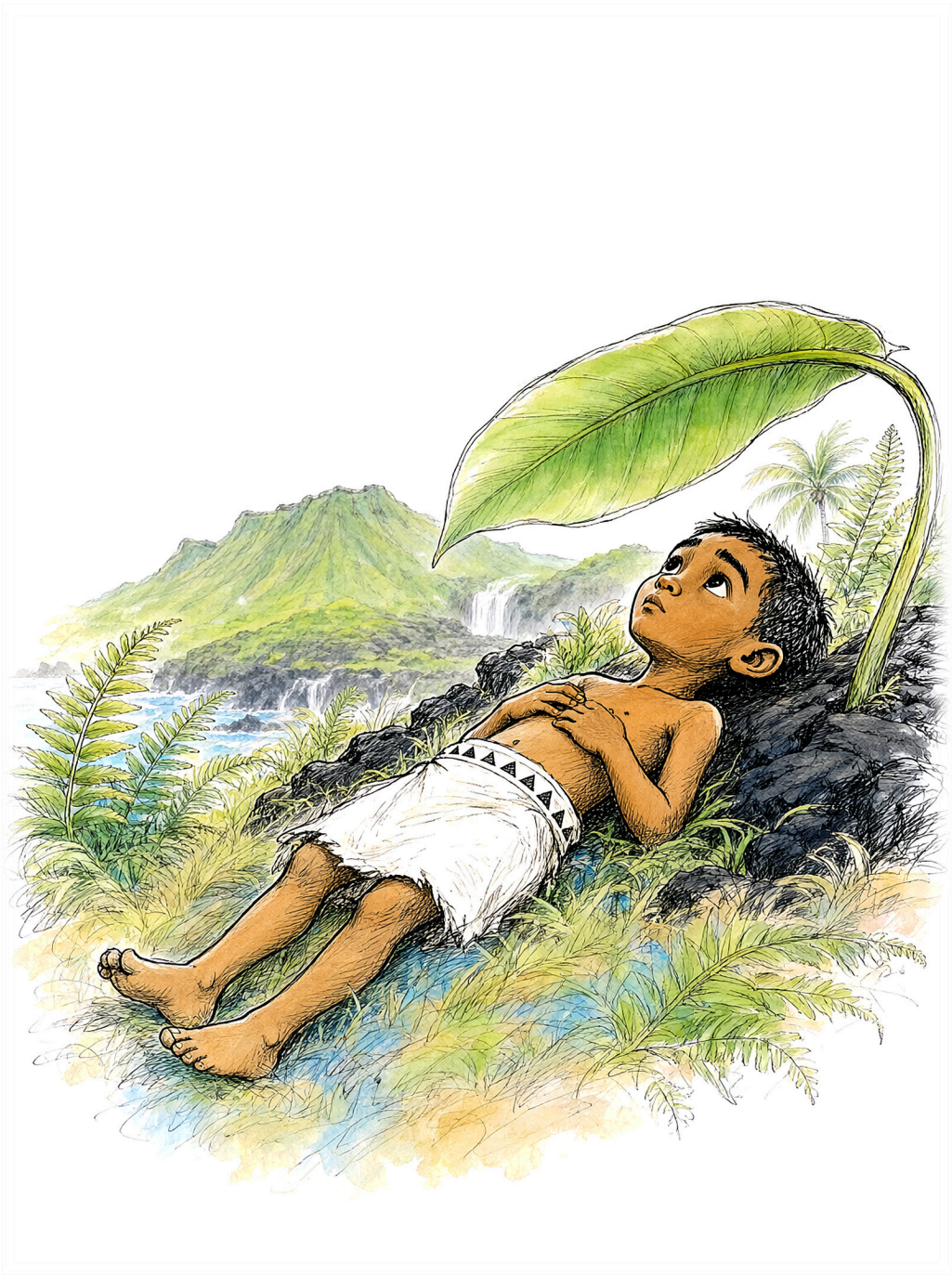
Māui

How Māui Lifted the Sky, Caught the Sun, Found Fire,
Fished Up the Islands, and Beat Kuna



A story in verse by Jay Fowler, for my son

Before you read

Say it

Approximate read-aloud guide. Māui is scanned as two syllables in these lines: MOW-ee, with MOW rhyming with cow.

Hina	HEE-nah
kapa	KAH-pah
wauke	WOW-keh
Hawai‘i	hah-WAI-ee
Haleakalā	HAH-leh-AH-kah-LAH
wiliwili	WEE-lee-WEE-lee
hau	HOW (that’s the joke in Chapter Three)
Mānaiakalani	MAH-nai-AH-kah-LAH-nee
Hilo	HEE-loh
Moloka‘i	MOH-loh-KAH-ee
Lāna‘i	LAH-nah-ee
O‘ahu	oh-AH-hoo
Kaua‘i	kow-AH-ee
Kuna	KOO-nah
Pele	PEH-leh

Chapter One

How Māui Lifted the Sky



Far out across the widest sea,
Where only seabirds go,
Lie islands born of fire and stone
Where roots split rock to grow.

But long ago, so long ago
That no one knows the day,
The sky above Hawai‘i hung
Too low for work or play.

It sat on every roof and hill.
It leaned on every tree,
And pressed its great gray belly down
From mountaintop to sea.

The plants pushed back with all their might.
Each leaf pressed up so hard
It flattened out. They're flat today
In every field and yard.

Still, leaves are small, and sky is big.
For years and years they strained,
And all they made was room to crawl.
And there the sky remained.



The people could not stand up straight.
They crawled on hands and knees.
To visit friends next door, they crept
Beneath the squashed-down trees.

If someone stood too quickly, bonk!
The sky would knock him flat.
He'd rub his head and crawl again,
And that, he thought, was that.



Behind a roaring waterfall,
Inside a cave of stone,
Lived Hina, making kapa cloth,
The finest ever known.

She soaked the bark of wauke trees
And pounded out a beat:
Thump, thump, till soft white kapa lay
In folds about her feet.

Her sons all had one name. All four
Were Māui, every one.
So when she called one in to eat,
They all came at a run.

The youngest Māui wasn't big.
He wasn't loud or tall.
His brothers said, "He's lazy, too.
He hardly works at all.

“He sits and stares at things all day.”
And yes, that part was true.
He’d watch a leaf, a root, a stone,
And wonder what they knew.



One day he lay down on his back
Beneath a leaf, to spy
On how a little hand of green
Could lift the heavy sky.

It pushed, then braced against its stem
And held the sky in place.
It rested. Then it pushed again
And won a little space.

Then Māui sat up. Bonk! He grinned.
A bump was nothing new.
“You lift, then find a resting place
To hold the weight for you!

“I can’t lift all the sky at once.
It’s far too big a load.
I’ll lift, then rest it on the trees,
The way that leaf just showed.”

He crawled back home and told his plan.
His brothers laughed out loud.
“You? Lift the sky? You’re half our size.
You couldn’t lift a cloud.”

But Hina set her beater down
And let the laughter die.
“He’s thought it through,” she said. “And now
It’s time we let him try.”

He crawled uphill on muddy knees.
His throat was hot and dry.
A woman held a water gourd,
Bent low beneath the sky.

“Give me a drink,” said Māui, “please,
And here’s what I will do:
I’ll lift the sky till you can stand
With sunlight pouring through.”

