PAALUA AND KAWELU

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LEGEND OF PAALUA AND KAWELU

BY HENRY M. LYMAN

THERE once lived on the island of Kauai an old chief who had a son named Paalua. When the youth was grown up to manhood, and had been instructed in all the arts of war, his father resolved to send him with a present to the king of Oahu. A large canoe was accordingly prepared. The gifts, carefully packed in leaves were placed on board; and at evening Paalua embarked with fifteen followers and set sail for Oahu.

All night long the soft west wind breathed gently over the sleeping sea; and at early dawn the high table mountain of Kaala was visible on the far southern horizon; veering over their sail the voyagers ran merrily over the waves that sparkled under the rising sun; and directing their course towards the notch of Nuuanu, were soon in sight of the rugged precipices of Koolau, with the broad plains of Kaneohe lying green and fair at their base. Before the sun had commenced its downward passage towards the hills of Waianae, Paalua landed on the curving shore of the Kaneohe bay, in front of the village then occupied by the king of Oahu. As the strangers drew their canoe from the surf, four warrior chiefs came down from the royal enclosure, and intently regarded their movements. Paalua advanced to salute these veteran guardians of the coast, at the same time announcing his name and titles, which were no sooner heard, than with a yell of delight the warriors hurled their spears full at his breast, and rushed forward to welcome the son of their ancient friend. Highly gratified by this complimentary reception, Paalua proved his skill in the spear exercise by catching in his right hand the first flying javelin, with which he parried the second and the third, dexterously avoiding the fourth by a nimble movement of his body.

After this display of warlike prowess, he was escorted to the palace of the king who received the young chieftain with many professions of cordiality and esteem. The presents were then brought from the canoe and spread out before the king. He expressed much pleasure at this mark of friendship and gave orders for a feast on the morrow. Proclamation of the festival was at once made, and great was the consequent excitement. Everywhere were the king’s messengers hurrying to the mountains after backloads of *ki* leaves and *awa* roots, or driving well-fed hogs to the place of slaughter, while the keepers of the fish-ponds drew up their nets full of the largest and choicest of mullet. The darkness of night caused no interval of leisure; for then were the *kalo* ovens heated, and the sound of the poi-
pounder was heard even till daylight again glimmered over the sea.

In the early morning the young girls wove garlands of fresh leaves and flowers for the adornment of their persons, and the dancers and musicians arrayed themselves in all their finery. At the time of day when the shadows of the trees leaned no more towards the mountains, the people began to assemble in the coconut grove, and the steaming ovens were opened. Long then was the feasting and revelry; and when the banquet was ended the dancers rose up and delighted the assembly with the grace of their motions and the beauty of their forms. One after another paid their dues of reverence to the stranger, and then fell back among the crowd. At length the king called for his daughter Kawelu, and ordered her to dance before his guest. The people, at his command, retired a few paces as the royal maiden came forth. She was young, and timid as a bird; but her beauty won the admiration of all. A pa-u of yellow feathers, bordered with red stripes, was wound about her waist; garlands of flowers twined around her arms, and clung lovingly to her bosom; cunningly carved ornaments of ivory were hung with many a shining braid of human hair upon her neck; and bracelets of dog's teeth clinked and rattled as she moved her feet and hands.

Thus arrayed Kawelu advanced into the presence of her father and began to dance, while the musicians beat time upon their drums, and the minstrels sang a mele in honor of her beauty and youth. Thus, for a little time, she moved alone through the measures of the hula till the musicians commenced a refrain in praise of Paalua, when a band of young girls dressed in a costume similar to that worn by Kawelu took their places on either side of the princess, and together they whisked around the grassy circle. Round and round they flew, their shining tresses floating and streaming in the air, until the drummers ceased their tattoo in obedience to a command from the king. This was the signal for a conclusion of the festivities; and the people at once dispersed, while the royal party went down to play in the surf.

The king, when he thus presented his daughter before his guest, had no thought of any untoward results from so trifling a circumstance. The possibility of such a thing as love never once suggested itself to his thoughts. Kawelu was a mere girl, hardly yet grown to womanhood; and she had been, moreover, long since promised to Mano—the lord of Kailua. But notwithstanding these facts, of which the young people were entirely ignorant withal, love had entered their hearts; and in the evening, they found means of communication with each other. Paalua set forth in glowing terms the charms of his home in the vale of Hanalei, and entreated the gentle maiden to go with him on his return from her father's court. With all the enthusiasm of girlish affection, she assured him of her love, but would not be persuaded to leave
her land for another, however lovely it might be. After many efforts to induce a different decision on her part, Paalua surrendered to the will of his mistress, and promised to adopt her home as his own, if she would but consent to their union. This proposal proved more acceptable; and it was soon arranged that on the morrow Paalua should formally ask in marriage the Princess Kawelu.

