



UNIVERSITY of
HAWAII'I
PRESS

Last Virgin in Paradise: A Serious Comedy

Author(s): Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa

Source: *Mānoa*, Summer, 1993, Vol. 5, No. 1, Writing from the Pacific Islands (Summer, 1993), pp. 193-203

Published by: University of Hawai'i Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4228866>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of Hawai'i Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Mānoa*

JSTOR

Last Virgin in Paradise: A Serious Comedy

The myth of Paradise is a legacy that Polynesia and Polynesians have had to live with since Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of the "noble savage" became popular in Europe in the eighteenth century. Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who read Rousseau and was influenced by the latter's ideas of a simple society where happiness reigned, sought to confirm the existence of a paradise and found it in Tahiti. A young Tahitian maiden who negligently allowed her loincloth to fall to the ground in full view of four hundred young French sailors who hadn't seen a woman for six months became Venus, revealing her beauty to the Phrygian shepherd. At this moment, ideology became "fact."

Ideas of simplicity, nudity, free love, and primitive ritual in the South Seas fascinated Europeans who came to wonder if the absence of the same in industrial Europe was their undoing. By the turn of the eighteenth century, however, evangelical thought and missionary zeal had caused a decline in the popularity of the myth. Notions of Paradise were replaced by ideas of pagan savages who needed steering to the Light. Many of Tahiti's exotic practices became frowned upon and were banned by the missionaries.

But the myth resurfaced. Sentimental writers such as John Byron, Pierre Loti, and Herman Melville rebelled against the puritanical values of the status quo and proclaimed the South Seas the answer to alienation and the mechanized life of Europeans. In particular, Herman Melville's accounts of adventures among the joyous children of nature in *Typee* and *Omoo* (based on his life as a marooned whaler in Tahiti and the Marquesas) captured the imaginations of Europeans who longed to escape to the South Seas.

In 1891, Paul Gauguin (a disciple of Rousseau) arrived in Tahiti and started to capture the myth on canvas. His paintings glorified the sexuality of Tahitian women and the simplicity of island life, inspiring others to visit Tahiti in the hope that they, too, would find Eden. The myth lives on. From the 1950s up to the present, the myth of Paradise has become an economic and commercial commodity, exploited by the tourist industry to lure thousands of visitors to seek out not just Tahiti, but her sister islands in Polynesia as well.

Last Virgin is a serious comedy that explores the myth of Paradise. Helmut is a much-married, -divorced alcoholic who arrives in the Pacific looking for a virgin bride. Hina is his "discovery." Temanu, a fledgling feminist returning to her island in search of her roots, learns of the impending marriage of her cousin to Helmut and protests.

Kerry, an Australian anthropologist, has also been influenced by the myth. Like Helmut, she has personal reasons for running away from urban society. Scene III, excerpted here, follows the wedding scene, wherein the drunken Helmut has lost his temper and dragged Hina away to consummate the marriage.

SCENE III, HELMUT'S BEDROOM, MARAWA HOTEL

(Spotlight on the picture on the backdrop, which has been replaced by one of a large eel that appears on the verge of eating a sea urchin. General lighting to reveal a bed placed diagonally at stage center. A table and chair at upstage right. A bottle of whisky, two glasses, and a parcel on the table. A red bed-sheet for the bed and table. Three books are piled up neatly on the bed. Enter Helmut and Hina, still in their wedding clothes. Helmut carries Hina's suitcase in his right hand while Hina carries a pandanus basket in her left hand. Helmut has his left arm around Hina's waist. Helmut puts the suitcase down and tries to lift Hina to carry her across the threshold but realizes she is too heavy and puts her down. She looks at him with impatience, and walks across the threshold on her own. Surveys the room and decides to sit on the bed [sits in Pacific-style "ladylike" fashion, legs tucked to the side]. Picks up each of the books in turn and looks at the covers. Helmut goes over to the table, picks up the whisky bottle, and pours himself a drink. Hina watches him carefully. He sings his favorite song, and straightens out his hair.)

