

# **O le Pepelo, le Gaoi, ma le Pala'ai | The Liar, the Thief, and the Coward**

## **Story Summary**

In Sāmoa's not-so-distant past, Pili Sā Tauilevā is a proud Ali'i (chief) in the village of Moa. He has devoted his life to the sacred fa'a sāmōa tradition of service. When he suddenly falls gravely ill and refuses to name a successor, his daughter and son become rivals for the title.

In a sacred paradise where "your path to leadership is through service", Pili's dwindling power sends the family rushing to fill his post as chief. But nothing plays out as expected when others come out to join the race. Pili is out of step with modern times, and his time is running out. Who will succeed as chief?

The play uses both English and Gagana Sāmoa. For non-Sāmoan speakers, there are some projected translations in English. Context will let non-Samoan speakers follow the action, and it's ok not to understand every word.

This story summary will give a synopsis of the show's plot, and include details about lighting, sound, surprises, and startling moments. However, during live theatre unpredictable events, action, and changes may occur.

Included in the story summary are links to filmed scenes and photos from the dress rehearsal, to help you know what to expect during the show. The pre-show demonstration at 6:30pm on Saturday 23 March will go into even more detail about what to expect, inviting you inside the theatre to check out the show elements live.

Warning: Spoiler alert! If you don't want to know details about the show, don't read any further.

Act 1: 1 hour, 30 minutes

## Scene 1



The stage looks empty and black, with a screen across the stage. There is haze in the air from a fog machine. Most audience lights will go dark when the show begins. Loud music plays, which may be startling. The screen blocking the stage flies out and lights come up on Pili, the father. He is writhing and crying out as the dramatic music plays, having a fevered dream. He tries to stand strong on his post, but he suddenly falls to the ground. The lights go out, and the music is replaced by the sound of crickets.

## Scene 2



Lights come up, and Pili is gone. Scruffy Vaofefe, the village idiot, drunkenly addresses the audience in Samoan from his place in the graveyard outside the house. Tama'i, the kid, enters the area representing the kitchen carrying a machete.



They banter and argue about service and the strict rules of their community. Vaofefe tells Tama'i that Pili is laying upstairs dying. He throws Tama'i a papaya for his friend Fish to eat, and a rooster is heard crowing loudly. Tama'i leaves and the lights darken, and Pili is heard crying out that he wants to live.

### Scene 3



Vaofefe steps off his tombstone and addresses the audience, like a narrator. Loud music plays and streaming lights are projected onto a screen that descends in front of the stage. Animal sounds are heard. He is bringing us to Samoa, to the village of Moa, to the recent past when this story takes place. He tells us about the village and the house of the family. The streaming lights sweep downward to look like rain, and the sound of rain is heard. He speaks louder and faster as the screen flies out and lights brighten to reveal the family members posed on the stage. Tama'i drums loudly on a wooden box as Vaofefe speaks, which may be startling.



Pili cries out from the top of the house, and the lights darken- he speaks to God.



He begs God not to remove him from his post, his position of authority in the village. Abruptly, the lights brighten again, and Vaofefe finishes his monologue as the family comes to life.

#### Scene 4



Afinamumū, Matagi's wife, orders Vaofefe and Tama'i around the house. Upstairs, Kilifi, the minister, Matagi the son, and Fa'asoa, the mother argue about addressing the village council while Pili is ill. They decide not to mention Pili's ill health, and that Matagi will address the council in his stead.

### Scene 5



Lights dim and loud ghostly sounds like a large knife scraping over a stone are heard. A figure rises up from the tombstone.

### Scene 6



Lights brighten. Afinamumū is instructing a nervous Matagi on addressing the council. Matagi dreams of taking his father's post as the next leader of the village. Matagi is worried that his sister Vailoloto, who lives in New Zealand, will return to challenge him for leadership. Afinamumū too questions her status in the family, sharing her ambition to rise above her position. Matagi argues with her, staunchly sure that sticking to tradition, to service, is key to succeeding his father as leader.



