of them stop and stare, he with mouth agape, she with hands clasped in front of her chest.

PUA: Paul.

PAUL: Pua? Ye gods; Pua! It's been thirty years since ...

PUA: Nearly thirty-one.

PAUL: I would have known you anywhere.

PUA: I haven't been anywhere, Paul; only here. But where have you been all these years?

They advance towards each other but stop again about one metre apart.

PAUL: That's a good question ... How are you?

PUA: Very well, thank you ... And you?

PAUL: I'm fine. Now, anyway. I went through a rough patch but I seem to be okay now.

She comes up closer to him.

PUA: You haven't been well? What has been the matter?

PAUL: Not something anyone puts on their CV. They call it depression.

PUA: Clinical depression?

PAUL: Yes, nurse! The whole can of worms.

She steps forward and embraces him, laying her head on his chest. He very obviously does not return the embrace. She steps back and looks at him. He hangs his head. Walking forward, she takes his hand and leads him towards the bed. As he gets closer to it, he hangs back, hesitating. She lets go of his hand and brings the chair nearer the bed before sitting on it and gesturing to him to sit on the bed. He perches on the end of the bed, seeming to keep his distance and shaking his head in disbelief.

PUA: Tell me about yourself, Paul. I'm still very interested. Even after thirty years.

PAUL: I'm sorry. Pua, I'm so very, very sorry.

PUA: Don't worry, Paul. I'm not Cho-Cho San. I'm Pua. Shall I make it easier by starting? I'm still nursing as you see. Back then, there were big plans. When I qualified, they were going to send me to Fiji to train as an Assistant Medical Practitioner. Then I would have come back to Rangimanea and helped the Deputy Medical Officer, running a District Nurse service here but ... well, the details don't matter right now. My grandmother died suddenly and that meant I had to go back to look after ... to look after family on Matangitonga. Later on, a few years later on, we all moved here to Rangimanea and I got back into nursing. I'm a senior sister now. When Matron retires next year, I might even get that job. That's what I would like. It's a much bigger hospital. All the doctors are Polynesian or Fijian now. You wouldn't recognise the place.

Paul stares at her and there is a silence.

PAUL: You haven't changed at all.

PUA: You know that's nonsense. We were teenagers then. Now we're both into our forties. But we're both still recognisable, which is good. Now tell me about yourself.

PAUL: The one thing I can say with confidence is that I haven't had my appendix out again.

PUA: No ... like some other things, you can only lose that once.

PAUL (*hanging his head*): I could have chosen a better place to start.

PUA: Don't tell me about your depression yet. Go right back. What happened after you left here?

PAUL: Straight back to Christmas Island and more of these nuclear tests, letting off hydrogen bombs like a firework display, and then off back home by the scenic route, all round South America. Oh Pua, I'm so ashamed right now. I wrote you at least a dozen letters as we sailed across the Pacific; one or two even on paper. But then we arrived in Callao, and there was a letter waiting from my father saying I'd been accepted for Leeds University, to read organic chemistry. It was what we'd both wanted. He was a dyer, you see, but he only had City and Guilds; not a degree. His own father had never seen the point of university.

PUA: But what happened to my – to the letters?

PAUL: I kept them for years. They were like my diary; my remembrance of things past; my buried treasure ... my guilty secret; my confession ... my own nuclear bomb.

PUA: So that was what I nursed you back to health for; organic chemistry. You were very ill, you know, and very lucky. If the appendix had ruptured while you were still in the helicopter instead of waiting until you were already on the operating table, I don't think you would have reached surgery. I hope you did well in chemistry. That would help to make it all seem worthwhile.

PAUL: Then you'll be pleased to know I got a first, then went straight on and did my Masters and then, not long after that, a PhD doing work on wool greases and the extraction of lanolin – Jesus, Pua, what am I talking about that for? I *meant* to write to you. I meant to come *back* for you. But the longer I didn't post my letters, the harder it was to try again. And the longer I'd been away, the more I got entangled with life back home. Can you understand? More important, can you ever forgive me?

PUA: You might say I got entangled with life too. As for forgiving – yes, I forgave you so long ago. I just didn't ... I just couldn't forget. But Paul, what happened back then was something we *both* did. Or that's how I remember it.

PAUL: Thank you.

PUA: What I remember first of all was you arriving on that helicopter. No one on the island had ever seen a helicopter before. Then, suddenly, when we were ready waiting at the football field not really knowing what to expect, this great deafening dragonfly came down from the sky. Seeing you descending from the Heavens, like the great god Maui, some of the older people actually fled into the forest.

PAUL: I can't remember much about that bit. I was doped to the gills.

PUA: And back at the little hospital, the Matron was boiling all the instruments and getting everything scrubbed and dosed with antiseptic. The place reeked of carbolic. She'd bought up the island's entire supply of nail brushes, all four of them, and practically stood over the doctor while he cleaned under his fingernails. And that poor man had been up all night, reading his medical textbooks and speaking on the phone to a consultant in New Zealand. He'd never taken out an appendix before. Even so, I must say he did a very neat job.

PAUL: I can still remember how the Matron smelt. It was that mixture of lavender and Dettol. What was her name? I've forgotten.

PUA: Miss Gladstone. Poor woman; you know she'd come out to marry one of the missionaries from the London Missionary Society but he died of typhoid while she was still on her way here. But instead of turning round and going straight back, she devoted the rest of her life to working in the hospital and tending his grave. Never mind; we saved *you* from an early grave, didn't we; Miss Gladstone and me. And now you're back again. Now tell me about University. What happened there?

PAUL: You could say I stepped inside the magic ring; I mean the benzene ring; and discovered the beautiful, ordered way the world works, from the perspective of organic chemistry anyway. I certainly did well at it. I loved the symmetry and the logic of it; long-chain molecules, polypeptide chains, how to combine hexamethylene diamine and terephthalic acid. I was something of a model student. But you must have been one too, from what you were saying.

PUA: I had no choice. I had to work hard. I had to earn a living.

PAUL: I don't suppose you could say I had a choice about working but I enjoyed it too much for it to seem like hard work. I was quite wrapped up in it for the first two years. And then, in my final year of my BSc, I suddenly got engaged.

Pua cannot help an involuntary gasp.

PUA: Engaged!

PAUL: The fact is ... the truth was ... well you know what the sixties were supposed to be ... the time when everyone pretended the answer was to make love, not war. What with chemical contraception and all that – more organic chemistry, really – suddenly, sex was safe, and it was free. Not just free, for Heaven's sake; it was compulsory. I hadn't got myself involved in that scene yet but Sue, this friend of a friend, invited me to the Humanities Ball. Then after that, she kept telling me she loved me, that she was 'on the pill' and things just developed. The long and the short of it, a couple of months later, she told me she was pregnant and said I had to do the honourable thing. I felt so guilty I agreed straightaway.

PUA: You have a child! (*Beat*). Boy or girl?

PAUL: Neither.

PUA: It can't be 'neither'! (*Then anxiously*) Or did she lose the baby?

PAUL: It certainly disappeared. It was only later, of course, I began to realise it had probably never existed. But I didn't really suspect that until we were man and wife. No, there was no baby; just the two of us yoked together, legally now as well as physically. For a while, there was plenty of love – well, love-making – but, by then, I was the one taking precautions. Then her mother began to complain about there being no grandchildren and Sue started to get broody. It wasn't a good time.