She looked at him, so small and young.
She looked up at the sky.
She handed him the water gourd
And said, “Well, have a try.”

He drank. The coolness filled his chest
And ran through every limb.
He flexed his hands and stretched his back.
New strength awoke in him.

He planted both his feet and crouched,
His fingers spread out wide,
Then laid his palms against the sky,
The way the leaves had tried.

He pushed. The sky began to rise.
It shuddered, groaned, and swayed.
He propped it on the tops of trees
And let it rest. It stayed.

Below, the people all stood up.
They stretched up straight and tall.
They jumped, and no one bumped his head,
And no one crawled at all.

But treetops are not very high.
The birds still flew too low.
He climbed a hill, shook out his arms,
And told the sky, “Let’s go.”

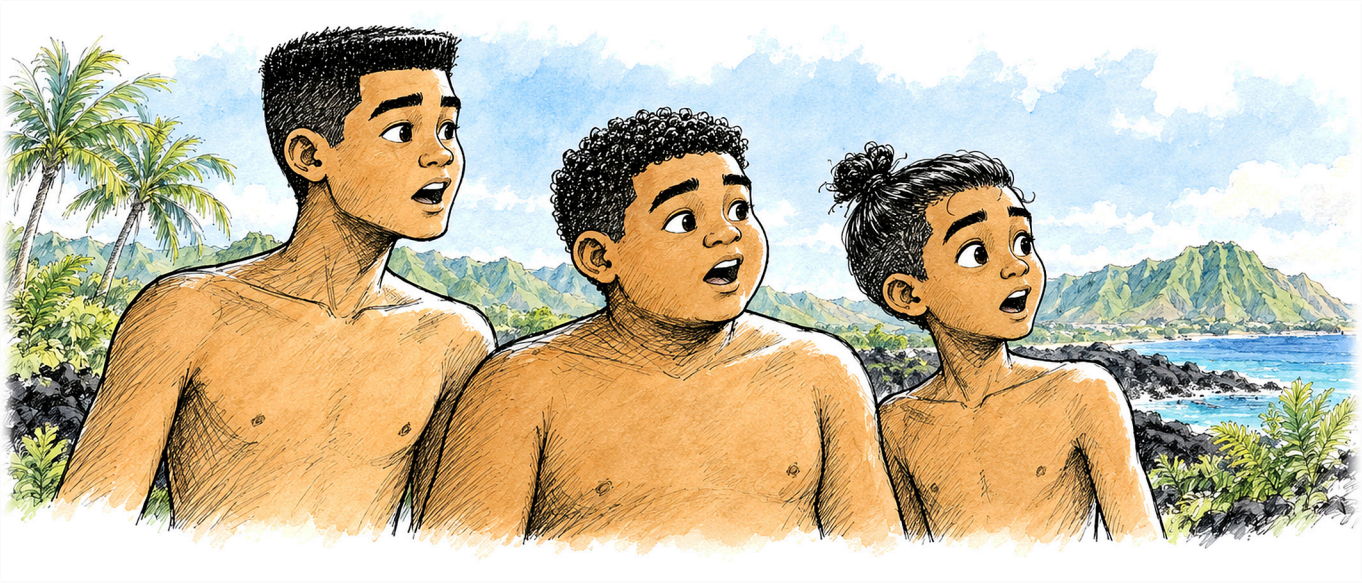
He heaved it up past all the trees,
Up where the seabirds soar,
Then braced it on the mountaintops
And rested, as before.



He climbed the peak and took a breath,
The biggest ever drawn.
Then, one, two, THREE! He shoved, and whoosh:
The low gray sky was gone.

Up, up it flew! The heavy gray
Unfolded into blue.
And there it stays, with room for birds
And trees, and me, and you.

And sunlight spilled on leaf and stone
And glittered on the sand.
The people blinked, then laughed, then walked
Upright across the land.



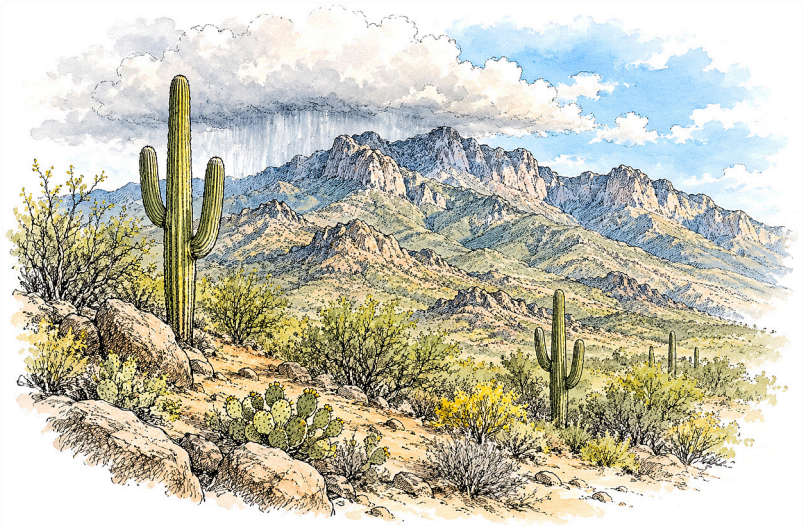
His brothers ran to where he stood.
(They ran! They didn't crawl!)
They asked him, "How?" "The leaves," he said.
"I watched them. That was all."

They looked at him. They looked up high.
They looked at him once more.
And not one brother said the word
That they'd all said before.

Then Hina stepped out from the falls
And stood up in the light,
And spread her kapa on the rocks
To dry before the night.

Still, sometimes clouds come drifting down
To rest on mountaintops,
And rain on everything below
In big, fat, heavy drops.

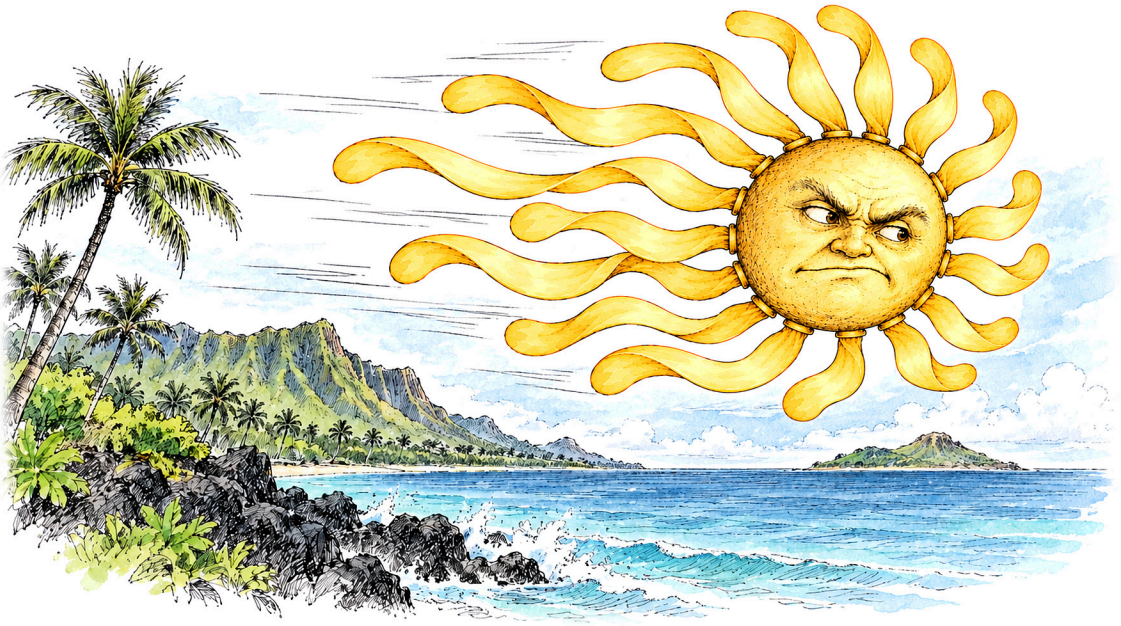
You've seen the Catalinas wear
Their summer caps of gray.
But not for long. The rain comes down;
The clouds must drift away.



