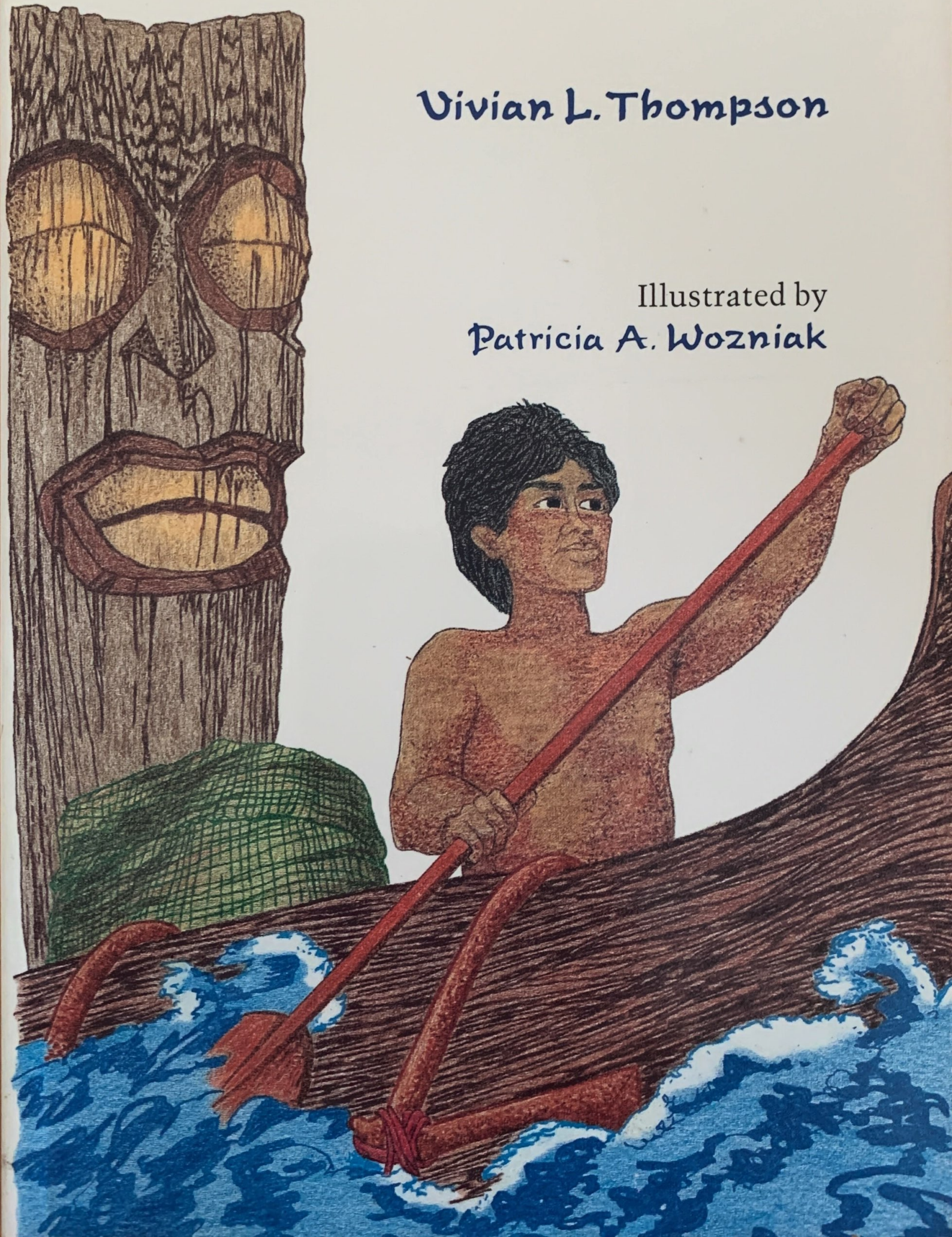


Hawaiian Legends of Tricksters and Riddlers

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Preface

TRICKSTERS AND RIDDLERS are found among the oldest and least-known of Hawaii's legends—from earliest times when man became a trickster to survive; from later times when he became a riddler to win a place for himself.