### Scene 7



Lights darken and thunder rumbles. Fa'asoa screams for help, fearing for Pili. Vaofefe is told to call for Tama'i and the minister, to prepare food and prayer for a long night. Vaofefe speaks in rhyme to the audience, lamenting his position of service that doesn't allow him a place in the house. Tama'i rushes around the kitchen, mining plucking chickens and preparing soup.

### Scene 8



The family disperses as Vailoloto, the sister from New Zealand, enters talking on the phone and dragging a rolling suitcase. The call disconnects. Tama'i ushers Vailoloto into the house, offering food and service. She dismisses him and comes upon her brother Matagi practicing his speech for the village council.



Matagi is shocked to see her, as she had been banned from the village for posting on social media. She tells him that she paid the fine for her offence. They argue, Matagi upset about Vailoloto dishonouring the family. Vailoloto insists upon seeing their father, Pili.

### Scene 9



Fa'asoa greets her daughter Vailoloto, and the family gather together to pray for Pili.

### Scene 10



Vailoloto and Matagi argue about their father, and tradition. Vailoloto has very different views from her brother about ancestry and heritage. She doesn't believe her brother, with his ambitions to bring prosperity to the village with a successful chicken farm, will make a good leader. She accuses him of failing to lead the family, let alone the village.

Scene 11



Matagi sits addressing the council, represented by the ensemble. His voice breaks, and he squawks like a chicken. He clears his throat and proposes lowering the fines for rule breaking. He stands to end the meeting, crouching.



Lights flash over Matagi as a rooster crows and a rolling drumbeat is heard.

Scene 12



Lights grow dim, and the sounds of water dripping in a cave are heard. Tama'i moves through the cave to the water's edge, with some fruit for Fish. A projection of a turtle appears. He tells Fish in Samoan about the events of the last few days, and promises to return with more food soon.



As he speaks, the family enter to surround Pili, laying on the top platform. As Tama'i waves goodbye, the sound of a church organ blares. Thunder crashes, and the light on the family brighten.

### Scene 13



The Minister is praying over Pili as the family cries around him. Suddenly Pili reaches up a hand, interrupting the organ music and the Minister. Pili struggles to speak. Before he can name his successor, he falls limp. The family cries, and then Pili gives a snore. He is asleep. The organ plays, and the family freeze in prayer pose.



Vaofefe, who is cooking in the smoky stove, addresses the audience in Samoan. As he speaks, the family disperses around the house.

Scene 14



Pili has recovered. He devours a chicken drumstick as Matagi tells him about the council meeting. Pili brushes him aside; he is back at his post as the leader of the family. He barrels about, enthusiastically barking orders and insisting the Minister stay and join the family for a meal. When the meal is delivered it is smoking and burnt, but Pili insists they eat as Matagi gives his report of the council meeting. Pili grows animated and shows his power and influence by imposing harsh judgement on villagers.



Matagi reports that a village family has proposed to ban the eating of the Sacred Fish, the turtle from the cave. Pili is upset, thinking it's his right as chief to eat the turtle, but the council has voted- no eating the Sacred Fish. Anyone who eats the Sacred Fish may be banished from the village.

Finally, Matagi tells Pili that the villagers may vote to lift Pili's sister's banishment. This upsets Pili, and ends the meal. Pili bemoans the lack of service in the family. The minister has a solution, and Pili calls for a meeting.

### Scene 15



The minister introduces Masina with a flourishing drum roll. Masina tells of his orphan past, raised in the church, seeking a position of service within the family. Pili interrogates him, and agrees to let Masina cook for the family to decide if he will let Masina serve.

### Scene 16



The ensemble leaves, and Pili speaks alone with his daughter Vailoloto. They discuss Vailoloto's business with seasonal labourers, which she runs with Pili's estranged sister in New Zealand.

### Scene 17



Afinamumū is talking Masina through the strict rules of his contract of service with the family. When Afinamumū leaves, Masina tosses his contract in the kitchen fire.