For clouds remember Māui's hands
And know that he just might
Come back and give another shove
And toss them out of sight.

Chapter Two

How Māui Caught the Sun



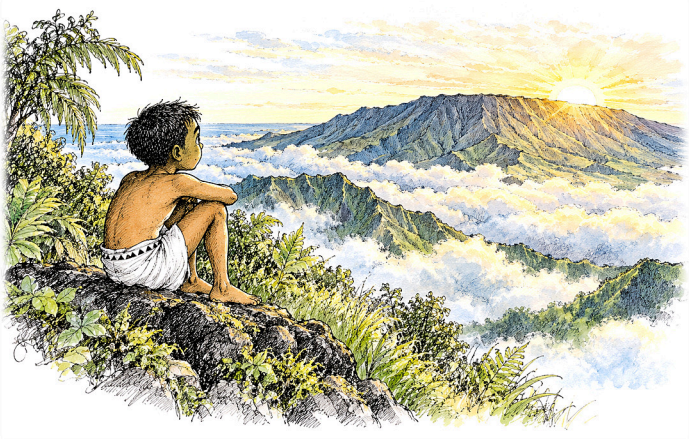
Now that the sky was high and blue,
The sun had room to run.
He took the morning in one stride,
The afternoon in one.

He popped up in the east. A flash!
Then streaked across the sky,
And dropped behind the western waves
Before you blinked an eye.

So Hina spread her kapa out
Each morning, fold by fold,
And every night she brought it in,
Still wet, and limp, and cold.

The farmers planted half their rows.
The fishers caught a few.
The singers reached their second verse,
And night came sweeping through.

And Māui watched the racing sun.
"He comes up somewhere. Where?
If I can find the place he climbs,
Then I can catch him there."



He paddled through the flying spray
And crests of curling foam,
And found an island with his name,
Far off from Hina's home.

He climbed a high green ridge, and watched
The dawn come, day by day,
And every dawn the sun came up
Along the same old way:

Up one great mountain's farther side,
Then up and past its crest;
A headlong dash across the sky,
A plunge into the west.

He counted, too, the sun's long legs,
The rays of yellow light.
Sixteen! The sun climbed up on them,
Then raced off, hot and bright.

"He climbs up Haleakalā,"
Said Māui. "Every day.
I'll catch him on the mountain's crest
Before he runs away."

That mountain's even taller than
Mount Lemmon, way up high.
Its crater is a great stone bowl
Held open to the sky.

He paddled home to Hina's cave.
"I'll catch the sun," he said,
"Up where he climbs, and break his legs."
His mother raised her head.

"Are you that strong?" "I am." She smiled,
And brought out from the back
Fifteen long ropes of coconut,
All coiled up in a stack.



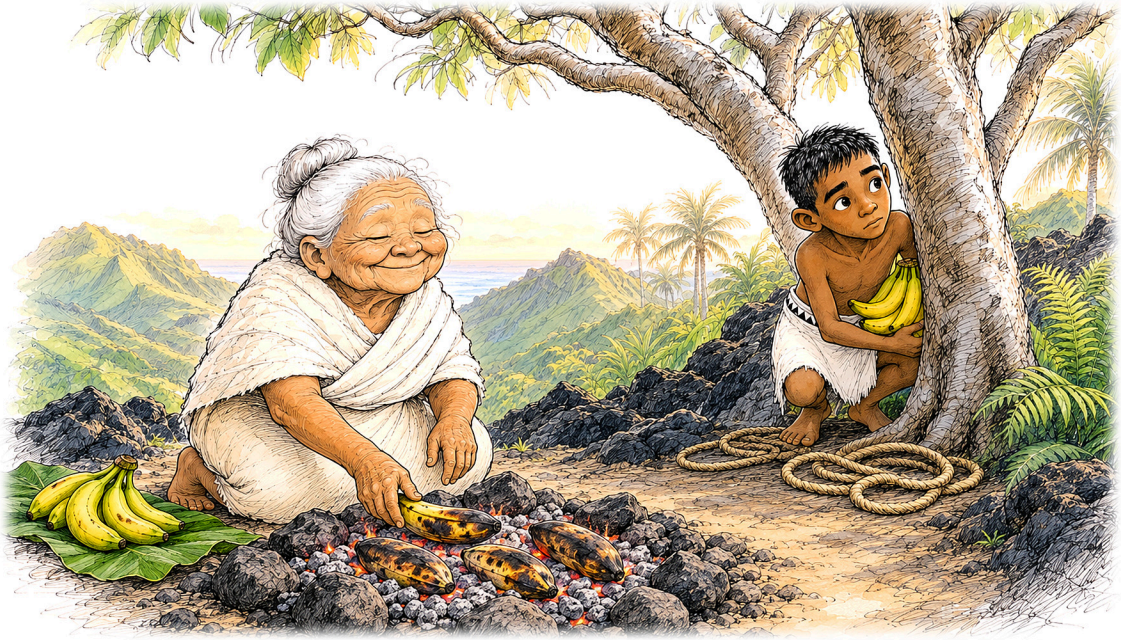
"That's fifteen," Māui said. "He has
Sixteen. I need one more."
"Your grandma," Hina said, "has just
The rope you're looking for.

"Go up the mountain, to a tree
Where Grandma, at first light,
Cooks up bananas for the sun.
Take them, then hide from sight.

"And when she asks whose child you are,
Don't fib. Just tell what's true.
Say, 'I belong to Hina.' Then
She'll help you see it through."

So Māui crossed the sea and climbed
The mountain's dry, rough side,
And found the wiliwili tree
With branches spreading wide.

He waited by the tree all night
Until the sky turned gray.
A rooster crowed: one, two, three times.
And Grandma came his way.



She was so old she couldn't see
Much more than dark and light.
She set bananas down to cook;
He whisked them out of sight.

She set down more. They vanished, too.
She set down more. All gone!
"Who's taking breakfast from the sun
Before the break of dawn?"

She sniffed the air, and sniffed, and smiled.
"Somebody's here," she said.
"Come out, come out! Whose child are you?"
And Māui raised his head.

He gave back every piece of fruit.
(He hadn't eaten one.)
And told her, "I belong to Hina.
I've come to catch the sun."

His grandma laughed. “So you’re the one!
Well, here’s a rope for you,
And here’s a stone axe, sharp and strong,
And here’s what you should do:

“Hide in the roots. When one long leg
Comes reaching into view,
Rope it and tie it to the trunk.
Then rope the next leg, too.”

So Māui dug among the roots
And crouched down out of sight,
His ropes all coiled, his axe in hand,
And waited for the light.