The first voyagers to Hawaii saw land and sea filled with unknown terrors—evil spirits that could be overcome only by trickery. Their clashes with such terrors gave us the earliest trickster legends.

In time, new tales developed. Life was lived under strict kapu—law of the forbidden things—and the ruling class of chiefs held power of life and death over the common people. Not all such chiefs were just, not all benevolent. It was dangerous, even fatal, to rebel. So people took a mischievous delight in telling of ones who did rebel—fearless fellows who matched wits not only against

spirits and monsters but against chiefs and kings—lively trickster heroes.

Just as the trickster-against-spirit legend grew from primitive Hawaii, so the riddler legend grew from cultured Hawaii. As civilization advanced, stress was placed on mental as well as physical skills. The art of riddling came to rank with boxing, wrestling, spear-throwing, and other arts of war.

Riddling was seldom the simple matter of giving and answering riddles, as we know it today. It was more a matter of quick-witted debate which could take the form of imitating words and actions, making good a boast, matching and topping another's wit, engaging in complicated play on words, composing or memorizing long involved chants.

Such riddling required lengthy and intensive training and so was most often a chiefly accomplishment, for who but a chief had time to devote to such study, or authority to draw on the knowledge of others? But occasionally a commoner became a trained riddler in hope of improving his lot.

Riddling contests were conducted by definite rules, under skilled referees. Stakes were high. A man might risk all his possessions, his property, even his life, and once a challenge was accepted there was no way to withdraw. Success might bring undreamed-of rewards; failure might bring death.

Here, based on some of the earliest recorded versions, are some of those trickster and riddler legends retold for today's readers.

