

THE THUMB NAIL

By Wade Warren Thayer in the Black Cat Magazine.

Kalua sat with his feet in the gutter, brooding over his wrongs. It was Saturday afternoon, the busiest hour of the week at the fishmarket, but Kalua was oblivious of the noise and turmoil about him; the vociferations of the Chinese hawkers, the laughter and chatter of the gaily dressed throng that moved among the stalls, passed all unheeded.

Across the way was Laka, the man whom Kalua most hated in all the world. He was leaning on the counter of a fish stall, clad in his Saturday afternoon best, silk shirt, duck trousers, a yellow handkerchief about his neck, a Panama hat circled with a lot of scarlet carnations perched jauntily on the back of his head. He was chatting gaily with Mann, the girl whom Kalua had wooed persistently, but in vain for more than a year. Laka was a good-looking young fellow, and the girl knew it, for she rolled her great eyes up at him now and then in a most flirtatious and fascinating fashion.

Presently she noticed Kalua glowering at her from the opposite gutter and she whispered something to her companion that made him guffaw loudly. Just at that instant one of the Chinese fish vendors, who had been scrubbing out his stall, emptied into the gutter a huge tubful of muddy water. It washed down upon the unfortunate Kalua, and before he realized it he was up to his knees in the filthy flood. The pair across the street witnessed the incident and exploded with laughter, while poor Kalua rose to his feet, trembling with fury, and stumbled off down the street towards the waterfront.

Before he had gone a block he was overtaken by a queer little weazened old man who had been pattering along in pursuit. His garb was startlingly incongruous, for he wore a tall silk hat, fringed with an ancient frock coat, dungaree trousers, and no shirt, nor shoes, nor stockings. He was bent with age and rheumatism, and he progressed with the aid of a cane.

"Wait a bit, Kalua," he wheezed, as he drew alongside. "I want to talk to you, and you go so fast I cannot keep pace with you."

So violent was the storm of rage that seethed within the younger man that his first impulse was to turn upon the newcomer and vent upon him the fury that possessed him. But as soon as he saw who it was that had accosted him he stopped in his tracks and almost turned as though to flee. The old man cackled with laughter as he saw the sudden look of fear in Kalua's eyes.

"Afraid of me, are you?" he shrilled, peering up at Kalua from under bushy white eyebrows. "You have no need to be. I am your very good friend."

"I know you are," stammered Kalua. "I am not afraid of you. Why should I be?"

But he was afraid, horribly afraid, for old Hopu was known through all Honolulu, from Kaimuki to Moanalua, as the most powerful kahuna on the island, one whose knowledge of the sacred art of the anaana, or praying to death, was most profound. He was a man to be feared and shunned; only to be sought when sickness or death hovered near, or when one's enemy—

Kalua's heart almost stopped beating as the coincidence burst upon him. All the rage which his fear of the old man had driven from his mind welled up in him again. His eyes lost the furtive look of intended flight and he glanced back towards the fishmarket. He could see that Mann now was about her prettiness, the wreath of carnations which had adorned Laka's hat. Kalua gritted his teeth at the sight.

"I came at the right time, did I not?" said the old man, following Kalua's glance and reading his thoughts. "Come with me, and I will show you what to do. I saw it all there at the fishmarket. He's stolen away your young girl, hasn't he? He is younger and handsomer than you, you see, and that's what the girls like."

Down to the wharf they went, and the old fellow artfully fed the fires of Kalua's rage as they walked, comparing his thin, gaunt face and angular figure with Laka's until Kalua writhed with impatient fury.

Seated in a secluded corner of the wharf, where an ancient anchor sheltered them from view shorewards, and the wavelets of the harbor lapped the piers at their feet, the old man proceeded in business.

"If I rid you of your rival, what do you give?" he asked.

"Kalua was rich, from the native viewpoint, for he had a house of his own in the fishing village of Punahoa, full of your grass-huts, dirt floors and squid, but a wooden house, with a shingled roof and a veranda across its front. And besides he had two canoes and a huge seine capable of holding a thousand mullet at one haul. Kalua grew cautious as he saw the light of cupidity in the old man's beady eyes.

"I'll give you this as a fee in advance," he offered, drawing forth from the pocket of his coat a square bottle of gin.