Up from below the crater’s rim,
A long gold leg of light
Came reaching. Swish! The rope flew out
And caught it, snug and tight.

He tied it fast. Then came leg two.
Then over came leg three.
He roped them, one by one, and tied
Each rope around the tree.

Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten,
Eleven, twelve, thirteen,
Fourteen, fifteen. But one more leg,
The last, was still unseen.

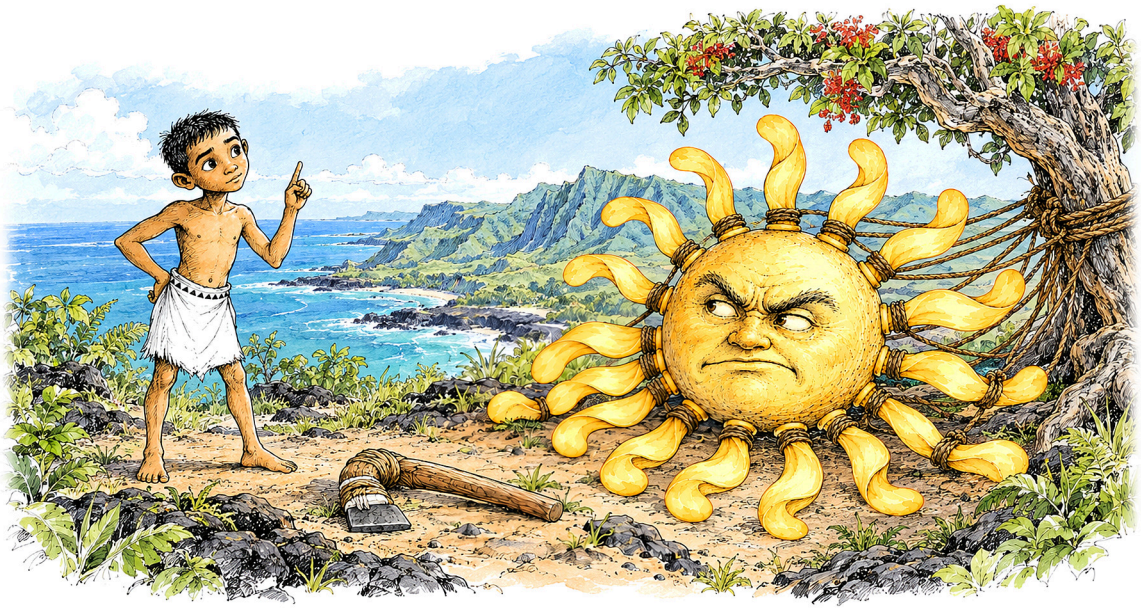


The last leg scraped the crater's side.
It shook and strained and slipped.
At last it hooked across the rim.
Swish! Grandma's rope. It gripped!

The sun looked down. All sixteen legs
Were roped up to the tree!
He pulled away and tried to sink
Back down into the sea.

But Māui's knots were good and tight.
The tree held on. And then
He braced his feet and hauled the sun
Back up the slope again.

He swung the axe of stone. Whack! Crack!
He struck each shining leg.
"Stop! Stop!" the sun cried. "Let me live!
Please, Māui! Please! I beg!"



"I'll let you go," said Māui, "if
You promise to go slow."
"But I'm a runner!" cried the sun.
"Why, running's all I know!"

So Māui thought. “In summer, walk
And take a slower pace.
But when the winter comes around,
You’ll have your turn to race.”

“That’s fair,” the sun said. Māui knelt
And worked each stubborn knot.
Then off the sun went, step by step,
So slow, and gold, and hot.

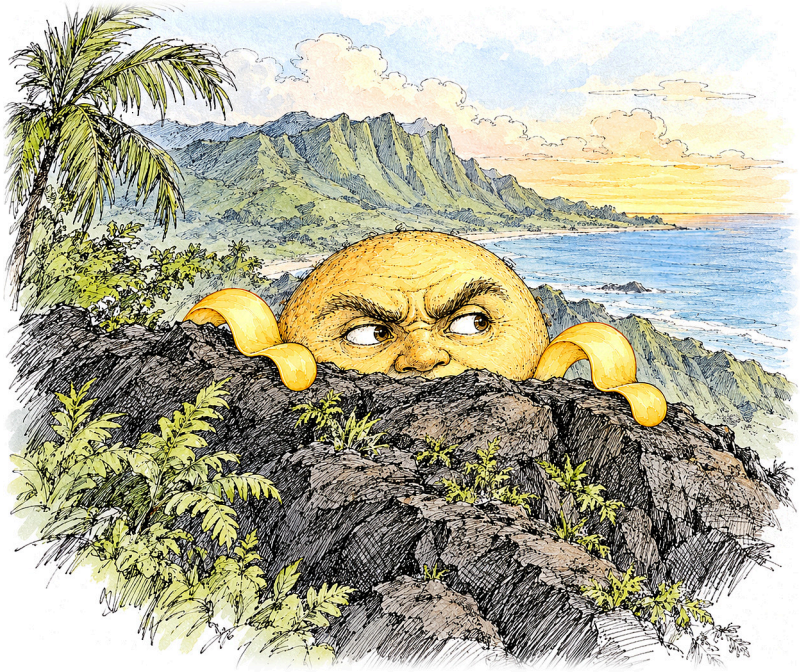


Then Hina spread her kapa out,
And long before the night
It all was dry, and warm, and stiff,
Like paper, crisp and white.

The farmers planted every row.
The fishers fished their fill.
And singers sang their whole songs through,
And there was daylight still.

That's why, in summer, days are long.
The sun walks, nice and slow.
You play outside past dinnertime,
And still the sky's aglow.

But winter's his. He gets to race
And hurry out of sight,
And dark comes down before you've had
Your dinner. That's his right.



That mountain's Haleakalā:
"House of the Sun." And now
The sun peeks out before he dares
To climb its rocky brow.

Chapter Three

How Māui Found Fire



The days were long. The kapa dried.
The crops grew thick and tall.
But still the people had no fire.
No fire. No fire at all.

They ate their fish and roots all raw.
The night wind whistled round.
They tucked their knees beneath their chins
And shivered on the ground.

One dawn, the brothers paddled out,
All four, to fish at sea,
When Māui pointed back to land.
“Look there! What can that be?”

Up on the mountainside, a thread
Of smoke rose, thin and gray,
And at its foot, a little fire
Was flickering away.

"Whose fire?" They swung the boat around
And raced it to the shore.
And Māui scrambled up the hill,
Then up, and up some more.



He found a flock of mudhens there,
Their feathers black as soot.
They kicked dirt on the fire, scratch, scratch,
With every busy foot.

The last smoke drifted off. The birds
Flapped up and flew away,
And Māui stared at trampled ash.
No fire for him that day.

And so it went, day after day:
The smoke, the race, the climb,
The mudhens kicking out the fire
And flying off, each time.