Offstage call of 'Paul!'

PAUL: Coming!

He gets up and heads off stage. The stage lights dim, Pua exits in the other direction and the bed is remade and moved to a new position with two bedside tables and a small dressing table. In another part of the stage there is a television set and a small armchair.

As the lights go up, Sue is standing beside the bed looking at a thermometer. She is in her mid-twenties; a blond dolly-bird in a mini-skirt.

SUE: Paul!

PAUL (*offstage*): Coming!

SUE (*To herself*): 'Le mot juste' as the actress is so often these days reported to have said to the bishop. Where is he? Paul! Where are you?

Paul enters. He has no glasses. He is wearing corduroy slacks and a tweed jacket with leather elbow patches. His collar is fastened and he is wearing a tie. On his feet are Hush Puppies.

PAUL: I was already halfway out of the door, Sue. I must get back to the lab.

SUE: You were there at seven this morning and you've not been home half an hour yet. They can manage without you during your lunch break, for Heaven's sake. I know you're a wage slave but this is the nineteen-sixties. You're entitled to an hour at least.

PAUL: All right, but you know we're in the middle of that series of tests I told you about, and there has to be someone there all the time to make sure the Soxhelet extraction is done properly. If that's fouled up the fractional distillation won't work and we'll be set back another month at least.

SUE: And if you don't drop your trousers and do the business straight away, I'll be set back another month, at least. Look! (*Waving her thermometer.*) My temperature is just right for ovulation. We can't afford to let this chance go.

PAUL: But we did it last night, and the night before, and twice on Sunday. What more can a man do?

SUE: The *man's* gotta do what a man's gotta *do*, and this man could do it a damn sight more willingly. You'd almost think you didn't enjoy it. Come to think of it, your climaxes do seem to come with a whimper nowadays when they used to come with a bang. I can remember you used to cry out. It's called *love-making*, remember.

PAUL: There's a time and a place for everything.

SUE: This is the time. This is the place. Let's just get on with it. (*She slips off her skirt and slips into the bed, holding the covers up for him to join her but he does not oblige.*) I can't have my mother visiting next month and asking so bloody pointedly, 'Isn't there any news?' It's getting to the stage she asks me in public. Come on, keep your pecker up, or at least get it up for a few minutes now.

PAUL: Sue, I just don't feel like it and, in any case, I really do have to get to work and get the yield up above 20 per cent. If the experiment doesn't work this time round, old man Hunter may not let me try again. He doesn't think there's really an economic market any more for the natural product. He thinks synthetic moisturisers are the future.

SUE: That reminds me, get the K-Y jelly out of the drawer will you, and get into bed! I want a baby and if I could manage without you I would but, at least for the moment, I need your input, or do I mean your output.

PAUL: What does that mean – “at least for the moment”? Don't think I've forgotten about you and Dennis, the demented dentist. Just what you thought you were doing I cannot imagine. I know you say it was all his fault but whose idea was it to suggest a bunch of adults play 'Sardines'.

SUE: For God's sake, we're a married couple and we're supposed to procreate in order to provide the next generation of wage slaves to pay the bills for us when we're too old to work. Now don't try to tell me you're already too old to fuck. Get into bed!

PAUL: You've had this week's rations. Right now I have to go and earn the money to pay the mortgage. And if the work's successful, who knows, I may get a rise and then we can really afford a family.

SUE: Money, money, money! Are all you Yorkshiremen the same? You told me these trials would take about six months. If we strike lucky now, you'll be getting the bonus just as I'm getting ready to bring the baby home. Get into bed!

PAUL: I'm going back to the lab. I'll see you tonight. (*He exits*).

SUE (*quietly*): If I'm here.

The lights dim, and the bed is moved to a new position.

Some months later. As the lights come up again, Paul, wearing striped pyjamas, is in bed with Sue who now has plain, silk pyjamas.

SUE: I'm sure that's done the trick. Not only was my temperature right but that was one of your best efforts so far.

PAUL: Thanks. How's your mother, these days? She wasn't terribly happy on her last visit.

SUE: Still casting aspersions on your qualities as a stallion but reasonably convinced we're still trying. Just unlucky, that's all. At least we know we can afford to bring up a family now. I always knew you would be successful. Do you think old Hunter is really serious about a directorship?

PAUL: Who knows? He sometimes says things about the future but then doesn't deliver. I was supposed to get a whole raft of money for the laboratory but, so far, all I've seen on the expenditure front is his brand new three litre Rover.

SUE: Couldn't *we* afford a second car? I'd love to have a little Mini. Especially when you're off on trips, not having the car makes getting to the shops and socialising a bit tedious. I mean to say, most of our friends already have two cars, don't they?

PAUL: When you have a baby to lug around, we'd want something a bit bigger and safer than a Mini. A Morris Minor Traveller might be the thing.

SUE: I want something a bit flashier than that. That's Women's Institute motoring; a conservatory on wheels. I see myself in something a little more Young Conservative.

PAUL: Don't let's get into politics again, for any favour. I'm going to vote Liberal and that's that.

SUE: A wasted vote! Surely if you're determined to be anti-Conservative then vote Labour and have done with it. Or is there going to be a Yorkshire Independence Party this time, operating from a secret base in the rhubarb triangle?

PAUL: Who knows? Listen, let's get some sleep. We've both got hospital appointments tomorrow.

SUE: That's true, but yours is a swish BUPA thing at company expense and I've got to take the bus to the NHS hospital to see the gyny guru. Anyway, it's just routine.

PAUL: And so's mine, really. And since it's the new company medical insurance, we should be grateful. And Hunter's even talking about a final-salary pension scheme. By next year, it'll cover all of us.

SUE: All of us? You don't mean mother by any chance?

PAUL: I do *not* mean your mother! No, I meant our family.

SUE: Oh, Paul!

The embrace and the lights dim. The bed is repositioned again. Before the lights come up again, Sue is heard sobbing. As the lights come up, Sue is lying face down, sobbing into her pillow. Paul is sitting propped up by a pillow. He is shouting at her.

PAUL: And I'm telling you there's nothing wrong with me! I don't need to go and see a doctor. I'm producing sperm by the bucketful, gallons of the stuff. I think you really need to take the cork out and let the little beggars in to do their job.

SUE: But it isn't working. Nothing's happening. There's no baby. No baby!

PAUL: Then get yourself sorted out. Go back and make a fuss. Tell them your husband is pretty well fucked out.

SUE: Come with me this time.

PAUL: No!! It's *your* plumbing that need's fixing. Mine's in working order. This is women's business. Men shouldn't even be allowed in there. Gynaecology is for women and it should be a woman-only profession.

SUE: That's Stone Age thinking! You didn't mind when a woman surgeon took out your wisdom tooth. In fact I think you took quite a shine to her; what with her fingers down your throat and her face pressed close to yours. Did you get a hard-on?

PAUL: That's completely different. The mouth is upstairs. It's above the belt: nothing to do with the sexual organs.

SUE: What shit you talk, Paul. We know you'd rather run a mile than try oral sex, just for a change, but don't tell me the mouth is nothing to do with sex. What about kissing for God's sake?

PAUL: All right, all right; but the rest is all Dennis talk. I really find the things he says at dinner parties quite disgusting but everyone is too afraid, in these liberated times, to tell him to put a sock in his filthy mouth. I nearly threw him out last time. I had to restrain myself.

