



The Magic Jawbone

Hartwell James

Maori

Intermediate
36 min read

How when Maui was cast away by his mother, the winds and the waves took care of him.

On a dark summer night, many hundreds of years ago, a woman was standing on the shore of the South Pacific Ocean. She was not a white woman, for that was long before any white people had found their way to New Zealand or even knew that there was such a country. She was a Maori woman with a brown skin, soft dark eyes and long black hair, thick and wavy. No one has ever been able to find out where the Maoris really came from; but they have a great many strange and beautiful stories which have been handed down from father to son for hundreds of years, and this story of Maui and his wonderful exploits is one of them.

The Maori woman had a tiny brown baby in her arms, and was wrapping it round and round with great locks of her hair which she had been cutting off with her knife. Then she lifted up the poor crying baby high in her arms, and threw it out to sea as far as she could ; and then went back to her home under the tall tree ferns — for in New Zealand the ferns grow as tall as trees. She had four boys already in the family and did not want this new baby.

But if his mother was not, the Waves of the Sea were sorry for the poor baby, and they rocked him to sleep in a cradle that they made for him out of the thick seaweeds, and the Breezes sang soft lullabies to him.

When the mighty Hurricanes and Wind Squalls looked down from the mountain tops, and saw what the Ocean

had done, they pitied the poor baby, all alone on the great dark waters, and blew gently on the waves that were taking him to shore, to help them along more quickly.

The waves laid the baby, whose name was Maui, gently on a bed of soft jelly fish, where swarms of bright winged flies came and buzzed around him to keep away the other insects that might otherwise have stung him.

But some fierce Birds of Prey saw the baby lying there in the morning, and would have torn him to pieces if Rangi — the great god of the Heavens, as the Maoris called him — had not seen them, and called to the gods of the Mountain-tops to bring the baby up to him. So that was the way that Maui, the little brown earthborn baby, was saved by the gods, and brought up in the Skies, where they taught him many things unknown to the people who lived upon the Earth.

Maui grew up very clever, but he did not grow up beautiful, for one of his eyes was bright brown and the other bright green, like the green stone of which the Maoris have always made their ornaments, and his body was tattooed all over with wonderful figures and designs.

He began to be dull as he grew older and soon complained because there were no other children to play with. He knew he was not a child of the gods, or he would have been a god, too, so he asked the gods to tell him about his father and mother. Then they told him how his mother, Taranga, had thrown him into the Sea, and that he had four brothers and a sister on Earth.

“I want to go down to them, and see what the World is like where men live,” he said.

So the gods told him he might go, and that he was to teach men what he had learned in the Heavens; and Maui went down to Earth on the wings of the Wind, and found his four brown brothers playing on the sand.

At first they would not believe he was their brother, and called their mother to drive him away; and his mother would not have anything to do with him, either, until he said : “I am your youngest child, mother, and when I was a little baby you threw me into the Sea.”

Then Maui told his mother how he had been saved by his Ancestors, the gods, and brought up by them in the Heavens; and then his mother knew that he was indeed her boy, and she was very glad, for she had often felt sorry that she had thrown her baby into the Sea.

Then she called him to her, and they rubbed noses for a long time, which is the way Maoris always kiss, and that night Maui slept beside her on a mat, for Maoris do not sleep upon a bed, but on a mat made of feathers or the fibre of the flax plant.

All this made Maui's brothers very angry and jealous. "Our mother never wants us to sleep with her on her mat, or to rub noses a long time. Why should she wish to do so with this little brat?" they said.

But it was not long before they found out that Maui could teach them many things which they did not know before, and so they began to like him. He taught them to make better pots for catching eels; how to make barbed spears and fish-hooks; how to make yams grow, and many other things that Maori boys know now, but did not know then.

All the other boys of his tribe were afraid of Maui, who was so strong and so clever. But they did not yet know that he could do things which no men could do, only the gods in the Heavens.

Now Maui's mother went away every morning at dawn, and often did not come back until evening, and he wondered where she went. He had asked her, but she would not tell him ; and when he asked his brothers, they said:

"We do not know, and we do not care. Whether she goes north or south, it is all the same to us."

They were not good boys, or kind to their mother; but Maui said, "I care, for I love my mother, and I do not like to have her go away alone, and be gone all day.

"Perhaps she goes to the place where they know how to make fire. She goes to some place where there is fire, for the food which she sometimes brings back is cooked.