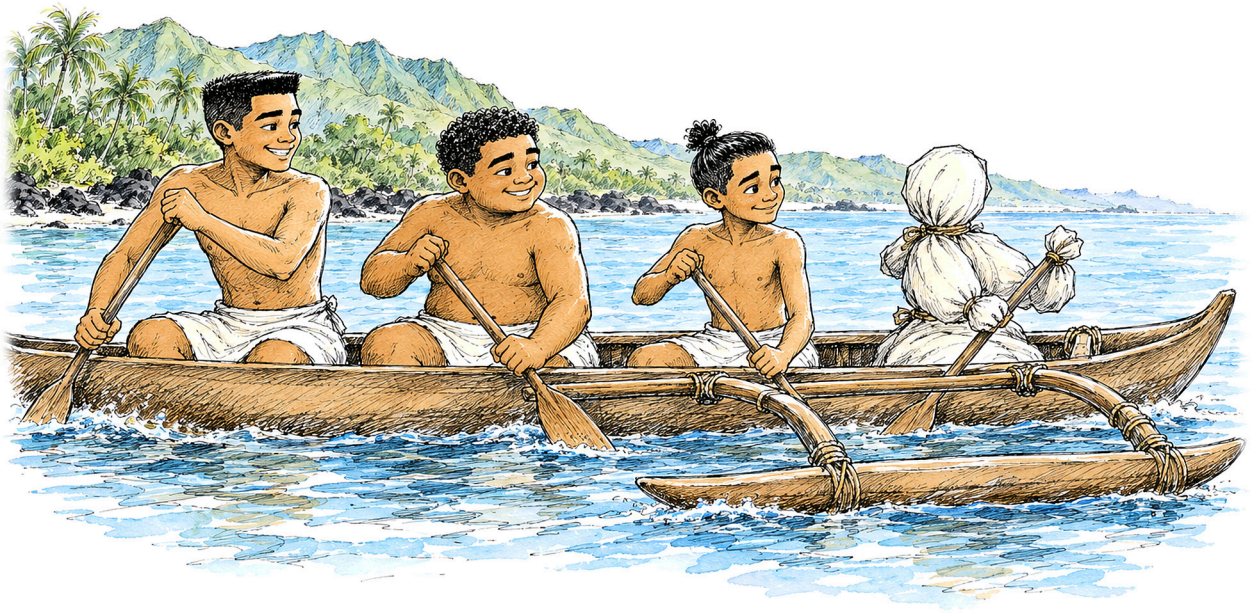
So Māui said, "You three go fish.
I'll hide here on the hill."
But that day, not one wisp of smoke
Rose up. The hill stayed still.

He crept up through the ferns and heard
The mudhens talking low.
"One, two, three brothers in the boat.
Where did the fourth one go?

"No fire," they clucked, "until we count
All four out on the sea."
"All four?" thought Māui. "Then I need
Another one of me."

He borrowed Hina's kapa cloth,
Now dry from days of sun,
And rolled a head and knotted arms.
Another Māui! Done.

He sat it up in the canoe.
His brothers stared. "Who's that?"
"That's Māui Number Four," he said,
And gave its head a pat.



“Now paddle out, all three of you.
Take Number Four along.
They’ll count four heads. I’ll hide right here.
It simply can’t go wrong!”

The brothers paddled out. The birds
Peered down. “One, two, and three…
And four! All four are out at sea!”
“Now, fire!” they clucked with glee.

They piled up sticks. The oldest hen
Picked two of them to rub,
And Māui couldn’t wait. He sprang
Out from the ferns and scrub

And caught her! But he’d jumped too soon.
He hadn’t seen the trick.
The rest had fled. He held her fast.
“How do you use that stick?”

“Don’t hurt me!” squawked the mudhen. “If
You do, my secret dies.
You’ll never, ever have your fire!”
She blinked her beady eyes.

“Then tell the truth, and you’ll go free,”
Said Māui. “That’s my word.”
“Rub stems of water plants,” she said.
(She was a tricky bird.)



He rubbed two stems. They squished and dripped,
And water trickled out.
He gave her neck a twist. “Try reeds!”
She squawked, “They’ll smoke! Watch out!”

He rubbed two reeds. They bent and broke.
Another twist. “Ow! Fine!
A green stick, freshly cut!” He rubbed.
No smoke. No spark. No sign.

Another twist. “Try wood that’s dry!”
He rubbed. No flame. But then
He felt the sticks: a little warm!
“I’m close,” he thought. “Again!”

He tried dry branches, one by one,
From every kind of tree.
Some warmed a bit. Some warmed a lot.
“Which wood is best? Tell me!”

The mudhen sighed. “You win. It’s hau.”
“It’s how? How what?” he said.
“Not how! The hau tree, silly boy!”
And Māui scratched his head.

“Lay down a log of soft dry hau.
Then take a hard, sharp stick
And plow it up and down a groove.
Press hard, and make it quick.”

He pinned the hau beneath his feet
And plowed, and plowed, and plowed.
The dust piled up. It smoked! It glowed!
He whooped and laughed out loud.



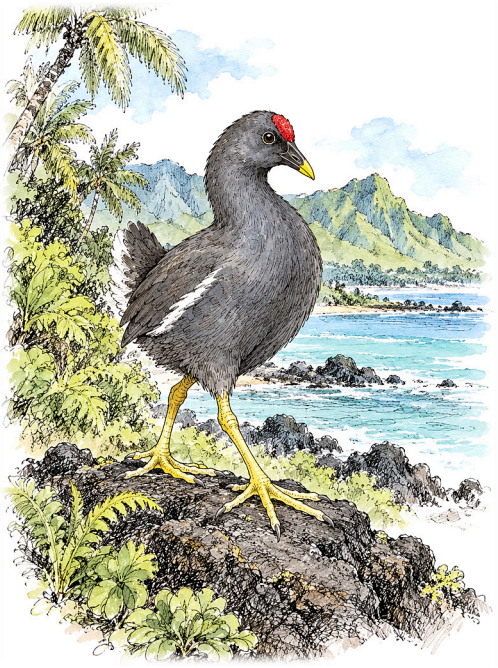
He blew on it, so soft, so soft,
And fed it grass until
A flame sprang up, all gold and red,
And crackled on the hill.

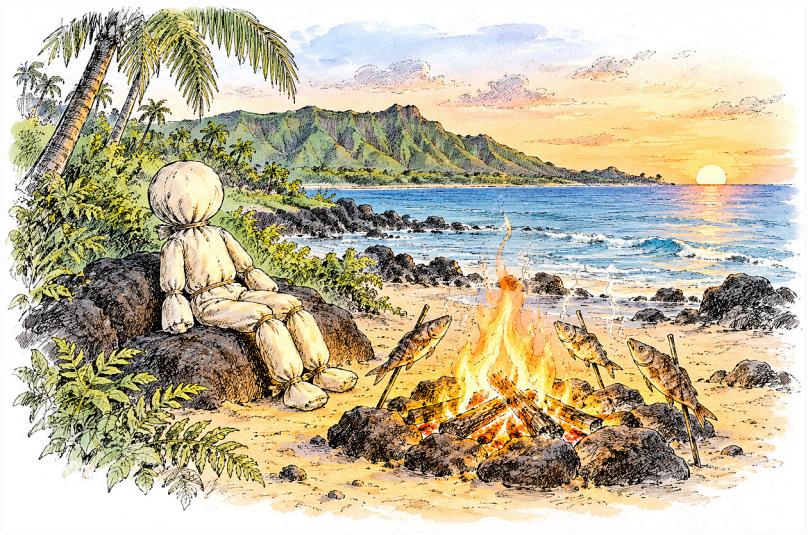
"You told me fibs. You'll wear a mark
For that," was all he said.
He took the stick, still warm, and rubbed
The mudhen's sooty head.

He rubbed until her forehead turned
As red as fire could be.
And though she'd fibbed and fibbed and fibbed,
He set the mudhen free.