SUE: The fact that he's six-foot-two and sixteen stone and plays rugger for the county wasn't a factor, then?

PAUL: It's not what he does on the rugby field but what he gets up to after away games that I detest. I'd like to punch his ugly mug.

SUE: He hasn't got an ugly mug but he has got three children, so *he's* in working order, even if you're not.

PAUL: There's nothing wrong with me, I'm telling you. I'm firing on both balls. Listen, I've had enough of this for the moment. I'm going to watch telly until I calm down. Go and see your doctor again and see if you need a better thermometer or some new pills or something. After three years, you're entitled to expect results. I'll see you later.

SUE: Bugger off!

As Paul gets out of bed, grabs a dressing gown and climbs into it, Sue also gets out of bed and exits in tears. He walks to the chair and switches on the TV (the screen not necessarily visible to the audience). As he settles down, a news bulletin fades up.

NEWSREADER (*on TV*): ... which the Prime Minister's spokesman described as yet another example of the Soviet Government playing Cold War politics rather than addressing itself to the substantive issues. (*Beat.*) Ex-servicemen and members of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association handed in a petition to 10 Downing Street today. Their spokesman said the recent death of Lieutenant-Commander Walter Wilkinson, after a long battle with leukaemia, was another example of how industrial injury legislation was too far behind the times. The Nuclear Veterans are claiming that Commander Wilkinson's death was as a result of the radiation that he received on Christmas Island at the time of the United Kingdom's H-Bomb tests in the Pacific in 1957 and arguing that the armed forces should not be exempted from legislation affecting work-related illnesses. A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said that every serviceman present at the trials had worn film badges to detect radiation and none had ever shown significant exposure to that hazard.

Paul crosses to the TV set and switches it off. He stands in front of it, pensive.

PAUL: Bloody hell! I knew him. He can't have been thirty-five. That takes me back though ... God, I wonder how *she* is. Why did I never write? Poor Pua. No: it isn't just Dennis that's a bastard, is it?

He exits. The lights dim and the stage is cleared and re-set.

In centre stage, there is a bench or double lounger. As the lights come up slowly there is the sound of the sea and offstage Polynesian music and singing. After a short time, the music fades and the lights come fully up, Pua enters in a one piece bathing costume and sun hat. She picks up a towel from the bench and a pair of sunglasses which she puts on. She looks off stage.

PUA: Paul!

PAUL (*off stage*): Coming!

Paul enters. He is wearing swimming trunks. He too picks up a towel, and dries himself off before putting on a floral shirt, a sun hat and sunglasses.

PAUL: I'd forgotten just how delicious a tropical sea can be. I really must learn to snorkel. You see so much more. (*He sits on the bench.*) Come and sit down and tell me more about what you've been doing. We never got to your story.

PUA: Do you really want to know?

PAUL: Of course I do.

PUA: I'm not sure.

PAUL: I remember slowly coming out of the anaesthetic and hearing the doctor saying, "He's coming round." Then his face swam into view: white, middle-aged, unsurprising. Then he moved out of my line of sight and a stern woman peered at me: starched and smelling of perfume and Dettol. She said, "He's perspiring a bit. Nurse! Wipe the patient's brow and then change the pillow cases." And that was when the most wonderful thing happened. An absolute dream of loveliness looked down at me and smiled. Pua, I can see you still. I had never, have never seen anyone so beautiful, so exotic, and so alluring. Then you smiled and I fell head over heels in love. The rest is history.

PUA: I don't think you can ever have studied history; certainly not my history. But I remember that moment too, and how handsome you

looked. I had seen many more white men than you had ever seen Polynesian women but all I had ever seen up to then were middle-aged, paunchy, red-faced, and often lecherous. You were different somehow.

PAUL: And for the next month you were almost in sole charge of me. How did that work out?

PUA: First of all, I was Miss Gladstone's best nurse and European patients had to get the best nursing. We didn't actually have many Polynesians in hospital either. Many were afraid because, at that time, it seemed that our people that we only went into hospital to die. They were especially afraid of injections because they imagined they were only given to ease the pain of dying; so getting one meant you would die, not recover. But there *was* another reason? I might as well confess I simply took over because I *wanted* to look after you. I wanted to be the one who helped you out of bed every day. I wanted to be the one who put you in the wheelchair and pushed you out onto the verandah. I wanted to be the one who made sure you were shaded from the sun. I wanted so much to be the one to gently rub sun lotion on your skin, especially your face. I wanted to be the one who got you walking again and held your arm close to me. I *wanted*; like I have never wanted anything before in my life.

She lowers her head and covers her face with her hands, sobbing silently. Very moved, Paul puts his arm across her shoulders and pulls her gently towards him.

PAUL: My own dear, dusky desert-island woman! I was a bit slow on the uptake, I think. Put that down to post-operative problems. It hurt like hell for a couple of weeks, but then I began to get my strength back. That's when I began to realise I was living in Paradise and that you were my ministering angel. But how on earth did you get permission to take me off on the bus? I can still hear Miss Gladstone saying every day, "To the hospital gates and back. No further, Nurse."

PUA (*looking up again and smiling*): It just so happened there was an emergency; an outbreak of whooping cough on another island; and the Doctor sent Miss Gladstone, much against her will. That meant I was left in charge of you and the Doctor was too busy to keep a constant eye on me. You were off the danger list and the Navy would be coming back for you as soon as your ship was within helicopter range. I just did it; that was all.

PAUL: And what a bus! Is there still only one bus going right round the whole island?

PUA: Oh, there's been progress since then. Now there are two, going in opposite directions but some people still prefer what they call the 'old bus' going clockwise, even if it means going right round the island to get back home. It's like a social event. A passenger on the eleven o'clock bus can get quite sniffy if someone from the noon bus gets on early and sits in 'their place'.

PAUL: How did they take to me turning up on the bus then; and you escorting me? Whose seats did we take?

PUA: Oh, you were different! You were white of course, so people would automatically give up their seats to you. And you were famous. You were the son of the god Maui who had come to the island on a magic flying canoe. And everyone knew I was taking you to visit my aunt, the witch doctor, who was going to tell us all if you were really getting well again. But of course, nobody really knew that what I was really doing was taking you to show you off to the whole of Rangimanea. To show them you were mine. I had seen you first. It seemed to me that you hadn't just come on a flying canoe, that you weren't just the son of the great god Maui. You were a gift from the gods for me. That's how teenagers think, all round the world, or so it seemed to me then.

PAUL: I can see now I was a very naïve young man. I'd had the odd girl-friend at school. Kissed and cuddled and had my hands pushed away when they strayed too far and just accepted it. I was doing it because my friends said they did it and I was curious but that seemed to be all. I'd never lain awake at night and sighed. And then; and then there was you! You were maybe younger than me but, the way things were, you were in charge, and I was a sailor who was used to obeying his superiors unquestioningly. But don't get me wrong, I was completely under your spell. I *wanted* to be on that rickety, smelly bus, sitting beside you on the front seat, with you putting a protective hand on my arm every time it was bumpy. And it seemed to be bumpy all the time. Then we came to that fantastic hut.