Vailoloto and Matagi are bickering again, culminating in a scuffle broken up by their mother Fa'asoa. The brother and sister are fighting about who's lot in life has been more difficult, and about their father naming a successor.

### Scene 18



With a sharp sound like metal being struck, Fa'asoa leaves and Vailoloto is talking on the phone again, discussing the investigation looking into her aunt's seasonal worker business. Masina tends the fire in the kitchen, and he and Vailoloto speak. Masina shares a sip of coconut milk with Vailototo, and Fa'asoa watches.

### Scene 19



Lights darken, and Vaofefe slaps at a droning mosquito. This evolves into a short sharp slap dance, with the ensemble chanting and dancing to rhythmic music in the shadows as Masina prepares his meal. The dance ends with the loud blowing of a conch shell, and the lights suddenly brighten.

### Scene 20



The family are gathered and Masina presents his meal. Pili tastes, and begins to choke. The family move to help him and he starts laughing- he was tricking them. Pili approves of the meal. Pili declares that the family will meet with the council, together, the next day. The family takes a photograph together.



## Scene 21



Pili and Fa'asoa are arguing. Fa'asoa wants Pili to rest, but Pili is energised and wishes to dance. With a cracking sound the lights change. The scene rapidly alternates between Pili and Fa'asoa at the top of the house, and Vailoloto and Masina in the kitchen. Matagi and Afinamumū join in, eavesdropping unseen outside of Pili and Fa'asoa's bedroom. The three conversations alternate until all leave except for Pili and Fa'asoa. Fa'asoa declares that her fears are not for her husband- and the lights go out, and the screen flies down in front of the stage. This is the end of Act 1.

## Interval

The audience lights will come on, and you can take a break, use the toilet, and get a drink or snack from the bar, or remain in your seat. You can use the breakout space to relax away from the crowds. The break will last about 15 minutes. When the performance is ready to begin, audience lights will fade down.

## Act 2: 1 hour

### Scene 1



The screen flies out, and lights come up on the stage. Pili stands addressing the council, represented by the ensemble with their backs to the audience. Pili argues that overseas family, like his sister, should have no right to make decisions in the village. The council shares that Pili's sister is under investigation for mistreating her workers, and that the council will seek to investigate Pili's own family for wrongdoings.

### Scene 2



Matagi asks Masina about his past, and why he has joined the family. Matagi demands loyalty and service.

### Scene 3



Vailoloto is on the phone, learning that her aunt's seasonal worker business has been shut down. She is distressed. Tama'i enters, and Vailoloto asks him if he is truly happy in his position of service. He says he is, that he has all he needs in the village, including his friend Fish. Vailoloto says she never wished to leave either, before she was sent away.

The lights switch back to illuminate Matagi and Masina. Masina reluctantly agrees to spy for Matagi, and they shake hands.

### Scene 4



Pili speaks with the minister about the contract between them for developing the island.

Vailoloto enters the kitchen, searching for Masina.

### Scene 5



Pili gathers the family, and tells them that his sister's bid for the title of village leader has been unsuccessful. The family celebrates, and offer toasts. Vailoloto declares that she will stay in the village, and that she wishes to marry Masina. The family are outraged, and Pili calls Masina upstairs to confront him. Pili tells Masina to know his place, and sends him back to the kitchen.

### Scene 6



Pili wakes coughing from a dream. He summons Masina. Pili disapproves of a relationship between Masina and his daughter, but more important things are at stake, so he allows Masina to remain. Vailoloto tells Pili that she was wrong to serve her aunt, Pili's sister, and Pili says she must now pick a side.

### Scene 7



The ensemble chant to music. Matagi and Afinamutu and Masina and Vailoloto come together.

### Scene 8



Pili cries out, waking from a nightmare. Fa'asoa tells Pili that he must name a successor. Pili resists, but eventually says he will give her a name- if she prepares the Sacred Fish for him to eat.