The young man arose at dawn on the ensuing morning; and in accordance with this plan, gave orders for the equipment of his canoes. The king remonstrated with his guest, and urged him to a longer stay; but Paalua declared that he must be on the voyage back to his father, who was old, and who would be alarmed if his son were long absent on this expedition. Finally, seeing that persuasion availed nothing, the king said:

"If you must now go, how shall we fill the canoe with gifts? The bird-catchers have not yet come from the mountain, nor have the fishermen brought any fish from the sea. Will the king of Kauai be pleased if his brother sends him a spear fashioned from the wood of the kamani, or a net woven with the threads of the olona?"

Paalua at once made answer: "The birds of Oahu are the birds of Kauai; the fish of the sea are alike from Hawaii to Niihau; the kamani and the olona grow in the valley of Hanalei; and the men of Waimea are skilled in the carving of wood and the weaving of nets. Such gifts kings should not send to each other. My father, too, is old; and how can he rejoice in the sight of new things whose eyes are dimmed by the spray of the sea; but his son is young. Give him one small present—one easily borne in the canoe, and he will be content, for thus shall he know the reality of your friendship."

"In truth," replied the king, "your words are pleasant to the ear. Ask of me now some costly gift, and it shall be at once bestowed."

Then Paalua bowed before the old warrior, and said, "Give me your daughter Kawelu, for great is my love for the maiden."

At this unexpected request the countenance of the king grew dark like the clouds that drive before the south wind, and he made no reply. What could he say! How should he avoid giving offence to his guest? He finally answered:

"My heart is made heavy by your words. How can I part with the flower of my land! Ask some other favor, or give time for consultation with the gods."

Paalua readily consented to a postponement of the king’s decision; and in the meantime, ordered his men to let the canoe remain under its covering of coconut leaves until he should give further directions concerning the voyage.

The king was greatly perplexed. His daughter was already promised in marriage, and the lord of Kailua demanded the strictest redemption of the pledges which he held; but how could he refuse the son of his powerful friend, the king of Kauai.
Fear and pride both prompted him to attach this young prince to his family, while a regard for his promises, and the threats of the lordly Mano, caused him still to waver and look with dread at the consequences of openly affronting a neighbor who could inflict bitter injury in retaliation.

While thus tortured with varying doubts, Mano approached with a plan which he thought would relieve all parties from embarrassment. "High up in the cliff," said he, "is a cavern which I found while searching for the nests of the tropic bird. Difficult of access, unknown to the stranger is that hiding place. There let us conceal the flower of the forest, and then bid this voyager seek her out. Day after day may he search; but never shall he find her who is to be the wife of Mano, for not yet has the man been born who, unguided by my words, can climb to that cave."

The king was pleased with this device, and, going to Paalua, informed him that he had consulted with his gods, and they had answered his inquiries by directing that Kawelu should be hidden in a grotto high up the face of the precipice, and that she should become the wife of Paalua if he could discover the place of her concealment before the going down of the morrow's sun. On no other conditions might their union take place. The young prince's heart well-nigh failed him, as he looked up at the towering crags piled one above another till their summits were lost amid the sweeping clouds; but there was no other alter-

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native, and he consented to make the trial. It was then arranged that during the coming night Kawelu should be taken by her father to the place of concealment, and the search should commence at the dawn of the next morning.

Clear and cool was the night; no moon lighted the stars; but ten thousand bright stars looked down upon the slumbering island, when the king summoned his daughter from her couch, and bade her follow him to the mountain. The sea moaned along the gravelly beach as they turned from the shore, while the lowly breathing airs of the night made soft murmuring among the leaves of the trees that overarched the little stream whose course they followed to the foot of the pali. There arrived, the king seated himself on a flat rock, and uttered a shrill whistle, which was answered by a rustling in the thicket near by, as the lord of Kailua cautiously advanced through the darkness. A small string of kukui nuts was then lighted, and screened from distant observation, in a hollow gourd-shell. Guiding their footsteps by this feeble light, the little party commenced the laborious ascent of the precipice—Mano leading the way, and assisting the timid maiden, while the king followed, and carefully obliterated the marks of their passage. Thus they toiled on up the steep face of the cliff till the morning star arose out of the sea, when the lord of Kailua, turning suddenly aside, swayed himself by a pendant root around the point of a projecting rock, and vanished among the leaves
of a creeping vine which had there spread its drooping festoons over the cliff. He reappeared after a moment's absence, and, lifting the astonished girl around the rock, placed her within the entrance of a little cave which had been completely hidden by the creeping evening-glory. The king scrambled in after his daughter, and commenced to peer curiously about the cavern by the dim light of the flickering torch.