- HELMUT *(Sings)* "It's just a little brown gal in a little grass skirt . . ." *(Offers Hina a glass of whisky. She shakes her head and holds her pandanus basket close to her body, as though to protect herself. She watches him)* You're the most beautiful thing that I've ever seen. Did you know that? Don't be afraid, I'll be very gentle. I'm experienced at this kind of thing, so there's no need to fear anything. Soon you'll have your legs around me, moaning for more and more . . .
- HINA What are these books?
- HELMUT Those? *(Walks over and takes them from her)* These are my favorite books. Do you want to read them?
- HINA Now?
- HELMUT No, later. Who would you like to read? Somerset Maugham, Jack London, or Margaret Mead?
- HINA Are they your relatives?
- HELMUT *(Chuckling)* Well, I suppose they are, in a way. But we're not here to talk about them, are we? *(Puts them on the table, then opens the parcel that is on it and takes out a red negligee with black lace at the edges)* Change into this; you'll look very sexy. *(She doesn't move)*
- HINA Aren't you going to read to me? I thought the *palagi* read story before you go to bed?

HELMUT Look. Just forget those books. One day you'll be able to read and understand them. Right now, I want you to change into this. (*Holding up the red negligee*) Do you want me to undress you?

HINA Where you buy this from?

HELMUT I brought it with me, from Germany.

HINA New?

HELMUT Yes.

HINA You look away so I put this on.

HELMUT Don't be silly, Hina. We're man and wife now. We can see everything and do everything and not feel ashamed.

HINA It's not my custom.

HELMUT No? Don't you natives practice free love under the coconut trees? That's what the books say. You have no hangups like us; sex to you is like drinking whisky. You can never have enough of it.

HINA But if we like that, there be no virgin left.

HELMUT Except you. You are the last virgin in Paradise. That's why you're so desirable. Why don't you put on the present, then come and sit here on my lap.

HINA Do you love me?

HELMUT Of course I love you.

HINA Why?

HELMUT Because you're pure, untouched by any other man. (*Refills his glass*)

HINA Why do you drink so much?

HELMUT I want to forget . . .

HINA Forget?

HELMUT About the past. Two of my wives died, one of cancer, the other in a car accident. My third wife left me for someone else. (*Drinks*) So you see, when I drink, the world is beautiful. I'm a child of nature again, wandering in Paradise. When I'm sober, the past comes back to haunt me, and I can't sleep at night. Look, why don't you have a whisky, then you'll know what I mean. Yes?

HINA No.

HELMUT Is there anything else you'd like to drink?

HINA You have Coca-Cola?

HELMUT Coca-Cola? No, who would have thought you'd want a coke on our wedding night?

HINA I only want Coca-Cola.

HELMUT What about me? Don't you want me?

HINA I don't know, Mr. Helmut. I . . . please . . . I'll put this red thing on, but you must close your eyes.

HELMUT *(Jumping on the bed and closing his eyes)* I'm yours to command. *(She tries to take off her wedding dress, with some difficulty. He sneaks a look and she shyly turns around. She finally undresses and is left wearing a lavalava)*

HINA Open your eyes. What do you think? *(Helmut sits up and stares, speechless)* Don't you find me attractive in a *lavalava*?

HELMUT Yes. Definitely. But . . .

HINA But?

HELMUT I can't get it up with a *lavalava*! That's why I got the red negligee. *(Losing his patience)* Put it on! Now!

HINA I only get excited in a *lavalava*.

HELMUT You don't need to get excited. All you have to do is lie there and close your eyes. I'm the one who has to get it up. But first, the foreplay. We kiss first. *(He tries to kiss her. She pushes him away and runs to the other side of the bed. He instinctively straightens out his hair)*

HINA Please, don't kiss. I don't kiss.

HELMUT No? What do you do then?

HINA Kissing dirty. It's filthy.

HELMUT Who cares if it's filthy? I want to be filthy tonight. Don't you?

HINA No.