Hopu took the bottle, uncorked it skillfully and drained off a long gurgling draught. Then he passed it back to Kalua.

"That is very good as far it goes," he said, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "But am I a mere low, drunken kanaka, do you think, to be bought with a square face of gin? I don't believe you love Mann after all. I must be going."

He rose painfully, but Kalua put out a detaining hand.

"Stay, I was but playing with you," he said. "The gin will do to drink as we talk. What do you want for this great service you are going to do me?"

Your new canoe," Hopu replied, quickly. "The one which outstayed them all on Regatta Day and took the prize. That is what I wish, and for it I promise you you shall be rid forever of that fat young thief who has stolen your Mann."

finite toll it had required, toll such as a kanaka will bestow on nothing else. And now, when the canoe was barely launched, when he was fresh from his victory at the Regatta Races over all the native fishermen, he must part with it. He could not bear the thought and he groaned aloud.

"This young man is not very much in love," soliloquized the crafty Hopu. "He cares for his canoe more than for the maid he would take to his bosom. He is not worthy of my help. I'll go away and leave him and his gin bottle."

"No, no, don't go," cried Kalua. "I'll give you anything but that, anything but my beloved canoe."

Long they haggled, the old man adhering inexorably to his first price, and Kalua expostulating and pleading to save his choicest possession. The sun sank over the harbor; the tall ships cast long shadows on the still waters, and the green hills back of the city were flooded with the light of evening. But finally, as was inevitable, the old man had his way, and the bargain was struck.

In the gathering gloom of the quick tropic night Hopu whispered into Kalua's ear the plan by which he should rid himself of his enemy. Kalua's breath came short as he listened and his eyes widened, and now and then he looked fearfully over his shoulder. But as the wily old man developed his scheme, playing the while dexterously upon his victim's hatred of Laka and upon his virtues and the charms of the beautiful Mann, Kalua's heart grew bolder. Finally he rose and with a mighty oath vowed that he would do it. The gin bottle was again brought forth and each in turn pledged the success of their plan and the early discomfiture of Laka.

The next Saturday evening there was a great political luncheon (feast) at the fishing village. It was held in a palm-thatched pavilion specially erected for the purpose and all Punahoa was invited. Laka was there and so was Mann, the belle of the evening, garbed in a flowing white holoku and adorned with a beautiful lei of roses. Kalua came also; a very different Kalua from the one who had sat in the gutter at the fishmarket the week before, for he was all in white linen, and his tall figure loomed with something of distinction among the guests. The pretty Mann, always a flirt, was nice to him, and chatted impartially with him and with Laka, who was always at her side. But not by word nor sign did Kalua show the hatred he felt for his handsome, reckless young rival.

During the preliminary speechmaking the three strolled amicably together through the throng that surrounded the platform in the palm grove where the native orators held forth, and there was much whispering and nodding of heads among the women and young girls, for the rivals were not wont to be so friendly.

As the night fell, torches were lighted about the pavilion and the guests flocked thither and squatted in rows around the long mat upon which the edibles were spread. Every delicacy beloved by the Hawaiian was there in bountiful profusion; pig roasted underground, fresh caught mullet baked in ki leaves, chicken, squid, dried limu or seaweed, sauce of kukui and cocoanuts, and all sorts of drinkables, okolehao and awa, gin, and even American beer. At every other place at the board was a great calabash of poi, that delectable paste made from the root of the taro-plant, which answers for bread and butter, vegetables and dessert to the Hawaiian.

As they came to their places Kalua was able by a skilful move to seat himself beside Laka so that they two should eat from the same poi bowl. If Laka noticed it he gave no sign, although he had fully intended that he should share his calabash with Mann. But the seat on her other side was taken and Laka was forced to be content. Not so with Mann; she had seen the maneuvering of Kalua, and she was angry and suspicious.

Scarcely were they seated than Kalua, obeying the instructions given him by the old kahuna, swept his hand, thumb down, carelessly across the calabash of poi at Laka's side. Only Mann saw him do it. For a bare second she did not comprehend. Then her whole body stiffened with sudden fear and just as Laka was about to dip his fingers into the poi she leaped to her feet, snatched the poi bowl from under his hand and flung it from her so that it rolled down almost the length of the pavilion.