The hiding place which now concealed the little party was a natural cleft in the rock, scarce wide enough to shelter nine persons. The uneven floor had been covered with green brakes, and a few calabashes stood upon a little stone shelf in one corner. Mano unrolled a large mat which had been left in the cave, and invited his companions to repose thereupon while he should prepare poi for their morning repast. The old king, wearied by his unwonted exertions, soon fell into a profound slumber; but Kawelu sat close by her father's side and watched for the coming of dawn.

The purple light of morning at length came streaming over the sea. Paalua was already at the base of the precipice, and at once commenced the search for the lady of his love. Slowly he climbed along the face of the cliff, and peered into every crevice and hole that he could spy. Many were the gloomy caverns he thus examined, of which some were filled with mouldering bones of ancient chiefs, and others were fitted as places of refuge in time of war, while others again were damp and
shiny with the constant dripping of water from the rocks above.

The sun was already throwing long shadows over the plain of Kaneohe, before Paalua reached an elevation equal to that of the cave for which he sought, and no trace of his mistress had yet appeared, when, as he was leaning for a moment against the knotty trunk of a lama tree, his eye caught sight of a shell bracelet lying among the dead leaves at his feet. It was Kawelu’s—he himself had given it as a pledge of his love. With a cry of joy he picked up the little ornament and renewed his search. Soon he found marks of recent footsteps, and followed them eagerly up the cliff till they suddenly disappeared at the base of the sheer ascent whose summit is capped with ever drifting clouds.

And now could Kawelu plainly see the perplexity of her lover. He looked up the bare, smooth side of the overhanging bluff—there was no chance for concealment above. He had thoroughly explored the portion below—his mistress could not now be far away. Paalua called aloud, and prayed her to give him some sign; but no answer came, save the wild scream of the oo-bird ringing among the trees far down the cliff side. He listened long in vain, then clambered among the stunted shrubs and creeping stems, if perchance he might discover the place where lay his love. Once he passed so near the unseen cave that Kawelu could hear his deep breathing as he lifted
himself over the projections of the rock. Mano started to his feet; and, grasping a long spear, fiercely muttered a vow to drive it through the stranger’s heart, should he but lift one leaf of the vine that covered them from view. The maiden heard that terrible whisper, and would have cried out with fright, had not her father hastily restrained her from thus revealing the secret he was so anxious to conceal. But fortunately, the young prince passed on, and soon began with heavy heart to retrace his steps towards the plain. Then rose the spirits of the king, and he bantered his daughter about her lover so skilled in the discovery of hidden treasure. “No son of mine,” said he, “shalt this pleasant youth become; but I will give you another lover who shall console your young heart. Our faithful guide, the lord of Kailua, shall wed you this night; and back to Kauai will we send our guest, well laden with good things from the pali of Koolau.”

Kawelu was a prudent girl, and she knew only too well that opposition could avail her naught in her present situation; so she wisely said nothing, and with an air of the utmost indifference sat quietly on one corner of the mat, where she could catch an occasional glimpse of her lover’s receding form. Her mind was, however, busy with a scheme for her deliverance; and finally she thus addressed her father: “You are weary and thirsty; let me now prepare a draught of awa which shall refresh the bodies of you twain, before we descend to the shore, for night is approaching.” The king, who was much given to such pleasures, willingly assented to this proposal, and a calabash was soon filled by his daughter with the intoxicating liquor. Mirthfully then drank the old man, nor would he suffer Mano to abstain from the draught, and they were both speedily overcome by the powerful influences of the narcotic root. When its full effects were manifest, and she saw her two companions prostrated in the drunken sleep that followed such potations, Kawelu pushed aside the overhanging vine, and waved her mantle as a signal to Paalua, who was now standing at the foot of the pali, and once more scanning its rugged wall. He saw her not, but turned his face seaward, for the sun was setting. Ah! what grief then filled the soul of the young girl; but still she held out the fluttering signal, and waved it on the spear which had so nearly drank the life-blood of her lover. He stopped, and again gazed wistfully over the face of the cliff. He saw the white kapa moving among the green leaves of the evening-glory; he knew that scarf, for it was hers. Up the steep ascent then hastened the young chief, and short was the time before he reached the hidden cave. Kawelu was there; her father slumbered beside the torpid form of a warrior whom Paalua knew not. “I go with you, my love,” whispered the maiden, and, while they descended to the plain, she told him of her father’s designs, and of the fierce rival to whom she had been promised in marriage. The
faithful lovers then hurried to the shore, and, as
the lingering twilight faded over the mountains,
they embarked in Paalua's canoe, and sailed away
over the foaming sea to the distant island of Kauai.
There dwelt Kawelu with Paalua, and, when death
bore their spirits to the lands ruled by Milu and
Akea, their bodies were changed into birds—
bright, beautiful birds—which still hover round
the streams and waterfalls where of old they had
been wont to linger in life and love.