Male comic/dramatic

Walter from Briar-Grace Smith’s *Nga Pou Wahine*

**Time:** day

**Location:** Uncle Walter’s living room

Walter is a Pakeha in his 50s, married to Lizzie. He is an old fisherman and hunter and clings to the past as he sits in an old armchair watching television. He is addressing Kura, the young niece who has lived with him since she was a baby.

**WALTER:** Don’t forget, Kura. Three sugars please love.

*(pause)* Hey Kura. You still keen on that hunting trip, girl? We’ll have to take a tent, oh, an’ plenty of wet weather gear. You got yourself an oilskin? Dogs. We’ll have to borrow a couple from young Charlie. I remember this one time, Kura. I thought I knew that bush like the back of me hand, but there was one part over the eastern ridge … ooo … I tell ya. I wandered up there one day – one of me dogs had gone missing. Normally I would’ve let him find his own way home but he’d taken a whiff of cyanide on the last hunt and was still groggy in the head. He was a good holder and I didn’t want to lose him. I don’t know how but I ended up somewhere on the eastern ridge. The sun was on its way down by this time and me guts was rumbling, so I sat down to open me can of baked beans. The bush up there was first generation for sure. You should of seen the trunks on those Kauris. They were like this.
It felt like no man had ever set foot in the place. And the birds, they were all so tame. There they were – tuis, fantails, and the fattest pigeons you ever saw, flying around my head like I was an old mate. (pause) I felt like I was being watched. Like God himself was peering down at me from the top of one of them kahikateas. (as the story continues, he becomes more animated and excited) So there I was, spoon in one hand, can in the other, shovelling beans down the old gasper, when I heard this noise. A rasping, like a lamb having its throat cut. Must be Charger the dog, I thought, in a bit of strife. So I got up to have a jack. I couldn’t see nothing, but I followed the noise anyway. Well, it was like chasing a rainbow; it always stayed five steps ahead of me. Finally I come to this clearing. Oh Kura, it was a sight to behold. It looked like a fairies’ garden. The bush flowers hung from the trees like stars, and inside the trees was a circle of pongas and fern. And smack in the centre of that was this spring, just bubbling away. (pause) And inside that spring was the sweetest, most pure water in the world. I could smell it, and I need something to wash down the beans, so I bent to have a wee drink. (pause) Then from outta nowhere I hear this giggling. It sounded just like little kids playing a trick, but struth, what the hell would kids be doin’ way up here? I come from Irish stock, so I know about the little people and how they play tricks on you. This had ta be the same kinda thing. It was not the place for a bloke like me to be. I took off outta there like I had a stick of dynamite up me rear end! Hell, I ran so fast I just
about broke my neck falling over a ledge. It took me two days to find my way back home and I never saw Charger again. (pause) Those beans gave me a crook guts too. I was laid up with the runs for a fair while after that. (sighs; realises Kura has gone) Kura? Kura! Oh Kura, I thought you were dead keen girl. We still gotta talk about the rental car. (yells out to her) Didn’t you say Hertz was the best brand? (quietly to himself) I still have the picture in my head. Lizzie walking into the shed with a bundle in her arms. A baby. ‘What’s her name?’ I asked. She said it was Kura. So I picked you up and from the minute I saw you I loved you. (smiles) You were a wee beauty with those fat cheeks and that mop of red hair, and you smiled at me. Lizzie told me it was ‘cos you had wind and that you were wet. (pause) But it didn’t feel like you’d peed yourself. Then she took you away. (pause) You know Kura, I … aarh … forget the tea.

Commentary

In Nga Pou Wahine, Kura’s story unfolds through the monologues of five characters. The staging of the original production was stylised with each character occupying a specific part of the set and being represented in the set design by visual symbols. Although originally written for one female performer (with no costume changes), Nga Pou Wahine may also be performed by a larger cast.

In her preface to the play Briar-Grace Smith writes:

When I was a child I remember being taken out fishing with my father in Whangaruru harbour. While we were out there, he told me the story of a great tupuna with
long red hair. She was captured, and while being taken out to sea, she cut her hair and threw it to the waves, so giving back her mana to her people. Although much of it I had forgotten, that story became the inspiration behind writing *Nga Pou Wahine*.

See Kura’s monologues from *Nga Pou Wahine*.