

THE CORKMAN AND THE KANAKA: A QUASI-HISTORICAL DRAMA

TIME:

Mid-19th Century.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

A Kanaka

Francis O'Neill (future "Chief" O'Neill)

LOCATION:

An unspecified mid-Pacific island

SCENE:

A long sandy beach rimmed with palm trees. A white man is paddling himself ashore in a flimsy rowboat. Both boat and sailor are somewhat the worse for wear. A local, clad in a grass skirt and holding a weapon, leans on a rock watching.

Kanaka:

Hi, sailor!

Francis O'Neill:

Hi yourself, you pigmented son of a Kerry gombeen man. Put down that spear or I'll damage you severely with this fine German flute that I happen to be carrying in my world-encircling search for neat jigs, reels, and hornpipes (and florid slow airs that won't be in the green book, thanks be to God).

Kanaka:

No need to be touchy. I just wanted to welcome you to our desolate little island. We don't get too many visitors here ... especially good-looking Celtic types like you. Let's see, it's been ...

FON (*interrupting*)

No wonder. Five palm trees, two huts, five pigs, two goats, no women - even a Mayoman would be depressed.

Kanaka:

We know it looks cheesy, but it isn't so bad. We have beautiful sunsets and all the breadfruit we can eat. Our women don't like it here because of Kanu Vata, the infant-devouring lizard god that lives on the other side of the island, but we guys leave him alone and he leaves us alone, you know?

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FON:

The spear ... the spear ...

Kanaka:

Oh, sorry. *(Tosses it into one of the huts; a short grunting shriek is heard)* Oh damn - I forgot it was the pigs' day to use the hut. Roast pork for dinner tonight, I guess!

FON:

Would you have anything to drink around here? I'm bone-dry after my epic wanderings.

Kanaka:

We just got in a barrelful of vanu kata - you might like that.

FON:

What's vanu kata?

Kanaka:

It's a blend of coconut milk and salamander droppings that we mix with a little rainwater and allow to ferment. Good stuff with a slice of pineapple and crushed ice, except we don't have any ice so we use pebbles. Here, try a slug. *(Pours liquid from a pouch on his belt into a monkey skull he finds behind the rock)*

FON:

I'm so dry I'll try anything *(Tastes)* Hmmm ... not half-bad. *(Takes another sip)* It would put you in mind of the poitin my uncle Jerry makes that killed two of Tadhg Patsy's prize bulls the night they broke into the shed with a big thirst and bad judgment.

Kanaka:

I have no idea what you're talking about but how about an old tune on the flute there? Would you know "The Gudgeon of Maurice's Car", by any chance?

FON:

Damn right I know it, you grass-skirted pagan ... give me another monkey skull full of that stuff first. *(Drinks, smacks lips appreciatively)* Not too bad at all. *(Starts to play)*

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Kanaka (*as tune ends*):

Lovely playing there, boss, except that was "The Walls of Liscarroll" and not "The Gudgeon of Maurice's Car". Nice finger work, though.

FON (*enraged*):

Why you ... (*waves the flute threateningly*) The nerve of the likes of you to tell ME, the tune collector of all time, which tune is which ...

Kanaka:

Hey, don't get all worked up. You didn't let me finish telling you before that the last ship that got wrecked out here a couple years back had three other Irishmen on board. Misters Petrie, Joyce, and Levey I believe were their names ... they were here about a month before they were ransomed and went home.

FON (*evasively*):

Petrie? Joyce? Levey? Uh ... never heard of them.

Kanaka:

I'm surprised you don't know them - they said they were tune collectors, too. While they waited to be rescued they taught us a few tunes so we could play them at our ceremonies, which we thought was a nice idea even if we don't have any musical instruments to speak of out here. They said not to worry, humming or whistling the tunes would work too ... Joyce tried to teach us to lilt, but none of us could manage it, but we got pretty good at the humming.

FON (*pretending disinterest*):

Did they happen to mention the names of any of the tunes they had collected?

Kanaka:

They mentioned a few but I don't recall too many. A lot of the names didn't make much sense to us. Anyway they didn't have anything else to use for ransom so we took the papers they were carrying - even though none of us can read. They made a fuss until we introduced them our Chief Disemboweller and his apprentice, then they calmed down.

FON (*With a sly look*):

Might there be any chance of a look at those papers they left behind?

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Kanaka:

Just a lot of lines and dots and squiggles - made no sense to us, but you're welcome to look at them after the pig roast tonight. Hey, how about another shot of vanu kata before we head back to the village?

FON:

A grand idea. You're not such a bad old heathen after all.

(Kanaka pours liquid into the monkey skull, raises his pouch to FON who responds in kind)

Kanaka:

Well, here's health to your tune-collector friends, wherever they may be.

FON *(barely suppressing hysterical laughter)*

Yes, indeed!

(Both drink and exit stage left, singing - more or less - The Minstrel Boy)

(curtain)

.....

(Tune in tomorrow when the Witch Doctor tells the Chief's future ...)

Witch Doctor *(mysteriously)*

I see police work in a big city somewhere...you'll be shot but you'll survive...
you'll become Police Chief eventually...

FON:

Police chief? Do I get to hire anybody I want?)

The End