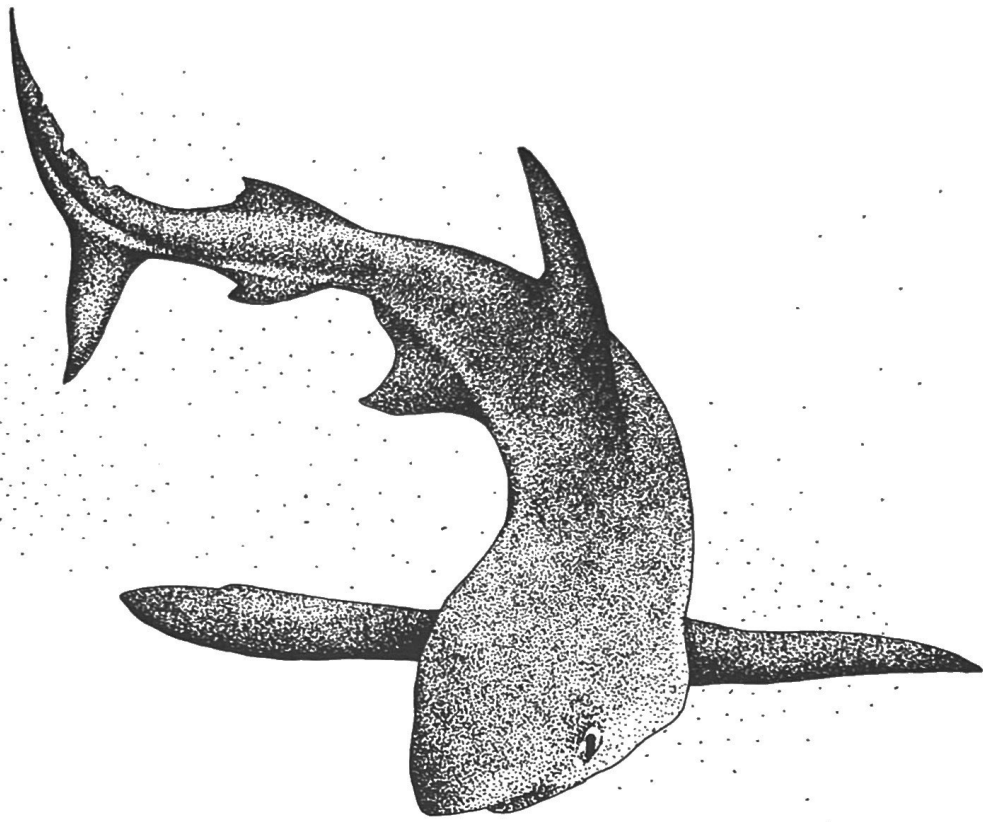


The Flying Spirits of Niihau

Early Hawaiians, to preserve their fishing grounds, observed strict kapu periods when certain fish could not be taken. When the kapu was lifted, competition was keen. Hardy fishermen, in great canoes hollowed from sturdy koa logs, paddled to distant waters—waters such as those off the desolate island of Niihau. Here, fish were abundant and competitors few—for a dreadful reason. . . .

IN THE DAYS when man-eating spirits roamed the islands, some fishermen of Kauai went out to fish off the shores of Niihau. How many? One, two, three, four, five. Their names? Ekahi, Elua, Ekolu, Eha, Elima.

All day they fished and their catch was a good one. When evening came they went ashore on the island of Niihau, cleaned,



King of the Restless Sea

People who lived surrounded by the sea, dependent on its waters for food, travel, and relaxation, found sharks a very real menace. Hawaiians came to know them well—well enough to give them names and to plan ingenious ways to outwit them. . . .

PUNIA AND HIS mother sat on a cliff overlooking the water. His mother spoke sadly. “Beneath this cliff, Punia, lies the cave where your father died while gathering lobsters.”

Punia nodded. “He was so fond of lobster, my father, and no one caught finer ones than he. I grow hungry for the taste of them. I shall dive down and get us some.”

“Auwe!” his mother cried. “Would you die there too? That cave



Riddler on the Hill

Hawaiian chiefs used sports to train their men for war. Many chiefs were themselves skilled in such sports: bowling with the maika stone, racing on the swift holua sled, riding the heavy surfboard. Excellent training, these. Useful too, if a wily chief wished to rid himself of a rival. . . .

ONCE IN THE section of Oahu called Moana-lua, there lived a chief who was most vain. Whenever he appeared before his people, he watched to make sure that he was the center of attention.

One day he noticed an odd thing. His men all bowed low to the ground when he passed, but the women—especially the young women—stole glances from the corners of their eyes, at someone



Hog Child Plays Tricks

Who did not fear the kupua with his strange, baffling powers? Supernatural strength might be his, and the ability to change form. If he had also a fondness for pranks—Auwe! Such a one was Kama-puaa. . . .

WHEREVER WILD HOGS plunge through the upland forests strange tales of that one are still told. From the day of his birth he was different. So different that his elder brother Kahiki secretly brought the infant to the home of his grandmother in the hills.

“O Kupuna,” he cried, “see this monstrous child born to my mother! Help us to hide him so no one may know of our disgrace.”

Kupuna turned back the covering of the bundle in Kahiki’s arms.