- HELMUT No? Then we've got a problem, haven't we? Look, why don't you put the negligee on?
- HINA This? Negle . . .
- HELMUT Yes! Put it on! As your husband, I command you to put it on!
- HINA Don't shout . . . please. I put it on. But you look away.
- HELMUT Why should I look away when I want to see what you've got?
- HINA I'm ashamed. It's my custom.
- HELMUT Your custom! Your bloody custom! Before the missionaries came, you wore just a leaf, like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Now, you can't even take off your clothes in front of your husband. And you say this is the custom? Well, tell me, is it your custom to do it with your clothes on or off? Yesterday I saw some Marawans jump into the swimming pool with all their clothes on! I suppose that's the custom too! Everyone on Marawa is so missionized, I wouldn't be surprised if they're too ashamed to pull up their *lavalava* to shit!
- HINA But that's different. When you shit, no one looking.
- HELMUT Thanks to the missionaries, everyone on this island is confused about their custom. But I thought you were different.
- HINA No, I'm same, same. Please, you look away. (*Helmut reluctantly looks away while Hina pulls the negligee over the lavalava*) You can look now.
- HELMUT Oh, God. You look surreal. Just as I imagined. Oh I love you, Hina. (*He grabs her, tries to kiss her, but she pulls away. She jumps on the bed and opens her pandanus basket*)
- HINA (*Excitedly*) I just remember something my mother gave me. (*She takes out a palusami [taro leaves and corned beef cooked in coconut cream], opens it, and stuffs her mouth with food. She licks her fingers. Disgusted, Helmut rushes to pour himself another drink*) Some *palusami*, my mother put in my basket in case I'm hungry. When you say to kiss, I think of this! (*Holding out some corned beef to Helmut*) You have some, Helmut? They nice . . . corn beef inside. Do you like corn beef, Mr. Helmut? (*Helmut stares at her in disbelief. Suddenly he lunges at her, grabs the corned beef, and throws it away. Jumps on her and tries to kiss her. They struggle. She grabs him by the hair, and his toupee comes off. She stares at what she has in her hand and screams. Tries to throw the toupee, but it becomes entangled in her fingers. She runs around screaming while Helmut chases her. Helmut tries to cover his bald head with his hands all the time. Loud banging*)

on the door, then Temanu and Kerry appear. Kerry is wearing a nightdress and is minus her makeup. Temanu is wearing a lavalava and T-shirt)

- TEMANU Hina! What is going on here? *(Helmut runs around trying to put things in order again. Hina sits on the bed sobbing)*
- HELMUT What do you want? How did you get in?
- TEMANU Through the door, how else?
- HELMUT Oh, God!
- TEMANU *(To Hina)* Are you all right? *(Hina nods. Temanu looks at Helmut)* You forced yourself on her, didn't you? *(Kerry stands watching)*
- HELMUT She's my wife.
- TEMANU That doesn't give you the right to rape her!
- HELMUT Rape! You exaggerate. We were trying to make love, and because this is her first time, she was nervous. Maybe I was a bit too enthusiastic, but not any more than any other man in the same circumstances.
- TEMANU *(To Hina)* Get dressed! You're coming to sleep with me in my room.
- HELMUT She's not! What business is it of yours anyway! Just get out of my room!
- TEMANU This is my business. Hina is my cousin and this is our island. *(To Hina)* Let's go. *(She picks up the suitcase)*
- HELMUT You can't barge in here and take away my wife! She's sleeping with me! I've married her. Understand?
- TEMANU Try and stop me! *(To Hina)* Come on, Hina, you're coming with me.
- HELMUT We're flying out of here tomorrow.
- TEMANU You might have to fly alone. We'll see if Hina wants to come with you tomorrow or not. Good night, you baldheaded rapist! *(Hina takes off the red negligee and throws it on the bed. Temanu leads Hina to the exit. Kerry is about to leave when Helmut calls out to her)*
- HELMUT Kerry, please don't go. Have a drink with me. *(She hesitates, then decides to stay for a while. Sits on the chair. Helmut prances around excitedly as he talks)* Tell me, you're an anthropologist . . . do you understand these people?
- KERRY No, but I'm trying. Anyhow, I'm not marrying one, so my situation is different from yours.

