

# THE DEAD-NAMING OF LUKAPEHU

By P. D. GOG

**T**HE following tale was handed to me in manuscript by an acquaintance to whom it was related by a friend who heard it from an old resident of the Hawaiian group as happening to his father. In view of the father's integrity, and bearing in mind other similar cases, there is, of course, no doubt as to the truth of the story. Whether Lukapehu died of an "error of mortal judgment," of the incantations of the old medicine man, or of superstitious fear, is for the reader to judge for himself.

The title Kahuna means sorcerer. Kahuna-anana is a specific title for a death-dealing sorcerer, from Kahuna a sorcerer; and anana, to gaze intently. The epithet suggests that ancient belief in the evil eye, so naively preserved in the Scottish ballads, and particularly common in Italy and India. The story is recorded here substantially as it came into my possession.

In 1859, my father had already established himself on a large plantation on Kawai, one of the Hawaiian group. He acquired among his "boys" a reputation for utter fearlessness and, to an astonishing degree, for foolhardy disregard of the various powers of enchantment. There dwelt also on Kawai, where the two branches of the Waimea River join, a famous old Kahuna, Kapukapu, who far surpassed his fellow sorcerers in skill, being reputed a Kahuna-anana or death-dealing sorcerer. So great was the reputation of this magician that never did any of the villagers presume to oppose his wishes; but often they complained bitterly to my father of Kapukapu's unjust demands for food and service, exacted under threats of fearful and certain calamity. My father pooh-pooed these tales, particularly to a certain one of his boys, Lukapehu, his most skillful fisherman, exhorting him to have no fear of the old man but to face him boldly and laugh his threats to scorn.

**O**NE evening in the year I have mentioned, Lukapehu came up the valley as the sun was setting, carrying in his net the day's catch, which had been large even for him. He was a tall,

good-natured native, swinging along with the care-free abandon of superfluous physical strength and primitive irresponsibility. Perhaps his savage heart was touched by the glory of the sunset, which was reflected from the palms and tropic ferns in a golden aura; perhaps he was thinking of the wife and the naked little bambino who would greet him at his hut and rejoice with him in the silver treasure his skill had wrested from the sea; for as he strode up the deep valley of the Waimea River, he sang a plaintive melody that mingled with the twilight like the lengthening shadows, faint, elusive.

Suddenly the song ceased and an uncanny silence pervaded the ravine, save for the swish of the river and the twitter of restless birds in the koa trees. Lukapehu had reached the branching tributaries where Kapukapu dwelt. Silhouetted against the fiery sun, stood the old sorcerer, tall, gaunt, leaning upon his staff and gazing intently down the valley. Clothed only in a ragged loin cloth, his long, unkempt hair brushing his shoulders, his thin, gray beard stirring in the evening breeze, his eyes bulging like fire brands from his cadaverous skull, he looked like the animated skeleton of a fiend. When he saw the fisherman with his burden, he crossed the stream and stopped Lukapehu.

"My son," he said, "I see how great has been your success. When a young man has so much it is well for him to share with an old man."

Lukapehu, fortified by my father's example, replied boldly, "It is well also, sometimes, for an old man to mind his own business."

**B**RUSHING past the gaunt Kapukapu, he continued up the valley, ignoring the calling of his name by the enraged sorcerer. But presently he heard the Kahuna chanting over strange, sonorous syllables which gathered intensity and resonance as the voice went on, until from the low, menacing hum of vowels, the Kahuna had raised the echoes of the valley and the wood with his reverberant chant, "Lukapehu shall die! Lukapehu shall die!"

Lukapehu's heart sank. He tried to reassure himself with the recollection of my father's words, but primitive fear was fast laying hold on his soul. How could civilization free from bondage in a single generation, a life which was the product of ages of superstitious slavery? Had not the evil Kahuna-anana called the fatal curse down upon his cousin, and had he not perished miserably? How could he, Lukapehu, hope to escape?

He looked back . . . and was lost! The sun had gone down leaving a bloody reflection in a cloud-bespattered sky; the shadows lay black and threatening among the palms. Beside the darkly numbling stream stood Kapukapu, his ragged hair fluttering in the quickening breeze, his long arms extended, his gnarled staff pointing toward the terrified Lukapehu, while he muttered his diabolical dead-naming, "Lukapehu shall die! Lukapehu shall die!"

Lukapehu broke into a run, leaving a silver trail behind him as the fishes fell from his net. Faster and faster he sped toward the shelter of his hut, as the chant of the Kahuna-anana rose higher and higher until it seemed to fill the earth, "Lukapehu shall die! Lukapehu shall die!"

The poor fisherman sank exhausted before the door of his hut saying over and over, "I am dying; Kapukapu has called me! I am dying! I am dying!"

His frightened wahine and the little brown bambino dragged him into the house and sent for my father. But he was busy and sent word back that Lukapehu should not fear, he could not die, and that he, my father, would come down in the morning.

The next morning, just before dawn, while the dew was still heavy on the ferns and the pandanus, he rode over to the hut of the fisherman expecting to find him about his work. But Lukapehu still lay moaning on the cot, nor could my father raise him up.

He died with the breaking of the day, just as the sun dispelled the gloom of the Waimea valley, called to his death by the hideous Kahuna-anana.

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