"The thumb nail, the thumb nail," she screamed, pointing with a shaking finger to where the calabash lay, overturned, its viscid contents sloping out upon the ground. A small dog, one of many which ran at will among the guests, had leaped upon the poi bowl as it fell and lapped eagerly at the spilled paste. But only for a moment. Then he slowly raised his head, gazed about with a frightened, queer air and with one sharp agonized yell he rolled upon his side. A single shudder shook his body and he was dead.

"The thumb nail, the thumb nail," shrieked Mann again, and her pitting finger swung from the poor little dead dog to the striking figure of Kalua. His gaunt brown face had blanched to whiteness and he seemed to shrivel into a very thin, very small, very old, old man, as the accusing finger centered upon him and all the eyes of the excited, staring throng were turned to watch him.

"He did it, I saw him," cried Mann, her whole body shaking with the frenzy of her fear. "He tried to poison Laka. I saw him do it. Like this," and she swept her hand, thumb down, through the air in a dramatic gesture. "The thumb nail. I saw him with old Hopu, the kahuna, last week. He tried to poison Laka."

A flood of horror swept over the throng. They had all heard from their uncles the tales of a subtle, almost unknown powder, made from a rare herb found only in the most inaccessible spots in the hills, and how a single grain, spread in a bowl of poi might kill a multitude. And the ancient tale of the old kahuna who dispatched the rascals of whom he was weary by depositing in their poi from his thumb nail a grain of this poison, came back to them.

Mann's words were still ringing in their ears when Kalua, as if hypnotized

by the pointed finger of the girl, rose slowly to his feet and stretched out his hands imploringly to her. But she turned away with a shudder of disgust and fell beside Laka.

Slowly Kalua's arms dropped to his side and his eyes traveled over the hostile faces about him. They rested finally upon the group beside him. Mann lay in Laka's arms, weeping violently, one arm about his neck. Only a moment did Kalua look down upon them. Then he slowly raised his right hand to his lips and touched them. It was almost like a salutation, and no one moved as he backed from the circle of light thrown by the flaring torches, and turning, fell prone in the outer darkness beyond.

"MYSELF AND ME."

This item of verse is floating around, what city, or the name of the uncrowned laureate, son of man knoweth not to this day. The name of the inspired writer should be written in letters of gold high up in the Hall of Fame:

I'm the best pal that I ever had,
I like to be with me;
I like to sit and tell myself
Things confidentially.

I often sit and ask me
If I shouldn't or I should,
And I find that my advice to me
Is always pretty good.

I never got acquainted with
Myself till here of late;
And I find myself a bully chum,
I treat me simply great.

I talk with me and walk with me
And show the right and wrong,
I never knew how well myself
And me could get along.

I never try to cheat me,
I'm as truthful as can be;
No matter what may come or go,
I'm on the square with me.

It's great to know yourself and have
A pal that's all your own;
To be such company for yourself
You're never left alone.

You'll try to dodge the masses,
And you'll find a crowd's a joke,
If you only treat yourself as well
As you treat other folk.

I've made a study of myself,
Compared with me the lot,
And I've finally concluded
I'm the best friend I've got.

Just together with yourself
And trust yourself with you,
And you'll be surprised how well your-
self

Will like you if you do.

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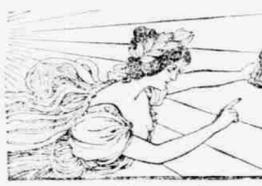
Lessons of a practical nature will be given two hours each evening (except Saturday and Sunday), in the various branches of brick, stone, plastering and concrete work with all the modern ideas of men who create.

It will be a splendid opportunity for young men and youths. Boys of sixteen years of age and above are eligible and their parents are invited to consider this offer. There is always a scarcity of artisans in these lines throughout the Territory and there are openings abroad for competent ones. It is a chance for young men to better their conditions and be in positions to be independent.

I would be pleased if applicants would address me at 1705 King street, Puna, or call personally between 6 and 7 o'clock p. m., when fullest information will be furnished. The training will be practical rather than theoretical and pupils will have opportunities to watch actual work as it progresses.

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