That's why the mudhen wears a patch
As red as coals that glow.
At Sweetwater her cousins swim,
And wear it, too, you know.

From shore to shore, the word went out,
And people did the same:
They plowed a hard stick through soft hau
And coaxed the dust to flame.





That first night, every fish was cooked,
All smoky, hot, and sweet,
And everybody gathered round
The fire to warm their feet.

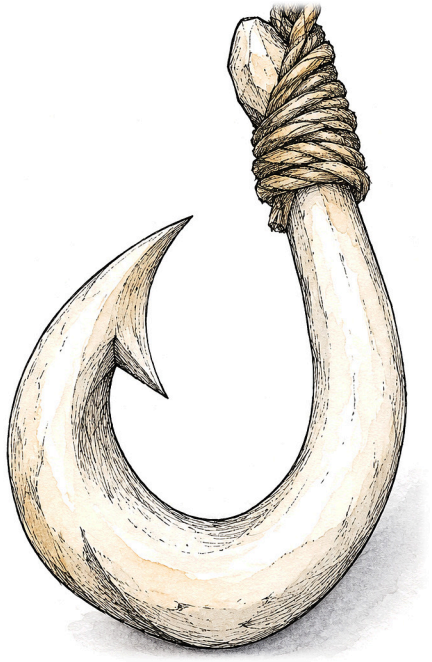
And Māui Number Four? He sat
Beside them, propped up tall,
Well back from flying sparks, of course.
He never talked at all.

Chapter Four

How Māui Fished Up the Islands

His brothers paddled past the reef
And fished the deep blue sea.
Their boat rode low with silver fish.
And Māui's catch? Just three.

"You pushed the sky," his brothers laughed.
"You caught the sun. You're bright.
You found the fire. But fish? Oh, no.
You hardly get a bite!"



But Hina smiled. "Your father's kept
A fishing hook for you.
Go ask him for it. Then you'll see
What that old hook can do."

His father brought it out: a hook
Of bone, its barb bent back.
"What bites on this stays on," he said.
"Don't let the line go slack.

"It's Mānaiakalani, son.
That means 'tied to the sky.'
For bait, use Hina's red-billed bird.
Then let it down and try."

Next dawn, he hopped into their boat.
"Get off!" the brothers cried.
"No room for one more Māui here!"
They dumped him off the side.

He swam to shore. And that same night,
The brothers paddled in
With just one skinny little shark,
All teeth and tail and fin.



"Take me tomorrow," Māui said,
"And I will catch a fish
As big as anything you've seen,
As big as you could wish."

They eyed their shark. Next dawn they said,
"All right. Just once. Get in."
He brought his hook and Hina's bird
And wore a little grin.

They paddled out, out past the reef,
Out past the fishing ground.
"Go farther. Farther still," he said,
Till sea lay all around.

His brothers fished. More sharks. “Well, where’s
Your giant fish?” they roared.
He baited up his magic hook
And dropped it overboard.

Down, down it sank, past fish, past rocks,
Down to the deepest deep,
And caught on something huge and old
That had been fast asleep.



The ocean heaved. Great waves reared up
And crashed and roared and splashed.
Then something hauled the whole canoe.
Away! Away it dashed!

It towed them all that day and night,
And all the next day, too.
“Pull in! Pull in!” his brothers begged.
But Māui held. He knew.

“Pull now, and it will pull back hard
And snap the line,” he said.
“We’ll let it run until it tires.
Then we’ll pull in, instead.”

At last the tugging eased. “It’s tired!”
Cried Māui. “Paddle, quick!
And keep the line pulled tight, so tight,
So that the hook will stick!

“And don’t look back. No matter what.
If you look back, you’ll stop,
The line will sag, the hook will slip,
And everything will drop.”

They paddled hard. Behind them swelled
A deep and grinding roar:
The sound of mountains breaking free,
The sea becoming shore.

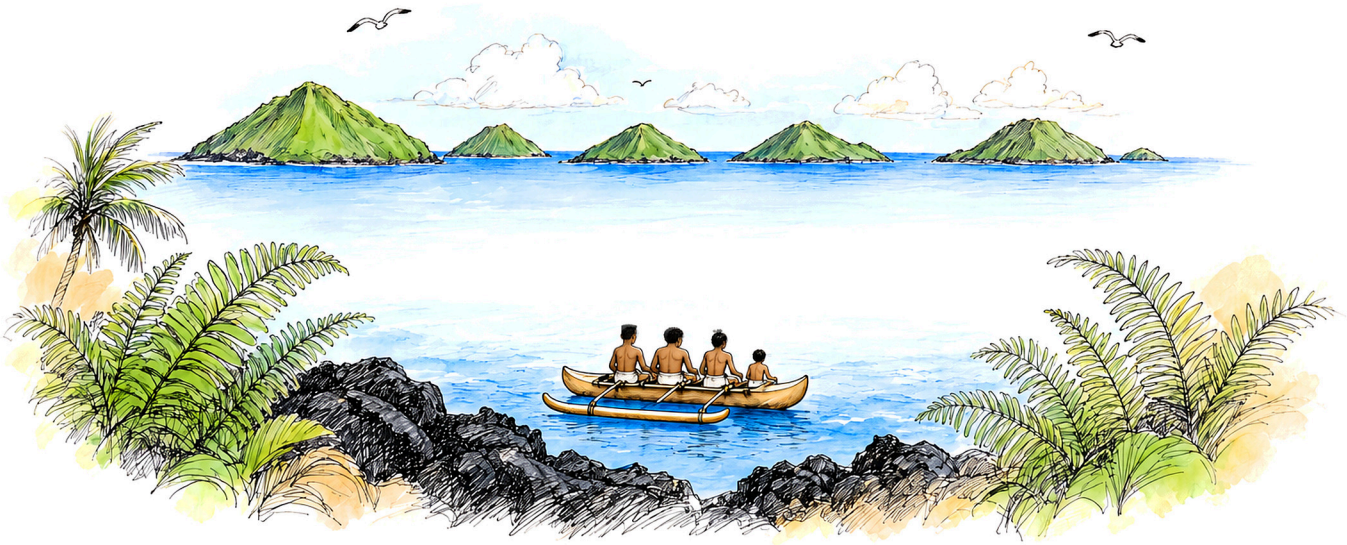
Up rose the mountains, wet and steep,
Between the isles they knew.
Up heaved the valleys, ridges, cliffs,
And still the new land grew.



"Don't look!" But one just had to see.
He turned around and stopped.
He gaped. His fingers lost their grip.
His paddle slipped and dropped.

The boat slowed down. The line fell slack.
A jerk, a crack, a SNAP!
The hook flew loose. The rising land
Split open, gap by gap.

What might have been one stretch of land,
All joined from side to side,
Was now a chain of islands, split
By channels deep and wide.



Hawai‘i, home, was there before,
And Maui, with his name.
But all along the broken line,
Four brand-new islands came:

First Moloka‘i broke the waves.
Lāna‘i rose in view.
O‘ahu rose. Kaua‘i rose.
And each was green and new.

And near their home, in Hilo Bay,
Close to the waterfall,
A tiny island raised its head,
The littlest catch of all.

The brothers stared at all that land
With wide, astonished eyes.
"So," Māui said, "can I fish now?"
They nodded. "What a prize!"

