



OUR KA'ĀNANI'AU

STUDENT READING

Kawiwi

In the days of old Hawai'i, there was a beautiful young woman living at the head of Wai'anae Valley. Although she was 30 years old, she was unmarried and still living with her elderly parents. Many of the men in Wai'anae Valley wanted to marry this beautiful *wahine*, but her parents refused to let her marry. They were waiting for someone worthy of their daughter.

Sometimes the mother and daughter would go to the shore to catch fish. They usually came home with only a small catch. Then one day they met a stranger to the area. He was a very handsome young man. He volunteered to help the mother and daughter catch fish. He was such a good fisher, that they brought home a big catch of mullet, *moi*, and other fish.

The girl's father was so surprised by their sudden turn of fishing luck. He asked them how they caught so many fish. They told him about the young man who helped them so willingly. Each time the girl and her mother went to catch fish they met this stranger. And each time he helped them to catch many fish. They always returned home with their baskets full of fish. In those days, people would dry the fish and keep them as food for many weeks. The fish was never wasted.

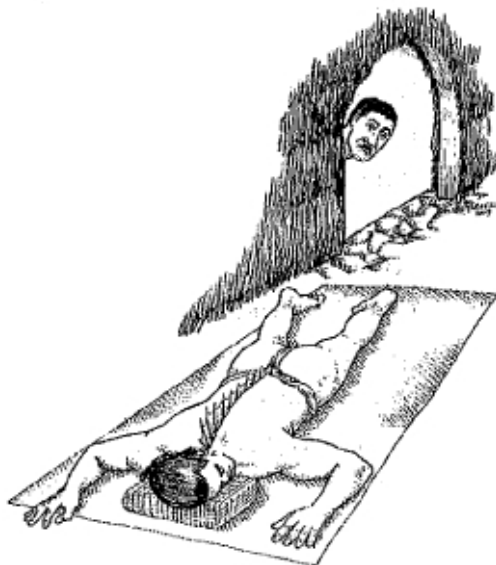


As time went on, the young woman and the strong fisherman fell in love. The woman's parents were fond of the young man so they consented to let her marry him. Hearing of this marriage, the other young men in the valley were jealous. They told stories that the woman's husband was a *kupua* (being with supernatural powers). Soon, the young woman became ill. Her body grew thin and sickly. Her family became very worried about her. Her brother went to see a great *kahuna* (priest or expert) in Nānākuli. When he heard the story of the woman, the *kahuna* said, "The husband is not a man, he is an eel. You should kill



him." The brother asked, "But how can we be certain he is not human?" The *kahuna* told the brother to look at his sister's husband while he slept. "In front he is a man, but on his back you will see the fins of an eel." This proved to be true. On the back of the sleeping man were the fins of an eel.

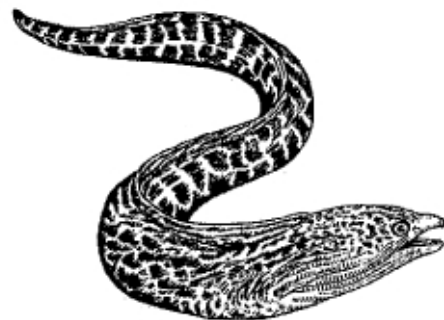
The brother summoned the people to gather wood and build a fire so they could burn the husband. The people feared that this eel-man would bring more evil to their *ka'ānani'au*. So they gathered a great pile of 'ōhi'a wood for a huge fire. They placed the logs at the base of Kawiwi in a place known as Ko'olina.



The people then invited the eel-man to a great *lu'au* near Ko'olina. When he arrived, they surrounded him. When the people attacked, the eel-man changed himself into an eel.

Warriors cut off the eel's head and tossed it into the blazing fire. But the eel continued to wiggle with life. And then a surprising thing happened. The eel's head jumped out of the fire and joined the eel's body. The warriors cut the head again and threw it into fire. And again the head leapt from the flames and joined the body of the writhing eel. Each time they cut the head, the same thing happened. Finally an older warrior told them to place their adzes on the eel's body where they cut the head. This time when the eel's head leaped out of the flames, it could not connect. The eel died at Kawiwi.

The old Hawaiians call this eel Pūhinalo, "the obliterated eel." What do you think obliterated means? To see the scar left by the eel, go about half way up the road that leads to the back of Wai'anae Valley. Look up at the *pali* wall of Kawiwi. There you will see a large scar that is known to this day as Ka'oninapūhi, "the writhing eel." Out in Pōka'i Bay there is a place known as Pōhaku o Lapalapa, the place in the sea where the eel lived.



Source: Adapted from: Sterling, Elspeth P. and Catherine C. Summers. 1978. *Sites of Oahu*. Bishop Museum Press. Honolulu, HI.