

# IWA THE CRAFTY ONE

## A Tale from Hawaii

Long ago the High Chief of Hawaii was fishing for squid. However, he was not having any luck. His men dove into the ocean over and over, only to surface empty handed. Iwa and his friend watched this from the shore. They wondered what was going on.

Soon one of the divers swam ashore to ask Iwa and his friend if they would bring forth the district's champion diver. The High Chief had lost his favorite red cowry shell – the one that always brought him luck. They feared the shell had sunk down to rest in the deepest coral. Since Iwa was the district's champion diver he went to the High Chief's fishing boat with the man.

As soon as Iwa got to the boat, the High Chief asked him to dive down and recover his red cowry shell. Iwa said he could not, because it was he who removed it from the High Chief's line in the first place. As you can imagine, the High Chief became outraged at this confession. He threatened to kill Iwa if he did not return the shell by day break.

The next morning Iwa did, indeed, return the High Chief's shell. Although still angry, the High Chief thought Iwa could be of use to him so he gave Iwa a task to complete. He told Iwa that his treasured stone axe was closely guarded in a sacred temple in one of the six districts of his chieftom. If Iwa could retrieve the axe by morning, he would live. If not, he would die.

Iwa learned that the axe was tied to ropes that were also tied to the necks of two women who were charged with its security. The entire valley was under a strict curfew. Every evening at dusk a crier ran from boundary to boundary to let the citizens know it was time to go indoors. He used this information to create a plan.

Iwa told the crier that the High Chief needed him and that he would take his place this evening. The crier was used to the High Chief's demands so he allowed Iwa to be that evening's crier. When the citizens heard Iwa's cries, they hurried into their houses for the night. Then, Iwa went to the temple where he asked the two guards about the axe. The women told Iwa that the axe was safe. Iwa asked to feel the axe so he could be certain it was really safe. As soon as he felt the axe, Iwa cut it free and ran away as fast as he could.

The two guards sounded the alarm, but the villagers were slow to respond because of the curfew. Iwa was far away before the first villager was brave enough to leave his home. And so it was that Iwa brought the High Chief's sacred axe to his own house, where he fell soundly asleep. The next morning when the High Chief came to Iwa's house, he was surprised to see that Iwa had accomplished the task.

In order to be sure that Iwa was what the High Chief wanted another task was set for him. Iwa was to compete against the six best thieves in the High Chief's kingdom. Two empty houses were set aside, one for Iwa and the other for the six thieves. In the morning, whoever's house had the most stolen goods would be the victor.

Iwa decided to take a nap. The six thieves set out at once. They worked until their house was full, and then they went to sleep. While they were sleeping, Iwa quietly moved every item from their house into his own house. He then went to the palace and stole the High Chief's royal blanket.

In the morning, the High Chief saw that Iwa's house was full to bursting with all manner of objects; including animals, food, fishing gear, shells, musical instruments, and such. The house of the six thieves was empty. The High Chief laughed out loud at seeing this. His merriment saved Iwa's life and earned him a place guarding the High Chief's treasures. Iwa did such a great job that nothing was ever stolen from the High Chief's royal treasury under his watch. And so it was that the High Chief and Iwa lived happily ever after.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta. Inspired by the following tale:

"Iwa the Crafty One" found in Hawaiian Legends of Tricksters and Riddlers. By Vivian L. Thompson. Illustrated by Sylvie Selig. NY: Holiday House, c1969, pp.80-85.