"I should like to know how to make fire, too. But you are older than I, and you ought to follow our mother."

But his brothers said again that they did not care where their mother went, and they could not understand why Maui should care.

So Maui saw he would have to follow his mother alone ; and one night, when she was asleep, he took away her girdle and the mat she wore by day. In those days Maori women wore for clothes long shawls called mats, that they draped around them. They often wear them in these days, but though they are called mats, they are really

not like a mat at all, but more like the long garments the ancient Romans wore many hundreds of years ago.

So Maui took the girdle and mat and hid them, knowing that his mother would not go away without them, and that only he knew where they could be found. Of course, Taranga looked for her mat when she awoke, but she could not find it, so she picked up an old one and went away. Maui waked up just in time to follow her. Away she went down a fern gully, till she stopped before two large black rocks, and Maui hid in the tall ferns to watch her.

Then Taranga sang a magic song, and suddenly the rocks divided, and she passed through them out of sight. Then they closed up again. But Maui had listened to her song and remembered it, and he went back and repeated it to his brothers, and told them how he had seen his mother disappear between the two great black rocks.

“But why did you not go after her?” they asked.

“You are so clever, and the gods love you.”

“I am going after her,” Maui replied. “I will turn myself into a pigeon, so that, if she sees me she will think how pretty I am, and not be angry with me.”

Once before he had pleased his mother by turning himself into a wild pigeon, like those that fly about in the bush, and she had told him how beautiful he looked.

The next day, as soon as it was light, Maui went to the two rocks, and repeated the magic song he had heard his mother sing. Then the two rocks flew apart, and he saw between them what seemed to be a dark, bottomless pit.

On either side was a fierce spirit. They had hideous faces and tongues of flame; and they gnashed their teeth, raised their huge claw-like hands in the air, and hissed with rage when they saw an unknown mortal.

But when they rushed at him, Maui turned himself into a pigeon, and flew down the dark passage between the rocks. One of the spirits caught at his tail, but only pulled out a few feathers and Maui flew on to the World Below.

Now the World Below was the place where men and women were then supposed to go when they had finished their lives on Earth. It was very much like the World Above, only it was always in twilight, for the Sun could not

shine in there very well.

Maui looked about for his mother, and soon saw her sitting beside a man who he supposed must be his father, but she did not see him. Then Maui took a hard berry in his beak and dropped it on his father's head ; but his father took no notice of it, thinking it was only a ripe berry falling from the trees.

Then Maui let another berry fall, and this time his mother looked up, and saw that it was a pigeon. Now Taranga knew that there were no pigeons in the World Below, and when some people began to throw stones at the bird, but could not hit it, she said:

“Perhaps it is that wonderful boy, Maui. I left him on Earth, but he must have followed me here.”

Maui heard what she said, and cooed softly in reply, and his mother knew his voice and called him to come down to her.

Then Maui came down and turned into his own form again, and stood beside his mother. And his mother told him that his father should sprinkle him with soft magic water that belonged to Tane, the god of Light, so that when he grew up to be a man, he might be able to do great and wonderful things.

Then she told him that he must go where Hine, the goddess of Death, lived. “You must destroy her, and free all mankind from her power,” she said.

So Maui was sprinkled with the magic water; and his father repeated over him a great many magic verses; but unhappily he forgot one, and when he remembered it was too late.

Then he was very sad, for he knew if Maui ever went to the land of Hine, he would not conquer her, but she would conquer him, and he would never come back. Still, it was many years before Maui went to the land of Hine, and before that time he did many wonderful things.

How Maui went to his Grandmother in the World Below, and took away the Magic Jawbone which enabled her to do wonderful things — not without difficulty, however, for his grandmother was a very unpleasant old woman.

While Maui was down in the World Below he learned that his grandmother, Muri, lived there. She was a very unpleasant old woman, but she had a magic jawbone, which made her able to do wonderful things, and Maui thought he would like to get it.

Muri was really a terrible old woman. She would eat up any mortal whom she could catch, and nobody seemed to love her. She lived all alone, though someone had to take food to her every day.

"I mean to get that jawbone," said Maui to himself. "I will take her some food." So day after day he took food and put it near her dwelling, but he never saw her. At last he thought that if he left food at some distance from the place, she would have to come out to look for it. So he did this, and then hid himself and waited. After a while, his grandmother came out, grinding her jaws and puffing out her cheeks. She seemed to think there must be some mortal about, for she sniffed loudly.

