

Monsieur Cochon

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After a lifetime working in Papeete, in her last days the old lady Fua moved back to her home village of Mu in American Sāmoa because she was afraid to be buried far away from her fanua, the place where her birth cord was put in the earth.

After weaving, every evening she went down the village road to the sea to visit her pig in his pen made of sea rocks.

Anyone who saw her walking on the white path that negotiated its way among the black volcanic rocks called out, “Where are you going, grandmother?”

“Malo lava, I’m going to visit my husband.”

“But you’re a widow.”

“I’m visiting my pig,” she answered, “to be sure my lazy grandsons remember to grate coconut for him!”

When she got to the pen of sea rocks, with drifting sea on the far side, she shouted as well as she could, “Hello Monsieur Cochon, hello Mister Pig!”

Among the large rocks was a big boar of a pig, quite spoiled in its bachelor pen. When the pig smelled Fua coming, it squealed loudly and happily.

Again she called, “Hello Monsieur Cochon, hello Mister Pig!”

And after looking around to be sure no one else was about, she called a third time. On the third call, the dirty pig turned with a shake and a moan into the most beautiful man in American Sāmoa, and he said in human speech, “Hello, Mrs Pig, Madame Cochon!”

As a man, her Monsieur Cochon was built strong as the mountain, skin dark as earth and smooth as the waters of the lagoon at night.

They made love under the trees and for the night Fua became a young woman again. There was never anyone to bother them; after all, it was the home of a pig, and the smell of pig kept all away.

When all was done, her hands shaking, Fua turned back into an old woman, and put on her mu'umu'u.

And Monsieur Cochon the man became a pig again.

They hardly said two words further.

She went home under the shining stars of home, the sandy road white as the Milky Way, white as the moon above. At home Fua made dinner and fell asleep under her mosquito net after blowing out the kerosene lamp.

But one day, after they made love, Mister Pig, her husband, Monsieur Cochon, did not turn back into a pig again. He remained a man, which made him completely sad. Now he was only a man, and everyone expected something of him. He had been much happier being a pig, waiting for the boys to grate him some coconut, listening to the sea all day.

Fua and Monsieur Cochon, the man, stood dumbfounded. He'd always turned back into a snouty pig as soon as he was satisfied, and as soon as the old lady was satisfied too. Madame Cochon walked around the man three times, and threw some mud on him, but try as she could, he remained a man.

Being a man now, he wasn't comfortable in his rock pen anymore and so he followed Fua home.

Madame Cochon was completely unhappy about that.

She enjoyed her love pig, but a husband at home? She thought she was long done with all that.

All day Monsieur Cochon just sat there, trying to tune the only electrical appliance, a radio, to Radio 2AP from Apia, and his favorite new song, "Tiny Bubbles."

He looked at Fua, expecting some beer with his dinner.

For Madame Cochon, on a fixed income, having a young husband in her favorite chair all day was unbearable!

They didn't make love anymore at all. Monsieur Cochon couldn't sprout a tusk to save his life.

"We must find a taulaitu," Madame said, "A witch doctor can turn you into a pig again." But times had changed. The missionaries had banished all the taulaitu. Only Fa'api was left.

Fa'api was a strange creature, a younger woman, who showed up at Fua's doorway looking like Pearl Bailey, with a voice like Louis Armstrong's. Fa'api said to Fua, "Why on earth would you want to change him into a

pig again? Because I wouldn't. He's beautiful. Life doesn't last very long, after all."

Waving a long thin finger in the younger woman's face, Fua said to her, "You, you're loose like an old lady. Do what I ask!"

"Oh well, let's go to the sea," sighed Fa'api, "It's always the same cure; it's a wonder anyone asks."

That night the three of them swam out in the reef-sheltered lagoon, and the seawater was warm and clear as glass in the moonlight.

In the shallows their bodies glowed faintly in the sea-green mere, as Fa'api whispered in Monsieur Cochon's ear, "Where do they go, the Dead?"

"Upwards, into white 'Aniva," the young man said, matter of factly.

"Where do they go, the Dead?" Fa'api now said aloud.

"Downwards, into the blue," the young man said thoughtfully.

"Where do they go, the Dead?" Fa'api said quite loudly, while Fua shivered in the warm tropical air, watching the clouds begin to cover the moon, thinking, Mm, always the same old spell.

"Eastward, to meet the moon," Monsieur Cochon said, pointing in the direction of the moonrise.

"Where do they go, the Dead?" Fa'api now shouted.

"Westward, to follow the sun," he said, pointing to the path of the sun.

"Where do they go, the Dead?" she screamed.

"Inland, to sleep," he whispered.

"Where do they go, the Dead?" she said, softly, calm at last.

"Seaward, seaward," he said, and as he said "seaward" one last time, his voice came out as a squeal, a grunt. And he became a pig again, shaking the long black hairs on his back, thrashing his hoofs through the shallows, digging into the beach vines. Forevermore, he was never again to be a man.

"Never again?" Fua asked, as she drove her pig back to his pen with a stick.

"Nevermore," said Fa'api the taulaitu witch, daubing her eyes with a piece of bark cloth she pulled from her hair.

Fua smiled in the dark and drove her pig over the wall of the sty. With Fa'api's help she shoved a barring log to pen him in—not that Monsieur Cochon had any intentions but to eat some grated coconut and foul his nest and fall asleep in the mosquito-filled night.

Fa‘api, whose heart was broken to see the young man change back into a filthy pig like many another cochon she knew, left Mu, burned her bark cloth and some of her hair, and tried to forget the spells and slip beneath clouds of witness.

The old lady, Fua, although she missed her young lover Monsieur Cochon the man, was content to raise him as a pig.

And meanwhile the pig grew larger and larger.

Monsieur Cochon the pig lived happily for another year, but, when he was almost as large as his pen, Madame Cochon had him cooked for her birthday.

And then she bought another pig.

Glossary

‘Aniva: the Milky Way

Apia: capital city of independent Sāmoa

fanua: cultivated land; umbilical cord

malo lava: a phrase of encouragement and praise

Monsieur Cochon: Mister Pig

Mu: fictional village; in Samoan, hot lava; also, the Atlantis of the Pacific in Western mythology

mu‘umu‘u: loosely fitting dress, commonly worn by older women

Papeete: capital city of French Polynesia

taulaitu: spirit medium or shaman