PUA: It's funny to hear you call it fantastic. I didn't really approve of my aunt's house. If you wanted to be modern back then, you lived in a house with a corrugated iron roof and sides, that got so hot in the middle of the day it was like an oven. My aunt was old-fashioned because she preferred a house made out of bamboo and palm fronds all woven together and all full of insects and lizards. But, in the middle of the day, her house was cool and you could sleep in the afternoon without being boiled in your own perspiration.

PAUL: Then there was that feast your aunt made. Dried fish, spicy coconut sauce, bananas, roast yam, pawpaw, and all kinds of herbs in the pork. What I specially remember were the prawns from the fresh water lagoon. I liked them so much I used to eat them by the panful for the rest of the time I was here. I think I drank too much coconut wine that day too. But there was one curious thing. I had the feeling all the time your aunt didn't like me. She would never look me in the eye.

PUA: I'm afraid it's true. But it wasn't you she didn't like. Not you specially. She didn't like any white men. She'd had too many difficult experiences back on our home island, . She never told me but my mother did. She was the maid working for the missionary's wife and when she was out visiting the sick one afternoon the missionary had his wicked way with her. After that, he kept encouraging his wife to do more and more sick visiting. He said it was her Christian duty.

PAUL: I thought that only happened in books.

PUA: It happens in books because it happened first in real life.

PAUL: And then, right in the middle of that feast, someone came to the hut, shouting for your aunt. There was a woman in labour. The funny thing was I thought they had come for you. I mean, you were the nurse.

PUA: Childbirth is not an illness, especially on islands in the South Pacific. It's simply an annual event. There are sometimes complications but, back then, it was the witch doctor who was the midwife. So my aunt had to go. It was her job. Mind you, before she went, she put a bad spell on you.

PAUL: So that was what the row was about. I didn't understand a word.

PUA: Yes. But it didn't seem to work. If she hadn't said all these things, I think I would have taken you straight back on the bus.

PAUL: I think it was just as well I didn't understand a word of all that.

PUA: I thought if I couldn't stop that spell then I could sing you a song that would delay whatever it was she had done to you, so that's what I did.

PAUL (*very quietly but with emotion*): And it was as good as a spell. I walked with you into that cool hut and we went to bed. We went into that hut a boy and a girl and came out a man and a woman. Whatever

happened afterwards, that is still the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me.

PUA: Thank you for saying that. It means more than you can ever know to hear you say that.

PAUL: Back on the ship, I kept feeling great waves of shame.

PUA: Shame?

PAUL: Not for what we *did* together, but for what I did afterwards, running away, deserting you; leaving you behind; behaving just like that missionary.

PUA: You couldn't have stayed, Paul. The Navy came looking for you. But you didn't come back. You didn't write ... Never mind, never mind; thirty years later, here you are.

It is Paul's turn to weep. He buries his face in his hands and Pua strokes his shoulders. After a while, he calms down and then stands up.

PAUL: I didn't really come to terms with that for many years. Not until my marriage broke up and I came to terms with the real facts.

PUA: What facts?

PAUL: I had to admit to myself something I had been denying all the years I had been married.

PUA: Admit what?

PAUL: When my wife ran off with Dennis the Dentist, she became pregnant almost immediately. So it was clear she wasn't barren, which was what I had been telling her. So I went for tests, at last.

PUA: Paul! Don't tell me!

PAUL: I must tell you now. It's why I managed to stop feeling so guilty about us.

PUA: My Aunt! Her spell! It was her spell.

PAUL: It's nothing to do with your aunt! But the tests showed my sperm count was so low I was effectively sterile. The Nuclear Test Veterans said I should sue the Ministry of Defence but the doctors said there was no way to prove the connection. And the other side of the

medal was that I had worried all these years that I might have left a souvenir here of my visit but the tests showed I couldn't have, could I?

Pua is standing now, shaking her head and looking horrified. Then, with a long wailing cry, she runs off stage. Go immediately to black and there is a short burst of thunderous drumming.

The scene is the kitchen in Pua's very basic home some ten years earlier. A teenage boy is looking in a cupboard, opening the lids of tins and after a brief dissatisfied look into each he shuts them and puts them roughly back into the cupboard. Then he sees bananas on the table.

MATA (*disgusted*): Bananas, bananas, bananas! At least in New Zealand I might be able to get through a whole day without even seeing a banana. And while we're on the subject, what about a day without coconut? I mean, who remembers their first coconut but who could ever forget their first hamburger ... and French fries? (*He goes over to the stove and lifts the lid of a pot*) Yuck, mitiore! God, I remember Grandma making me eat that every Sunday after church on Matangitonga. Fermented coconut with onions and shell fish; and we're supposed to call this a Polynesian delicacy. The oldies gobble it up but that's because they've no teeth but Ma shouldn't be making this stuff. (*Raising his hands above head as in mock prayer*) Sorry respected ancestors, sorry! Mama! Mama!!

Pua enters, carrying sheets that have been drying. She is wearing a staff nurse's uniform now.

PUA: Shouldn't you be at school?

MATA: I've got study leave.

PUA: Well, since you're not studying right now, what about helping me fold these sheets.

MATA (*grumbling*): You're always getting me to *do* things!

PUA: That's how things get done. People do them. When we've *done* this you can get out there and *do* some study. You've only got provisional acceptance for Otago remember. You need the right grades to actually get into University.

MATA: Okay, okay! No lecture, please! I get enough from the history teacher.

As they talk, they work together to stretch, shake and fold the damp sheets.

PUA (*relaxing*) Mata, my darling boy, I do know you are trying hard and you've done very well for someone who didn't get to New Zealand for secondary schooling. I'm proud of you. But you can do so much more!

MATA: Would my father be proud of me?

PUA: If he knew, he would be; like any father.

MATA: Like any father but not like my father whom I've never met.

PUA: Nor are you likely to, so let's stick to the present day and just focus on doing us both proud.

MATA: Sorry Mama, I shouldn't get at you. It's just that you're the one standing there when it hits me. It's only in the past year I've got so curious and sometimes so angry. How could he?

PUA: Mata, we've been over this so often. I think you're making yourself unwell. You *are* looking a bit off-colour actually. Maybe you ought to see the doctor.

MATA: Of course I'm off colour. I'm only half the usual colour round here because my father was pink not brown.

PUA: Yes he was. Bright pink!

They both laugh, then after an embrace, they sit down.

MATA: Mama, I would really like to talk about him sometime: sometime soon. I know he's never coming back. I know I'm never going to see him but it's not as if he was lost at sea or got killed in a road accident. He's out there somewhere, and before I go to New Zealand and start seeing more and more of our former colonial masters I want to feel I know enough about him that I'm not looking at every white male in his late thirties and wondering if he's my father. But you never talk about it. Isn't it time?

PUA: Who knows? I suppose it just might be. A lot of time has passed. You're growing up ... What can I say? ... To begin with I was so hurt and angry, so resentful. I totally believed I would hear from him and that, in a year or two at most, he'd be back, here on Rangimanea. And then by the time I knew I was pregnant and I hadn't even had a postcard,

I did begin to have doubts. It didn't seem like him; not the man I had known even for such a short time. The man I loved.

MATA: Great-aunt Witch says he was wicked and cast a spell on you.

PUA (*laughing*): She's only half right. He wasn't wicked. He was good, he was gentle and he seemed so kind. He just didn't seem like the usual sort of *tangata teatea* looking at Polynesian women as just someone to go to bed with. After all, we have a long tradition of that. And I know you've read that Somerset Maugham story. I've never told you this but until that moment we created you he had never done more than hold my hand.