HELMUT In what way?

KERRY I simply study them. Then I write about them. I don't aspire to marry one of them, so I don't need to get inside their skin at all, as it were. I know I appear to be exploiting them, but what else can I do? I've got ambitions and aspirations, I've got a book to write, and a career to worry about. And these people will be famous when this study comes out!

HELMUT And you? Is that all that matters to you?

KERRY No. I get lonely, too. And confused at times, nobody here takes me seriously, nobody knows that I'm the daughter of famous parents, nobody wants to talk to me, even when I offer to pay them!

HELMUT What about love?

KERRY Love? Is there such a creature? The best I can hope for is to find an irresistible man, or woman, to have a little bit of fun with. But love? No, Helmut, where I'm searching, there is no love! But I've learned how to insulate myself, to ward off the slings and arrows that threaten to hurt me. (*Pause, looking rather upset*) But your case is different. You're married to one of them, so you can't afford to be detached or uninvolved.

HELMUT What about them? Do they try to understand us?

KERRY You were the one who went looking for her, not the other way around.

HELMUT So?

KERRY So perhaps you should make the first move. For a start, you might consider learning the language.

HELMUT At my age? Why should I? Hina speaks English well enough.

KERRY They say that language is the key that will unlock a culture. That's why, as an anthropologist, my first task is to learn the language.

HELMUT I have no time to learn a primitive language spoken by only a few thousand people!

KERRY Then don't complain if you don't understand them.

HELMUT I understand Hina well enough. It's that cousin of hers I don't understand. Barging in here and acting like she was her bloody saviour!

KERRY Can I have a drink?

- HELMUT Of course. (*Helmut walks over to the table, pours Kerry a drink, and hands it to her. Then he tries to straighten out the sheets on the bed and to fold the negligee*)
- KERRY I notice that Hina didn't protest at all. On the contrary, she seemed only too happy to be free of your clutches. Perhaps you don't understand her as well as you think. Otherwise, you wouldn't have pushed her to the screaming point.
- HELMUT I didn't try to rape her. Anyway, how can it be rape when she's now legally my wife, and this is our first night! Do you believe me?
- KERRY I don't know.
- HELMUT But that's the truth.
- KERRY Truth? Helmut, you and I know that truth isn't always relevant. Right now, I don't think you really care what is or isn't the truth. All you want is your own fulfillment, your need to be young again. Tell me, why is it so important that you marry a virgin?
- HELMUT (*Surprised by this question*) Ever since I was a little boy, I've always wanted to own what was new. I've never liked anything that was used, old, or worn out. I suppose my being here is just an extension of that need to be first. And there's that part of me that wanted to believe in the traditional values. I wanted to prove to myself that there are still women who believe in chastity before marriage. You see, I've been married three times before. None of my other wives was a virgin before we married.
- KERRY I suppose you were.
- HELMUT I was a stud even before I was sixteen! But not once was I the first.
- KERRY So that's why you're here in the Pacific. The last frontier, I suppose.
- HELMUT Are you mocking me?
- KERRY No, I understand you. I'm here really because I'm a misfit back at home. I'm trying to find a part of myself that doesn't make sense. Here, in a society that is supposed to be "primitive" and free of the taint of civilization, I had hoped to find a people who would validate who I am, my sexual hangups, my fantasies, my existence. But western civilization has penetrated every corner of the globe. We're centuries too late, Helmut!
- HELMUT You understand me.
- KERRY I think so! You're running away from memory . . . you drink so you can dull your senses, so you can live in a fantasy world of make-believe, so you can never wake up from your nightmare!