First she sniffed to the west, but she could find no one there; then she sniffed to the north, but could find no one there; then she sniffed to the east, but could find no one there; and at last she sniffed to the south, and smelt a man.

Then she made herself bigger and bigger, thinking what a feast she would have. "Who are you?" she cried in a dreadful voice. "The south wind touches my skin. Did it bring you?"

"Yes, it brought me," said Maui.

The old woman was greatly disappointed when she recognized Maui's voice, for she could not eat her own grandson, so she shrank back to her usual size.

"Why do you come here to play tricks on me, Maui?" she asked.

"I came for your jawbone, grandmother; the one with which you do such wonderful things," Maui replied.

"But you are not going to have it," said his grandmother. "I shall not give it to you."

"Very well, then I shall take it," said Maui, and he looked so strong, and the old woman was so weak from going so long without food, that she let him take it.

Then Maui returned to Earth, holding the jawbone close to his breast, and told his brothers all about where he had been, and what he had seen.

How Maui learned the secret of making fire in the World Below— not in a way to be commended, however — and taught it to his people ; relating, as well, the origin of the existing hot places and boiling hot springs in the South Island of New Zealand.

Maui was a very mischievous boy, and in this he was like a great many other boys. One night he got up very quietly, and put out all the fires in the country, so that when the people got up in the morning they could not cook their food, for they did not know how to make fire. There were no such things as matches in those days, and people had to be careful not to let their fires go out. So now they complained a great deal, and made a great noise; but for some time Maui pretended not to know that anything was the matter.

“What is all this noise about?” he asked at last.

“There are no fires,” they said. “Some one has put them all out, and we do not know how to light them again.”

“Why don’t you go to the World Below and get fire?” asked Maui. “They know how to make it down there.”

They said they knew it, but were afraid to go. Then they asked Maui to go, and even offered to go part of the difficult and dangerous journey with him.

Maui knew the way and said he would go, but he would not let anyone go with him ; so he set out for the World Below, and when he got there, he told his mother how he had put out all the fires, and asked her where the Fire-god lived.

His mother was not at all pleased when she heard of the mischief he had done, and told him he would only get into trouble if he teased his ancestor, the Fire-god, for he was a very bad-tempered old fellow. But Maui said he did not care, and started off to find him. Maui soon found out where the Fire-god lived, because of the smoke. He was busy cooking some meat in an oven made of stones which was covered up with a mat. He had just lifted off the meat and was thinking how good it smelt.

This put him in rather better temper than usual, and he turned round to Maui, and said: “What are you doing here, and what do you want?”

“I came to get a fire-stick,” said Maui. The old Fire-god only grunted, and turned to his meat again. Maui waited a few minutes and said, ‘Give me a fire-stick.’”