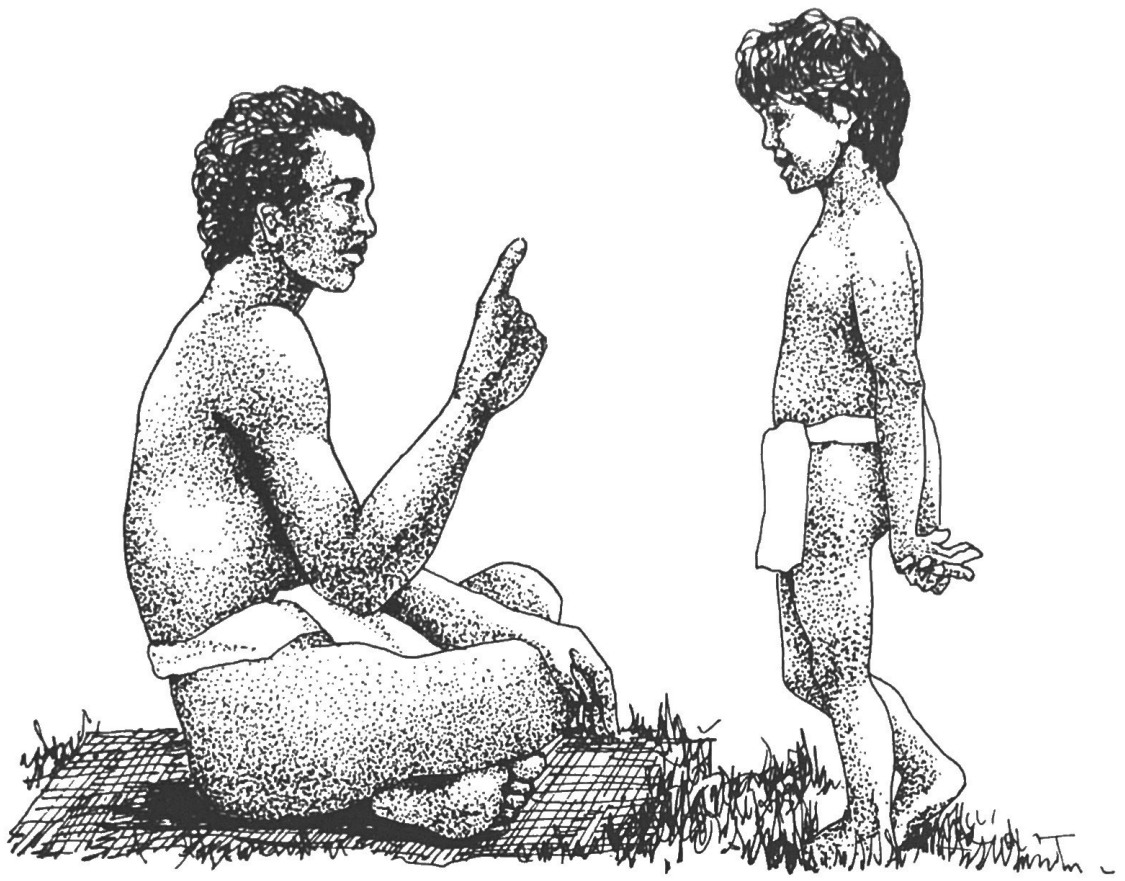


A Chiefess and a Riddle

In days now nearly forgotten, no man dared call anything his own. Chief took from commoner, high chief from chief, king from high chief. There was little to do but submit—unless one had great courage, rare skill, and a quick wit. Even then one might lose his life and all he held dear. . . .

ONCE ON THE beautiful island of Hawaii there lived a youth named Paka. Handsome he was, with glossy red-brown skin and back straight as a cliff. His uncles, both high chiefs, had raised him, training him in the chiefly arts of boxing, wrestling, spear-throwing and spear-dodging.

One uncle, Kii-who-goes, was a swift runner and a man of action.



The Riddling Youngster

In Old Hawaii a man born a commoner found few opportunities to improve his lot. But an expert riddler, whether chief or commoner, could win fame and fortune. Had he a quick wit? Could he match word for word, idea for idea, insult for insult, action for action? Express himself in chant form on any subject? Such a one might become champion riddler and win a position of respect—or lose his bones. . . .

IT WAS RIDDLING time for Halepaki and his son, Kai-palaoa. Each morning they spent long hours together in the giving and answering of riddles, in the creating of chants, in the matching of wits.

Halepaki had scarcely seated himself when his son began. "I have a fine riddle for you this morning, my father! Listen!