MATA: Mama! Then why! Why! And for that matter why are Polynesian women so willing.

PUA: I was so much in love with him and he seemed to be totally in love with me. And Mata, it isn't just the Europeans who behave like this as you very well know. All over the Banks Islands, young people start having sex with each other long before marriage, and grandmothers do a roaring trade in child minding. That's the way it is all over the South Pacific. The white men just take advantage of this because they can't do it so much back home. The consequences are just that little bit harder for people like you and me.

MATA: People like us?

PUA: To put it bluntly, single mothers and half-caste children.

MATA: Mama!

PUA: Oh, it's getting easier. What with education and tourism and aeroplanes and contraception, and the way the missionaries can't boss us around anymore, I wouldn't stand out in the same way as I did when you were a baby. I just hope you know enough to protect *yourself*. It's not as if I haven't spelt it all out to you.

MATA: *Mama!!*

PUA: Sorry Mata, but it comes from being a nurse as well as a mother. I see the damage as well as the other consequences of teenage sex. And I would be the grandmother this time and I'm not keen to miss out on my chance of becoming Matron like I missed out on being an Assistant Medical Practitioner. How is Moana anyway?

MATA (*sighing*): I think she's fine but I don't think I'll be seeing much of her for a while. Do we have to talk about it?

PUA: Only if you want to.

MATA: It's just that she doesn't see the point of University. She thinks I should just get a job, maybe in one of the new hotels. She's trying to get in as a chambermaid and says I ought to go after a porter's job and then become the union organiser. And when I said I'd rather be the manager she said I was stuck up, just like my mother and I called her a few names.

PUA: I'm sorry.

MATA: That's all right but when she told me about her cousin taking money from guests in the hotel for sleeping with them I said that was being a whore and she said was it better then if you did it for nothing like your mother? That's when I lost my temper and said I didn't want to see her ever again.

PUA: Mata, I'm very sorry. You're not responsible for the sins of the parents.

MATA: I know Mama, but the funny thing is I found myself thinking it *was* different; it *is* different when you do things for love, for all kinds of love.

PUA: I think you're right. Dear God I *know* you're right. That's how it was for me. That's how it *is* for me.

MATA: Do you *still* love him?

PUA: Maybe, maybe not, how would I know now? I think I still love the memory of him. And I'll always love you. Now then, my young son, get off and do some real, serious study. Get your head wrapped around those logarithms you were telling me about.

MATA: Okay, and thanks Mama! (*He exits*).

PUA: My son. My son.

From offstage Paul cries out.

PAUL (*offstage*) A son? My son?

Go to black.

There is an interlude of Cook Island drumming. The drumming fades and, as the lights go up, PUA is seated on the bench with her face in her hands while PAUL stands near her looking shocked.

PAUL: A son? My son! My own son.

PUA (*dropping her hands and glaring at him*): OUR son!

PAUL (*very quietly*): Our son. A boy. A child. I can't take this in. All these years ... The first time I ever make love I make a baby then never manage it again. And I've never seen him. Tell me about him, oh please, tell me all about him. What's his name? (*He sinks to the ground beside her.*)

PUA: Mata.

PAUL: Mata, Mata ... Mata-Mata-Mata ... my boy Mata. Go on please, Pua, go on. Tell me everything.

PUA: He was born in 1958; March the twenty-seventh. He weighed seven pounds one ounce. Of course, I'd gone back home to my home island, Matangitonga. That means South Wind, the name of your hotel. They were going to give it the Maori name but none of the Europeans could pronounce it properly.

PAUL: Don't tell me about my hotel: tell me about my boy!

PUA: I will, I will, but give me time. Be patient and gentle like I remember you. This isn't easy.

PAUL: I'm sorry.

PUA: My own mother was very sick and it was my grandmother who was going to look after him when I went back to work. That's actually pretty much the way we do things here. Sometimes the grandparents are *given* the child as their own; as someone to look after them when they get old.

PAUL: You didn't!

PUA: Never! But after I had nursed him for a couple of months I had to get back to work to earn money. But then I was lucky. There was a job for me as a junior nurse there on the island, but it meant I lost any chance to be sent off to Fiji to train as an Assistant Medical Practitioner, which was what they'd promised me here on Rangimanea. They sent

someone else instead but she failed all her exams. I was able to see Mata every day, but I had so much work at the clinic I couldn't do much else but play with him for a little while most days. He was such a good baby. Then I had to come back here to do more training courses and I didn't see him for nearly a year. That was very hard. And I was on my own, Paul. On my own!

PAUL hangs his head. She puts a hand on his head and he puts his on top of hers. There is a silence.

PUA: Auntie came back to Matangitonga to try and cure my mother but she died soon after, so my grandmother went on looking after Mata until it was time for him to go to school. Grandma was very much traditional Polynesian and I think she listened to Auntie too much about how to bring him up. Auntie never really liked Mata and said he was a big sin. (*Pua laughs.*) Grandma said no, he was a big pineapple.

PAUL: What are you talking about?

PUA (*smiling at him*): Sorry! It's a Banks Islands Maori joke. In our language, sin and pineapple are the same word, 'ara. The missionaries often got it wrong and the islanders said that was because they loved sin so much just because it was so sweet.

PAUL: It was sweet, Pua, and it wasn't a sin.

PUA: Thank you, Paul ... Anyway; the fact was they began rowing about Mata all the time, Grandma and Auntie, and the school here on Ragnimanea was very near the hospital and that was how I was able to bring him here to live with me. Then, when Grandma died a couple of years later, Auntie came back to Ragnimanea as well. I did offer to try to get her trained as a medical midwife but she just laughed at me and went to live on the other side of the island, as far away as possible, so she could go on being a traditional Maori midwife. She was always busier than the hospital. She probably still would be if she hadn't got too old to work. So, anyway, Mata was living with me and going to school, and I was becoming a staff nurse and then a junior sister but that took years and years.

PAUL: Was he a clever boy?

PUA: Well, of course – just like his father. He was always winning class prizes in primary school but, like any boy, he was quite mischievous. Nothing wicked ... well not very often. One time he borrowed a friend's bicycle without asking and rode it all the way round to Auntie's. It was the bus driver who came and told me he had seen him turning off the

road to Auntie's. Nobody had phones at home in those days so I was already up to high doh, I can tell you. I had to get the bus all the way round and miss a day's work to go and fetch him. Mata said that Auntie had put a spell on him but I think he had just eaten too much food at her place. He was sick for a week afterwards and I think that put him off being a long distance cyclist.

PAUL: Of course I'm baffled now as to how I could have been a father here but not after I got back to England. Auntie's so-called curse on me has to be a suspect but I'm beginning to wonder if it wasn't something more sinister, something that happened *after* I left the Islands, to do with the Tests. I mean, it can't have been something I *ate*!

PUA: Who can tell? Auntie wraps her native medicine up in all sorts of superstition and spells, but some of the herbs and roots she uses do seem to work.

PAUL: I'm sure they do. There aren't any willows on Rangimanea but willow bark contains salicylic acid that alleviates headaches. Native American peoples used to chew it. There must be other local cures here.

PUA: Salicylic acid: but that's aspirin! I know that.

PAUL: Exactly. So Auntie knows a thing or two.