- HELMUT Yes.
- KERRY Perhaps our pasts are very similar. My parents divorced when I was ten, and I was looked after by an uncle who lived on a sheep farm. To win his affection, I learned from an early age how to satisfy his needs. He was a violent man! Were your wives bad to you, too?
- HELMUT Bad? They made me feel inadequate, impotent! With them, I didn't feel I was a man! This is my attempt to salvage my self-respect, my pride, to restore my dignity as a member of the male species. I drink to hide the hurt, to numb my conscience, to protect myself from any feelings of guilt! Do you think I'm crazy?
- KERRY I don't. I think you're a little lost, but so are most people. Look at Temanu, deluding herself that she is here to find her roots. But when she finds them, will she want to embrace them? Of course not! Her roots sound grand and noble to her because she does not live here. As soon as she arrives at the airport and sees the dilapidated buildings, the thatched roofs, and the deep-pit latrines, she heads straight for the comfort of a motel. She wants to be decolonized, yet she can't do without the colonizer's symbols of the good life. She thinks she knows what's best for her cousin and I suppose for everyone else on Marawa. But she doesn't know them any more than you or I.
- HELMUT And me? Tell me more about me.
- KERRY You were attracted to the Pacific because of all that you've read about free love and sexual freedom. Am I right?
- HELMUT Yes, carry on.
- KERRY Why then did you expect to find virgins here? Since you're a psychology professor, I find that rather curious.
- HELMUT You make me sound twisted.
- KERRY We all are. We're all looking for a paradise that never existed. I came here expecting it to be primitive, the last place in the Pacific to be spoiled by westernization, and what do I find? Natives dressed to the ankle, a fledgling feminist from ANU, and a toupeed alcoholic from Stuttgart! (*Kerry laughs; Helmut sees the humor and joins in*) It's ridiculous, isn't it? We all think that Paradise is a place, when all the time . . . it's a state of mind!
- HELMUT I'm afraid of growing old, of not being able to get it up. Kerry, I'm afraid of a limp penis.
- KERRY And I'm afraid of sagging breasts and wrinkles under my eyes. Why do you think I stuff cotton wool in my bra and plaster my face with makeup! (*They*

both chuckle. Helmut puts his arms around Kerry, who gently resists) It's late, and I must go. Thanks for the drink.

- HELMUT Please don't go. Stay the night here, with me. Please . . .
- KERRY You're drunk, Helmut.
- HELMUT I'm not drunk.
- KERRY Yes you are.
- HELMUT You can sleep next to me. I promise I won't touch you. Or you can sleep on the bed, and I'll sleep on the floor.
- KERRY Go to sleep, Helmut. You've had a hard day.
- HELMUT (*Holding her hand*) Please don't go, I want to be with someone. I feel so lonely. (*Begins to sob*) Nobody loves me . . .
- KERRY Go to sleep, Helmut. I'll see you in the morning.
- HELMUT Will you come to the airport?
- KERRY Are you still leaving tomorrow?
- HELMUT Yes.
- KERRY And Hina? Do you think she'll join you?
- HELMUT She's my wife now.
- KERRY Of course. Well, I must be going. (*Kerry moves to the door as Helmut tries his luck again*)
- HELMUT Kerry . . .
- KERRY Yes?
- HELMUT I love you, Kerry.
- KERRY You only say you love me because you're drunk and feeling lonely. When daylight comes and you're sober, you'll hate me because you revealed your secrets to me.
- HELMUT No, I won't. Even in the daylight, I'll still love you. Kerry, spend the night with me. I have more secrets to reveal to you. Please . . .

KERRY

(Seemingly undecided) Thanks for the offer, Helmut, but I'm not so desperate, yet. Besides, I don't think you can . . . no, never mind. *(Pause)* I'll be at the airport tomorrow. Good night, Helmut! *(Quick exit)*

HELMUT

(Turns around and sees the negligee on the bed. Holds the red negligee to his chest as he lies down on the bed and curls up like a fetus. Faint sounds of his favorite song) "It's just a little brown gal, in a little grass skirt, in a little grass shack . . ." *(Blackout)*