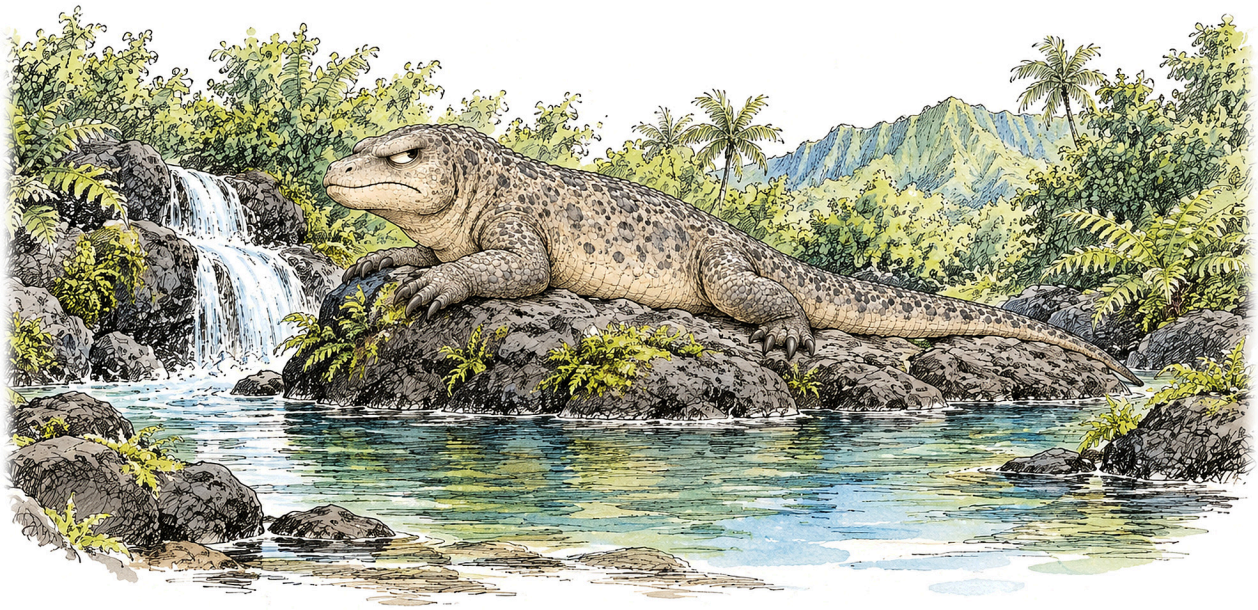


And Mānaiakalani? When
The line snapped, up it flew,
And caught the sky and held on fast,
As hooks like that will do.

On summer nights, look south and low,
And there, in stars, you'll spy
The hook that hauled the mountains up,
Still fastened to the sky.

Chapter Five

How Māui Beat Kuna



Behind the waterfall, the cave
Was cool and safe and wide,
And every morning, rainbows hung
Across the falls outside.

But up the river, in the pools,
Lived Kuna, long and gray,
A giant lizard, thick with scales,
Who snapped and splashed all day.

One stormy day, mean Kuna shoved
A boulder from the top.
It crashed and jammed below the falls
And made the river stop.

The water had nowhere to go.
It rose, and rose, and grew,
And crept up into Hina's cave
And soaked her kapa through!

Now Hina climbed a rocky ledge
Where she'd stay dry, and then
She cupped her hands and called, "Māui!"
And called his name again.

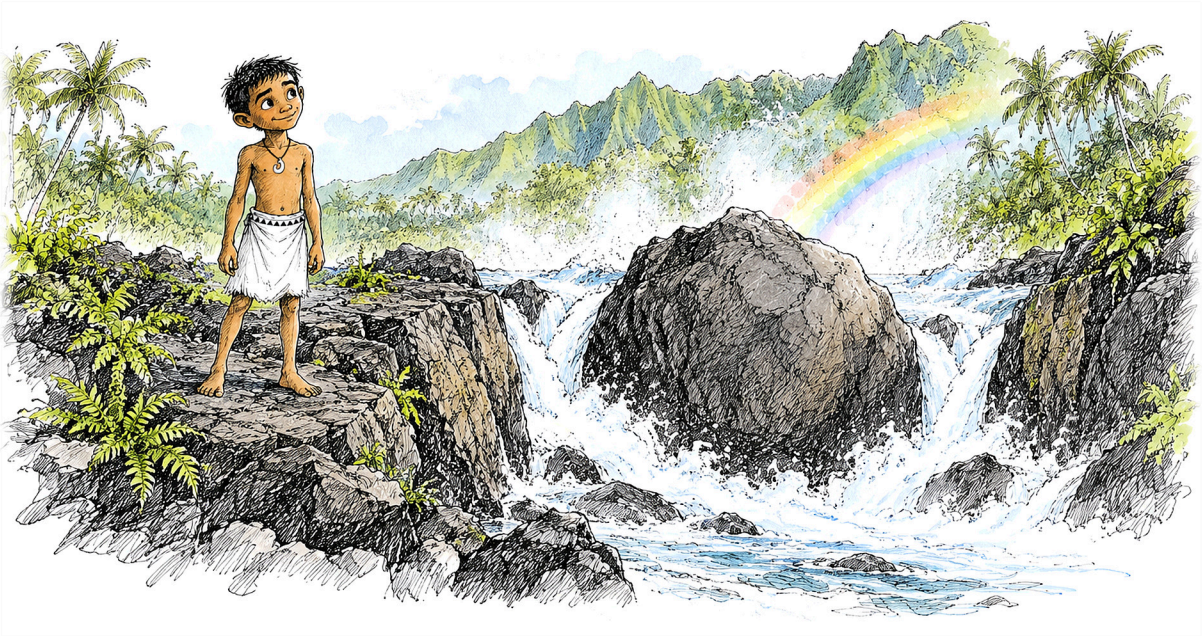


Far off on Maui, Māui heard.
He grabbed his paddle. Swish!
One stroke! Two strokes! Across the sea
He skimmed like a flying fish!

He ran upriver to the falls
And saw the boulder there,
Wedged tight between two banks of rock,
With water everywhere.

He braced his feet and heaved. The rock
Just shuddered in its bed.
"Why move the rock? I'll move the stream
Around its side," he said.

He climbed the bank beside the rock
And SMASH! One mighty blow!
The bank split open. Now the stream
Had somewhere new to go.

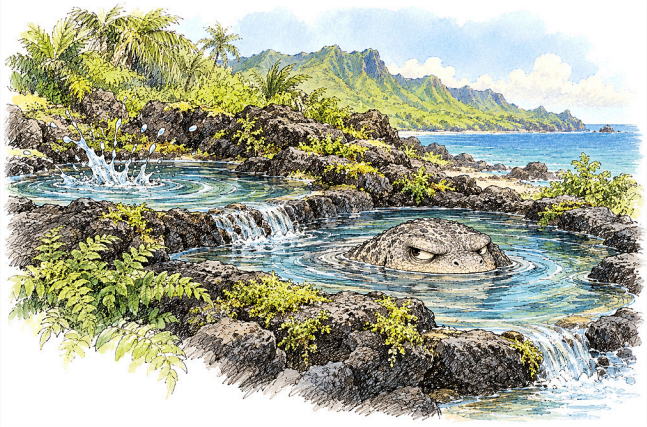


Whoosh! Through the gap the river rushed
And tumbled on its way.
The water drained from Hina's cave.
She stepped out through the spray.