PUA: Oh please don't tell me that! I don't want to begin to believe in witchcraft again after all these years training in scientific medicine. And don't tell Auntie about any of this. She would only crow.

PAUL: She's still around.

PUA: Very old and a bit deaf but still here and just as bad-tempered.

PAUL: And she still seems to be casting spells on us. We should be talking about Mata, not her. You'd got as far as primary school and all those prizes.

PUA: He was a prize-winner ... but also a loser.

PAUL: A loser?

PUA: At the end of primary school, all the children in the Banks Islands had the chance of a scholarship. There was only one secondary school for the whole of the Banks Islands in those days and it was more or less free, but there were two scholarships every year for the brightest children. It paid for them to go to school in New Zealand, in Auckland.

I wasn't very happy about it because if he won a scholarship I might not see him for five or six years except during the summer holidays, and then only for two or three weeks because of the sailing schedules. But Mata's closest friend was dead keen to go and that fired him up to try for it.

PAUL: Didn't he get it then?

PUA: He came third. It broke his heart. It was more than a year into secondary school before he got any appetite back for study. It was his history teacher performed the miracle.

PAUL: How?

PUA: He was a New Zealand Maori. One of their very first university graduates. The official syllabus for history was still very much British Kings and Queens, the Wars of the Roses, the Spanish Armada, Roundheads and the Cavaliers but this man found time to tell the children about the history of Polynesia and how we were such great navigators and explorers, all over the Pacific a thousand and more years ago. He told Mata about the new courses in Maori cultures that were beginning to be taught at university and got him all fired up. But it also made him rather anti-European which, for him, was a problem.

PAUL: You mean because he was half European himself?

PUA: Exactly.

PAUL: So what happened?

PUA: Several things.

PAUL: Tell me, please tell me. I want to hear everything.

PUA (*sighs*): Yes, everything. I'm going to have to tell you everything now ... but just give me time ... He was growing up, getting quite tall and quite athletic. He swam a lot, like we all do, and he was very good at basketball although he wasn't the tallest player. He seemed to score a lot of goals. So he was something of an all-rounder: getting pretty good marks for schoolwork and always being picked for the team. It made him quite a popular boy, almost a local hero. But the inevitable happened.

PAUL: What was inevitable?

PUA: What else? Puberty. Can you remember it?

PAUL (*grinning*): Not without blushing. I remember one summer we all left Year Two singing treble and came back in the autumn with spotty faces and singing bass. There were other symptoms of course!

PUA: Exactly. Well the secondary school was mixed but they taught the boys and girls separately. So the boys were in the basketball team and the girls were the cheerleaders, all of them cheering for Mata, the goal scorer. One of them was probably the prettiest girl on the island but just about the dumbest.

PAUL: What was her name?

PUA: Moana.

PAUL: Moana.

There is a pause and offstage MATA calls out, "Moana, Moana!"

PAUL: Did it affect his schoolwork?

PUA: Yes and no. I could never get him to sit and concentrate on his homework like he had before and yet he seemed to be living in a much more intense way, and his class marks actually got better. I went to see his class teacher and she said he seemed much more intense in the classroom but she couldn't engage him in conversation like she used to. He seemed to be burning up inside. He got very skinny but you don't worry about that on a boy so much.

PAUL: Was it love?

PUA: That's what we all thought but the head teacher told me Mata had talked to him about his ambition to go to Otago University like his idol the history teacher and then come back and get into Banks Islands politics. It was complete news to me. The Islands hadn't been independent for ten years yet and I hadn't seen much of a difference except that it took twice as long and cost twice as much to get medical supplies from the Health Department and there seemed to be lots more jobs on the public payroll; like mine I guess. Then I remembered that Moana's father was a union organiser for the dock workers and a member of the Islands Assembly too, an opposition member.

PAUL: Could that explain it?

PUA: I don't know. I was nervous about saying too much to him and having him go into a teenage tantrum. I was afraid it would just push

him towards her rather than focus him on the future. But then we had a visit from a team from the University on a recruitment drive. They were offering scholarships for Maori students. It was nothing they actually said but I did get the impression they'd been told to do something about ethnic balance, that sort of thing, but it gave me a chance to ask him about it all.

PAUL: Did that help? Was he keen?

PUA: Amazingly.

PAUL: That had to be good then.

PUA: You would think so.

PAUL: Pua, what's wrong? What are you not telling me?

PUA: I'm telling you everything, Paul, but I have to tell it the way it wants to come out.

PAUL: Of course, of course. Sorry.

PUA smiles and nods silently for a moment before continuing.

PUA: He seemed so burned up, so intense, so determined. He was spending a lot of time with Moana's family and coming back late, talking about how things had to be run better on the Islands, more in the interests of the Maori people and how the whites still had too much control over the economy. There was a strike at the new garment factory and he and Moana joined the picket line. When I said to him it was crazy; that the company got a whopping subsidy from the Islands Assembly just to keep it in business; he was so angry with me and said that was only economic justice.

PAUL: I think we went through a time like that in the UK, maybe around the same time, but Mrs T changed all that. I mean that was why I found myself looking for a job in New Zealand. Sorry, I'm digressing. This is about Mata.

PUA: He was in the final year and still getting great marks but I could see he wasn't just growing up: he was becoming gaunt and looking undernourished. I wanted him to go to the doctor. I tried to get him to take vitamins. I told him he needed more sleep. I could have been talking to the wind. And I didn't even think about him being ill.

PAUL: Ill? Was he?

PUA: Yes. Yes, he was. But we didn't realise it until after he'd finished his exams and he'd been awarded one of the scholarships. It was the day after we heard the news that I dragged him to the doctor and that started a whole series of tests.

PAUL: What sort of tests?

PUA: Blood tests, X-rays, everything.

PAUL: And?

PUA: He had leukaemia and cancer of the bone marrow.

PAUL: Oh, my God!

PUA: And as if we needed it, Moana's father started up a campaign to say it was all the fault of the British H-bomb tests before he was born, and some people even said his father must have infected him.

PAUL: Jesus! What happened?

PUA: What happened first was that he and Moana disappeared.

PAUL: Disappeared? On a small island like this?

PUA: Moana's father must have had a hand in it but the real culprit was Auntie and, of course, I never thought to look there. I was out of my mind with worry but they turned up again in three days and the story came out, in dribs and drabs.

MATA (*offstage*): Mama! Stop nagging me.

Violent drumming and go to black. The drumming continues for at least a minute, slowly fading as the lights come up on PUA and MATA in her kitchen. He is sitting at the table and she is standing over him with her arm round him.

PUA: Mata! This is your mother speaking. You've been missing for three days, the pair of you and then you come out of Auntie's and, bold as brass, just climb on the bus and come home. I don't trust myself to go and confront her until I've calmed down a bit more. I just don't know what goes on inside her hate-filled head. And where's Moana?

MATA: She's gone to see her mother.

PUA: But why, why, why did you have to disappear, just when you needed everyone's help?

MATA: I needed time to think.

PUA: And Moana's a *thinker*!

MATA: Leave her alone!

PUA: This has nothing to do with her. I'm not interested in her. It's you I'm concerned about. You need treatment, medication, all kinds of things and instead you disappear. God forgive me, I even thought you might have gone and killed yourself.

MATA: And what would have been so silly about that? It would be cheaper all round.

PUA: Oh, Mata!

