

The Shark that Came for Poi

'S EE that shark!"
"He is a big one!
What do you suppose he wants?"

As the men paddled toward the Kona coast they watched the great shark following their canoe. "What do you want, old shark?" one asked at last. "Do you know that we carry pa'i'ai to Kona to our relatives? Do you eat poi, O shark? Here then!" and the man threw a small bundle toward the shark.

The great fish did not catch and swallow the food but pushed it with his nose. The men saw him swimming toward shore, pushing the little bundle through the waves. They watched him as long as he was in sight. "That is a strange thing," Aukai said. "He seemed to know we had a load of pa'i'ai."

"But he did not eat it," another answered. "Who ever saw a shark pushing food through the waves as that one did?"

"And why did he want it?" Aukai asked again. "Where was he taking it?"

The next week these men again paddled from Kohala to Kona with pa'i'ai, the dry, pounded kalo from which poi is made. Again the shark followed and again swam toward the shore pushing before him the small bundle thrown to him. This happened many times.

Then one day Aukai said, "I mean to find out about that shark. You paddle toward Kona with the food and throw a bundle to the shark as you always do. I shall follow in a small canoe and see if I can learn what the shark does with the bundle."

Aukai's canoe was some distance behind the larger one. He saw the men throw the bundle of food and watched the shark swim with it to a Kona beach. Then a strange thing happened. Aukai saw an

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old man come down the beach, leaning on a stick. Aukai watched as the old man picked up the bundle and hobbled to his house.

Very curious, the Kohala man beached his canoe beyond a point of land and walked along the shore. He came to the house the old man had entered. "O friend!" he called, "here is a thirsty one. Can you give me a drink?"

The old man hobbled to the door. "You are welcome, stranger," he said. "Come in, drink and eat. Our water is a bit brackish but it will cure your thirst." He brought a gourd of water. Then he brought out fish and poi. "Eat," he repeated.

Aukai took the food. He had looked quickly about the little place and noticed that only the man and his wife lived there. Still he wondered. "This food tastes good to a hungry traveler," he said. "I thank you, old man. But I wonder at the poi. Can one so old as you work in the kalo patch?"

"Alas no," the old man answered, "and we have no relative in this village to bring food. But in the bay we have a friend. A good shark brings us fish. Of late he brings poi too. Every few days he comes with a bundle of pa'i'ai for us. I pound it with fresh water and make the good poi which you taste."

"Where does the shark get the pa'i'ai?" Aukai asked, wondering whether the man knew.

The old man answered simply, "The gods provide."

Aukai paddled back to his Kohala village and told what he had seen and heard. The people were full of wonder and sympathy. "The poor old folks," they said, "with no child to care for them!" And, "What a wise shark! After this he shall have a big bundle of food each week."

And so he did. For many months the shark was given a big bundle of pa'i'ai whenever the canoe went to Kona, and the bundle was dropped for him close to the beach where the old couple lived.

Then one day the shark did not come. The next week, still, he was not seen. "I shall take the food," Aukai said, and paddled straight to the old man's village. He found the little home empty. Not even mats or bowls were there. Aukai went to a neighbor. "I have come to see the old man who used to live in that house," he told him, pointing.

"He is dead," the neighbor answered, "and his wife has gone to relatives in another village."

Aukai paddled back to Kohala and told his friends. "The shark's work is done," he said. The shark was never seen again.

*Told by Mary Kawena Puku'i,
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