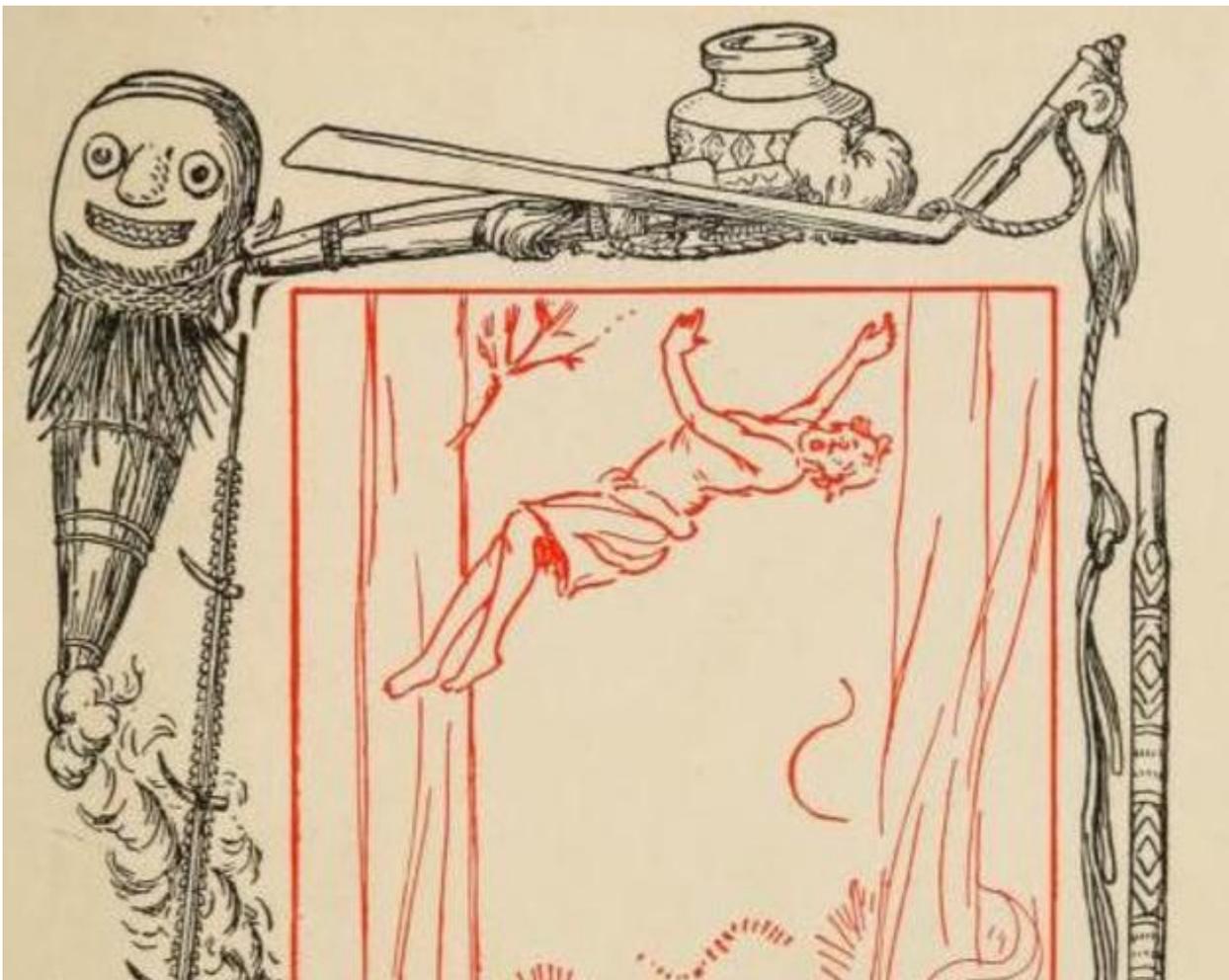
The old man grunted again, but said nothing. “I tell you I want a fire-stick!” shouted Maui so angrily that at last

the Fire-god threw him one to get rid of him. Maui picked it up and went away, but in a few minutes he began to think that it was the secret of how to make fire that he wanted, and not fire only. So he dropped the burning stick into some water and went back to the Fire-god.

“The fire went out because I fell into the water,” he said, holding up his wet hands, which he had put into the water on purpose. “It is the secret of how to make fire that I want to know. Tell it to me.”

The old Fire-god only grunted again, and threw him another fire-stick. Maui took the second stick and went away and put it in the water again. Then he came back and said very angrily, “Tell me how you make fire, or I will make you !” Then the Fire-god became very angry. “You are an impudent fellow,” he said. “I will toss you up high into the air.”

“Tell me the secret of fire-making!” was Maui’s answer. This made the Fire-god still angrier, and he went into his house to put on his magic girdle. Then he rushed after Maui, seized him and tossed him as high as the tallest trees — and you must know that some of the trees were very tall. But Maui made himself as light as a pigeon, and the fall did him no harm. Then the Fire-god got angrier still, and threw him much higher than the tallest trees. Again he fell unhurt, and again and again the Fire-god threw him up, until he was quite out of breath.



“Now it is my turn,” said Maui, and he seized the Fire-god, tossed him clear out of sight, and caught him like a ball when he came down. ” Illustration by John R. Neill. Published in *The Magic Jawbone: A Book of Fairy Tales from the South Sea Islands* (1906) Henry Altemus Company.

“Now it is my turn,” said Maui, and he seized the Fire-god, tossed him clear out of sight, and caught him like a ball when he came down. He did this over and over again, until the poor old Fire-god was quite tired out; and just as Maui was going to toss him again, he cried out: “Spare me, and I will tell you the secret of making fire!”

So Maui let go of him, and the Fire-god showed him how to make fire by rubbing a piece of hard wood on a softer piece, and putting fine fibre between them to catch the sparks made by the rubbing. But Maui was still angry, because he had been obliged to ask so many times before the Fire-god would tell him how to make fire; so he killed the old Fire-god, and, having obtained the secret of making fire by rubbing sticks together, he went back to Earth and taught it to man.