She throws herself on him and after a moment he returns her embrace. They both weep. After a moment, they sit down together.

PUA: Mata, this is not some lost cause. This is the 1970s. You'll have to go to New Zealand for some of the treatment, especially the radio therapy, but you were planning to go there anyway in a couple of months and the hospital in Wellington is part of the University of Otago so you'll be attending your own university already. Think of it as a rehearsal.

MATA: This isn't a rehearsal. This is my real life, or what's left of it.

PUA: Stop talking like that. Listen to me. We are going up to the hospital now and you are going to stay there while the doctors get to work on your treatment.

MATA: With you standing over them, I suppose. And standing over me saying drink this! Swallow that! Do what the doctors tell you!

PUA: Well you suppose wrong. I won't be involved in your treatment at all. That's the rule.

MATA: So where will you be then? Off on a tour of the islands?

PUA: I'll be sitting at your beside most of the time, wiping your brow, holding your hand and feeding you imported grapes since you don't like bananas or coconut, and bringing you hamburgers and French fries since

you don't care for mitiore. And I'll even be saying Auntie's old prayer because I've no pride and I'll do anything to help you get better.

MATA: Tell me Auntie's prayer.

PUA: You've heard her say it when you were little. (*Pua folds her son into her arms and recites the poem.*)

PUA (*continuing*): In the presence of Great Vatea,
Staunch, O wound, lest the sufferer faint,
Staunch quickly, lest he faint and die!
Here is water from the swamp to cure thee
Wound, heal speedily!
Here is water from the valleys to cure thee
Wound, heal speedily!
Here is water bubbling out of the earth to cure thee
Wound, heal speedily!
Here is water from the taro plantation to cure thee
Wound, heal speedily!
Here is water from the mountainside to cure thee
Wound, heal speedily!

Be healed in the name of Rongo and Tutavake
Poison of the ironwood, arise, depart!

They sit quietly for a minute. Then MATA sits up and takes his mother's hands.

MATA: I remember it now. It seemed to work when I had whooping cough. Listen Ma. I need to talk to you. Please let me tell you this; and let me finish.

PUA nods silently.

MATA: I'll go to hospital. I'll let them do what they want to do. But when it's done, I don't want to go to university. I want to stay here on Rangimanea. I want to live here in the Banks Islands. I want to live here with Moana.

PUA (*standing up and about to argue*): But ...

MATA: Mama!

PUA: All right, all right! I can't argue with you anymore. Whatever you want. Shall we walk up to the hospital now?

MATA: Not yet. I'm going round to see Moana first. Then I'll walk up to the hospital myself.

PUA sinks down onto the seat and nods silently. MATA stands up and walks very slowly off stage.

PUA (*to herself*): Auntie, if you have done this to him, I will kill you. I will take strychnine from the poison cupboard and make you swallow it and then I will dance round and round while I watch you die in agony. What am I saying? I'm a nurse. (*Shrugs and sighs*) And I'm a Polynesian. "In the name of Rongo and Tutavake, poison of the ironwood, arise, depart". Oh ye gods, make Mata well. Mata, Mata, Mata.

PAUL (*offstage, crying out*): Mata, Mata, Mata.

Go to black. A crescendo of drumming fades and is followed by the sounds of the sea lapping the shore..

The stage has one bench and an exit at centre stage rear, a symbolic low doorway fringed above with palm thatch. PUA and PAUL enter slowly. They are holding hands. She is carrying a beach bag. They walk to the bench and sit down.

PUA: Let's sit here and listen to the sea before we go in.

PAUL: I'm glad you hired a car. I don't feel I could have coped with sitting in the bus today with everybody being so friendly and me feeling so miserable.

PUA: Well, it meant we could go round by the airport and see if there were any flights. I'm sorry you feel you have to go, but it's your choice.

PAUL: Like last time, you mean?

PUA: I didn't mean that but, since you said it, I suppose it could seem like that. Like you can't face up to life's realities and find it easier to run away.

PAUL: I admit it. But since I learned within the space of an hour that I had a son and yet I've lost him; can never see him or hold him; I've been like a Zombie, catatonic, no feelings. I just want to get off the island. I'm glad I've seen you; and saying sorry for what I did has lifted that weight off my chest; but I'm still wishing I'd never come here, never found out how much I'd lost; never had something snatched away from me so cruelly. I just want to go somewhere, somewhere *else*, to be on

my own for a while. I'll not go back to work until I feel able to face other people. Why, oh why did I ever come here?

PUA: I know why ... and Auntie (*she gestures to the doorway*) knows. And if you want the truth I expect the whole of Rangimanea knows. We all know why you're here.

PAUL: I don't understand.

PUA: No, and I don't know if I really understand either. Auntie believes it's a spell she has cast. It was a spell to bring you here. It was a spell to stop you leaving, which is why there are no seats on any flights for the next two weeks. It was a spell to make you unhappy because Auntie thinks you are to blame for all this. A part of my Polynesian inheritance wonders if Auntie has those powers, and another part of me believes the great god Maui may have detected you flying overhead on your way to New Zealand and brought you here. But the simple fact is that it's probably all coincidence.

PAUL: Coincidence? Now I understand even less.

PUA: Long before you left the UK, the laboratory in Christchurch put the news of your appointment in their employee bulletin. That goes to everyone from the big boss to the little laboratory assistants. And one of these assistants thought she recognised something; something she had heard me say to her many years ago when we were grieving for Mata; something I had never meant to share with anyone but, woman to woman, it just slipped out.

PAUL: Something? What sort of something?

PUA: Your name.

PAUL: What's in a name? A rogue like me would smell as awful, whatever the name.

PUA: There's magic in our names. It made her write to me and I told Auntie, and Auntie sent her a spell to bring you back.

PAUL: You can't expect me to take any of this seriously.

PUA: She sent her a *tiki* to put in your desk drawer and then she came and asked you a question. She asked you 'How are you?' in Banks Islands Maori. She said, 'Pe'ea koe?' and the spell took effect when you replied. You said ...

PAUL: 'Meitaki'. I am well. I remember that! Who was she?

PUA: Moana.

Paul cries out; a long, anguished cry, and buries his face in his hands. After a moment, he looks up again.

PAUL: I had forgotten I ever knew those words. But it was you who taught me, all those years ago. I can't have spoken them in more than thirty years but they were lodged there, ready to be triggered. And that's why I went out that day and booked a flight to come here. I was fighting it right up to the moment I paid for the ticket; maybe even right up to the moment I fastened my seat belt in the plane.

PUA: But the magic was too strong. And we were all strangely curious to see you. The fact that Moana said you were still very handsome helped a great deal!

PAUL: Don't joke about this? And who is this Moana anyway?

PUA: Moana is Mata's widow.

PAUL: His widow? When did he get married? You haven't told me this.

PUA: They were married only a couple of days before he died. It was his last wish and we had to arrange it quickly because the doctors said he was sinking fast.

PAUL: So, I have a daughter-in-law! Or at least I would have if I had come back and married you.

PUA: I don't know if she'd want to be called your daughter-in-law but you are right: your son had a wife.

PAUL: So, if I am to break the spell I need to meet Auntie again?

PUA: She says one meeting with you will fix everything. But remember, she is very old and expects to be treated with respect. She will offer you a drink of kava and you must drain the coconut shell cup in one swallow. Then she will ask you how you are feeling: 'E maitaki koe?'