She hugged him. "Kuna did it, son.
He hides up in the pools.
He thinks this river's his alone.
He thinks he makes the rules."

So Māui took his spear and climbed
The rocks above the falls
To where the river hollowed pools
With steep and stony walls.

They're like Sabino Canyon's pools,
But wider than a house.
And Kuna hid in one, as still
And quiet as a mouse.

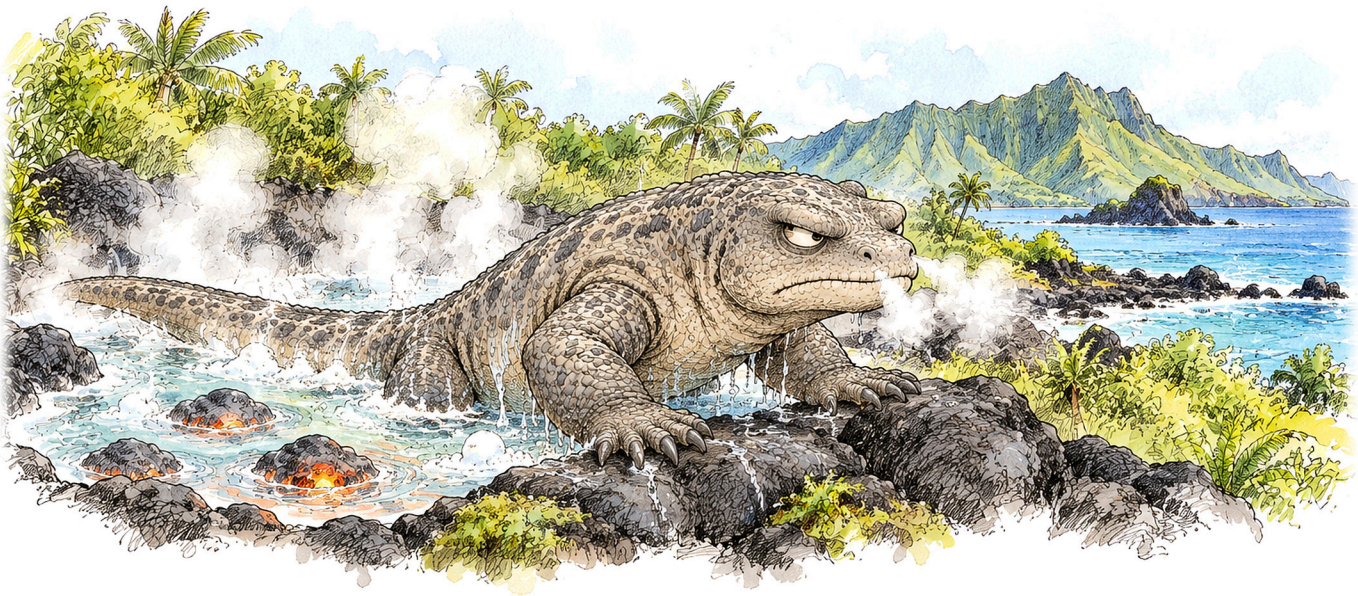


He jabbed his spear down. Splash! Too deep!
He couldn't reach the floor.
And Kuna slithered out and hid
Inside the pool next door.

He'd find him, jab, and miss, and off
Old Kuna slid again.
From pool to pool, the same old game,
Through eight, through nine, through ten!

So Māui sat and thought. "He hides
Where water's deep and cool.
My spear can't reach. But if it got
Too hot, he'd leave the pool!"

He called to Pele, queen of fire.
“Hot stones, please!” Māui said.
She sent them tumbling to his feet,
All glowing orange-red.



He tossed them in. Hsss! Blub! Blub! Blub!
The water churned and steamed.
The pools all bubbled up and boiled,
And Kuna leaped and screamed!

Out burst the lizard, steaming mad.
He snapped. He lashed. He bit.
But Māui ducked and dodged and struck,
And struck, and didn’t quit.

At last, with one tremendous whack,
Mean Kuna’s fighting stopped.
The river carried him downstream,
And down the falls he dropped.

He landed in the pool below,
In front of Hina's cave,
And there he turned to solid stone:
A rock that must behave.

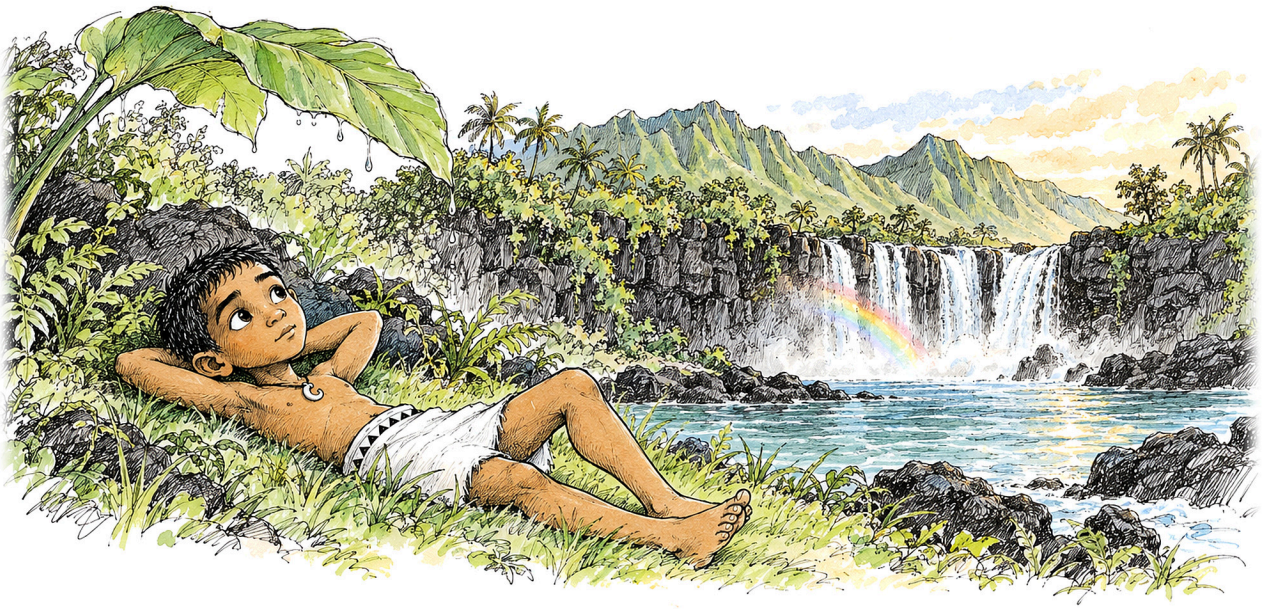
And if you go to Hilo now,
To Rainbow Falls, you'll see
That rock still sitting in the pool,
As still as still can be.



Upriver, those round pools still foam
And churn and bubble so
That they've been called the Boiling Pots
Since long, long, long ago.

Then Hina spread her kapa out
Beneath the slow sun's light.
The rainbows spanned the falls again.
Her cloth was dry by night.

He lifted up the heavy sky.
He slowed the racing sun.
He found the fire. He fished up land.
And Kuna? Māui won.



And Māui? Some days, by the falls,
He'd lie back in the dew
And watch a leaf, a root, a stone,
And wonder what they knew.

The End