### Scene 9



The ensemble begin to dance and chant, the music and movement getting faster and louder. They move jerkily like chickens before dispersing in a squawking flutter.

### Scene 10



Lights grow dim, and Fa'asoa, Matagi, Afinamumū, Vailoloto, and Masina are talking about catching the Sacred Fish, and the need to keep it a secret as it's now against the village law. Fa'asoa asks Masina what he thinks. Masina is conflicted- he believes it's Pili's traditional right to have the Fish, but it will now put his position with the village at risk due to the new law. Eventually, they agree to return in two hours to vote on the matter.

### Scene 11



Vailoloto and Masina pace back and forth beneath the sound of rain. They decide to secretly catch the Sacred Fish. Unknown to them, Matagi and Afinamumū meet to agree on the same thing, also in secret. Thunder roars.

### Scene 12



The two couples sneak around the stage, bumping into each other but trying to act casual. They follow Tama'i to the turtle's cave. They search for the turtle. Suddenly Tama'i runs past, and they all follow him. The two couples run into each other, get a fright, and run off.

Scene 13



Lights brighten and Vaofefe appears, dragging a heavy sack. The two couples confront him, and each other. Matagi points a rifle at his sister Vailoloto, as she brandishes a knife. Matagi and Masina and Afinamumū and Vailoloto fight and thunder rumbles and tense music plays.



Fa'asoa runs in and shouts for them all to stop. Vailoloto and Matagi dive for the sack, struggling over it as dramatic music intensifies. The sack opens, stretching out to a tapa cloth which represents the turtle, the Sacred Fish. Vailoloto and Matagi fight over the cloth. Music becomes very loud and frantic.



Suddenly, Tama'i runs forward and grabs the cloth, bundling it tightly in his arms. He stabs the bundle representing the turtle, over and over. The Sacred Fish, his friend, is dead.

#### Scene 14



The turtle is delivered to Pili. We hear the crunching of a shell and a loud burp as Pili consumes the cloth. He praises Tama'i for his service. The family is horrified, and they question how Pili has strayed from the path of tradition and service. They worry that the villagers will take revenge.

#### Scene 15



Pili makes an announcement- and says the name of his successor will be announced at the next council meeting. Fa'asoa, Vailoloto, and Matagi protest, demanding a name now, but Pili refuses. He rages against the changes to the island, the break from tradition toward profit and development. He believes no one but him is fit to lead. His family realise that he himself has made compromises and gone against the laws of the village, to keep himself in power, and they are horrified at what he has done. His children leave.



Fa'asoa tells Pili that his actions will lose him his family, and her. She has tried to keep the family together, and Pili has destroyed them out of his own greed. Pili orders her to get out.



### Scene 16



The minister runs into the house, panicked. He tells Pili that the villagers are gathering, demanding the family be banished. Pili says he can win the village over.

### Scene 17



The villagers, represented by the ensemble, are arguing. Pili insists that he had a right to eat the Sacred Fish, and that democracy has no place among traditions. The ensemble speak rapidly, laying out the crimes against Pili.



The village banishes Pili to exile, removing him from his post. The villagers crow like roosters.

### Scene 18



Dramatic music plays, as Pili stands at the front of the stage. He tries to struggle his way to the top of the house, to his post, but he staggers and can't move forward. The ensemble are posed frozen around the stage. Pili struggles, but he eventually accepts death. Vaofefe guides him to the tombstone, Pili's new post, and lays down upon it as rain falls.



Tama'i sits alone in the light at the front of the stage, addressing the audience in greeting. His voice is powerful and strong. Lights slowly dim around the rest of the family, who stand frozen. Tama'i finishes his speech, and the lights go dark.

This is the end of the play. The audience will clap and make noise as the actors bow, and the audience lights will come on. You may leave with the audience, or sit in your seat until the rest of the audience leaves if you prefer to avoid the crowds.

Thank you for coming to the sensory relaxed performance.