PAUL: 'E meitaki koe.' And the answer is 'meitaki?' All right. Ready when you are.

PUA: Let's go in and see Auntie and then we can go down to the sea and swim.

PUA and PAUL stand up and, leaving the beach bag, they enter Auntie's hut, ducking under the low door. PUA goes first and as she enters she addresses the unseen AUNTIE. The back drop is illuminated from behind and the audience see a shadow play (which may be pre-filmed and projected for greater clarity) that follows the dialogue. Cook Island drumming begins quietly.

PUA (*offstage*): Kia Orana, Auntie. This is Paul. Father of Mata.

AUNTIE (*offstage*): Kia Orana, Paul, father of Mata. Come, drink kava. Auntie has kept this for you alone.

The shadow Auntie proffers a half coconut which the shadow Paul accepts and drinks. There is a drum riff.

AUNTIE (*offstage*): E maitake koe, Paul?

PAUL: (*offstage*): Maitaki. But I feel ... I feel ...

The shadow Paul drops to his knees and the cup falls from his hands. Four fate-like, loud drum-beats are followed by a steady crescendo of drumming.

AUNTIE: (*screaming and cackling with wicked laughter*): Kare! Kare! E kino koe. Kino! [No. No. You are sick, Sick.]

PUA (*screaming and hauling shadow Paul to his feet*): Auntie, you wicked woman. What have you done? Have you poisoned him?

AUNTIE (*triumphant*): Ae! Ae! Ae! [Yes. Yes. Yes.]

PUA drags PAUL with his arm round her shoulder. They appear at the low door and struggle through. PAUL looks very sick. The Cook Islands drumming becomes very loud as PUA shouts above it.

PUA (*yelling*): Get into the sea, Paul; into the sea and drink. Drink, drink, and then drink some more. (*She is helping him diagonally downstage and they exit.*) Drink until you're sick, very sick. Don't stop. Drink more, more. Paul, my darling Paul. For God's sake drink. Paul, Paul! ... My husband!

The drumming comes to a violent crescendo and then abruptly stops. Go to black in utter silence.

Airport noises and a Tannoy announcement of the imminent departure of an Air New Zealand flight to Christchurch. Lights fade up slowly. Paul enters and looks around. He shrugs and sits down on the airport style bench, shaking out a newspaper. Once again he looks around and then starts to read. There is a further Tannoy announcement asking "all remaining passengers" to get on board the Air New Zealand flight. PAUL stands and slowly folds and puts away his newspaper. He is stooping to pick up his case when, only at this point, PUA runs in, calling out.

PUA: Paul! Paul!

PAUL springs up, dropping the newspaper.

PAUL: I really thought you weren't coming.

PUA: There was an emergency at the hospital. I had already left the ward when they called me back. I nearly left the poor man to bleed to death.

PAUL: But you didn't! You are a real life-saver, Pua. You've done it twice already for me ... I'm sorry about Auntie, despite everything.

PUA: I'm sorry too but maybe it was what they call poetic justice. At least her heart attack was swift and final. I was so afraid you were in for something lingering and painful. Thank goodness for the telephone in the village shop. We needed that ambulance so quickly.

PAUL: We needed what we had on the spot. You know that sea-water emetic saved my life. Yes, the hospital did the rest with their stomach pump and their antidotes but if it hadn't been for your nursing skills I would probably have been buried here on Rangimanea.

PUA: You don't have to stay that permanently, Paul, but I would have liked you to have stayed longer.

PAUL: We've been over and over that. You know how I feel. Apart from having to get back to my job so I don't lose it, I need a little time away from here. Too much has happened to me and I need to get busy again and try and bring some normality back into my life.

PUA: But you are coming back?

PAUL: I've promised. And we'll go together to Matangitonga. I want to see my son's grave.

They embrace tenderly.

PUA: Listen, I've got something for you to read on the plane ... and something to look at. The radiologist at the hospital has been doing some research for me while you've been recovering. I haven't had time to read it in any detail myself but you remember how both you and Mata were such fans of fresh-water prawns.

PAUL: Of course I remember but why should a radiologist be investigating fresh-water prawns?

PUA: He remembered some work by a scientist called Joseph Rotblatt.

PAUL: Rotblatt? I've heard of him. Isn't he an anti-nuclear campaigner, or with CND or something?

PUA: I've no idea, but he knows about food chains and the way radiation gets passed on and then stored up in the body. Anyway, Rotblatt has uncovered reports from the time of the H-bomb tests that showed that they knew radiation accumulated in fresh-water prawns, even miles and miles away from the tests, because the wind carried it over the oceans, then the plankton absorbed it and they got eaten by the prawns. And then you and Mata ate the prawns. I mean it could explain what happened to Mata, and maybe even what happened to you.

PAUL: I'll read it, Pua, but it doesn't change anything, does it? It still means we've lost our only child and I can't have any more.

PUA: If you come back, there is something; someone we could share.

PAUL: If you came to New Zealand, you could easily get a job and there's my flat we could share.

PUA: You're not listening to me. There's something I didn't tell you before what Auntie did to you; and then it was never the right moment to talk about it.

PAUL: What can there be to say that hasn't been said by now? There's been enough high drama, or Greek tragedy, or whatever you want to call it.

PUA: Paul, Paul, this is important.

The airport tannoy signal prefaces an announcement.

TANNOY (*offstage*): Will Mr Paul Wilson please proceed at once to the departure gate where the Air New Zealand flight to Christchurch is about to close. Mr Paul Wilson to departure immediately, please!

PAUL: I have to go. Whatever it is will have to wait for another time.

PUA (*thrusting an envelope at him*): Paul! There's a photograph in here of your granddaughter.

Paul is stunned and cannot speak.

TANNOY (*offstage*): Mr Paul Wilson must present himself at the departure gate immediately or the flight to Christchurch will depart without him.

PAUL: Oh, Pua! I think you may have saved my life again. Listen. I'll be back in a month at the latest. (*He embraces and kisses PUA*). Wait for me.

He rushes off to catch his flight.

PUA: Yes Paul. I'll wait for you. What's a month after all?

END

Appendix:

The following Cook Islands prayer aimed to hasten recovery from injury and was considered to be an infallible cure:

In the presence of Great Vatea,
Staunch, O wound, lest the sufferer faint,
Staunch quickly, lest he faint and die!
Here is water from the swamp to cure thee
Wound, heal speedily!

(The above two lines were repeated five times, mentioning "water from the valleys", "water bubbling out of the earth" "from the running stream", "from the taro plantation", "from the mountain-side")

Be healed in the name of Rongo and Tutavake
Poison of the ironwood, arise, depart!

Mitiore (grated coconut fermented with onion and seafood) is a delicacy, especially for the elderly. It is still used for feasts, but until 20 years ago it was eaten with every Sunday dinner. To prepare it, mother and a big daughter go to the reef at low tide and collect rori pua (sea cucumber), ariri (turban snails) and ungakoa (marine worms in tube shells). Once ashore they scrape the rori and cut it into small pieces, and shell the ariri. If they also collected trochus, they bring it home to boil to make it easy to extract the meat. Father and son prepare the taro, kumara and other foods. In the evening they grate the coconut, and then catch ko'iti (sand crabs) on the beach to marinate. By mid-day, after church, the mitiore is ready.