Maui’s parents were very angry with him for having killed his ancestor, the Fire-god, and asked if he had buried him. He told them he had, and then they said he must dig him up and scrape his bones — a Maori custom to this day. Maui did this and put the bones in dry gourds, and rattled them as he had seen children rattle stones. But the Fire-god could not be killed so easily. He called his bones together and took his shape again, and then ran after Maui. Maui picked up a fire-brand and ran as hard as he could along the road to the Upper World; but on his way, in his haste, he set several places on fire, and the flames pursued and scorched him. The other gods heard his cries for help, and sent a deluge of rain, but still some burning places were not put out, and still burn to this day. Now there are a great many hot places of all kinds in the North Island of New Zealand ; but all these things happened in the South Island, where there are at this time several boiling hot springs of water.

How Maui tied Ra, the Sun, to the Earth to make the days longer, and the Moon to the Sun, as well. How he caught all the Winds but one and shut them up in a cave and made them obey him ; and how he rode upon them whenever he wished to do so.

Some time after Maui had taught men how to make fire, he married Hine-a-te, the daughter of the Swamp. Like all Maori girls, one of her chief duties was to have food cooked for her husband when he came home at night ; but sometimes Maui would come home and find his food not ready, and then he would grumble. But Hine-a-te told him the days were so short that she had no time to cook food, and hardly time to do anything ;

and a great many people said the same thing. They complained that the Sun went down and left them in darkness long before they were ready for night to come.

“If that is the trouble, it can easily be arranged,” said Maui. “We will tie the Sun to the Earth, so that he can not travel so fast or so far.”

“Oh, ho!” laughed one of his brothers. “We cannot do that, neither can you. The Sun is so hot you could not go near him ; and if you could catch him, you could never hold him. Then Maui said: “Go and get some strong flax fibre, and I will show you how to make ropes strong enough to bind even the deathless gods.”

So his brothers brought the fibres of the tall flax-plant that grows in the swamps and on the mountain sides, and they plaited many strong ropes, and made nooses with which to catch the Sun-god. Then Maui told his brothers what they had to do. “We must start long before dawn,” he said, “so as to get to the place where the Sun comes up over the edge of the Earth. Then we must throw the rope over him before he knows what we are about, for he is stronger and moves more quickly than all the other gods.”

So Maui and his brothers got up in the middle of the night, and went a long way over the plains to the place where the Sun rises, and watched for him under a shelter made of the leaves of tree-ferns to keep off the fierce heat. Maui carried with him the jawbone that he had taken from his grandmother, and his brothers carried the ropes.

“We must wait until the Sun’s head and shoulders are well above the Earth,” Maui told his brothers, “and then we will throw the nooses over him. You must hold the ropes tight while I beat him well with my grandmother’s jawbone till he is so weak that we can easily tie him down.”

When it was time, up came the Sun, all glorious and beautiful, with bright and flaming locks. Maui and his brothers kept still until the Sun’s head and shoulders were well above the Earth, and then they managed to throw the nooses over his head and pull the ropes with all their strength, while Maui beat him with the jawbone.

In vain the astonished Sun tried to break the ropes that bound his mighty limbs, but they were magic ropes and could not be broken. “Why do you do this?” asked the angry Sun. “Why do you beat me so? Do you not know that from me you get all the daylight and the warm sunshine?”

Still Maui continued to beat him, and his brothers still pulled at the ropes. “What have I done?” cried the Sun

angrily. But still Maui beat him and beat him, until he begged for pity. Then he told him that he always would travel too fast, and that they would have to tie him up, so that he could not go so fast or so far away. And though he did not like it at all, they bound him to the Earth ; for as he was all tied up with the magic ropes, and sore with the beating they had given him, he could not resist any longer. And the strong ropes with which Maui and his brothers bound Ra, the Sun-god, can be seen at this day through the clouds stretching from the Sun to the Earth. But men do not know that they are the ropes tying down the golden Sun-god, and they call them “beams of light.”

And now that Maui had bound the Sun, his flaming locks no longer fell upon the Earth in great masses and scorched it. Instead they were spread out and fell on the world in tiny golden threads of sunshine, and people did not have such hot summers, and the days were not so short, but long enough to suit every one. The next thing Maui did was to tie the Moon to the Sun, so that when the Sun set, the Moon would be dragged up to light the Earth, which before had been left in darkness quite all night. And then he caught all the Winds except the West Wind, which is the most powerful Wind in New Zealand, and shut them up in a cave and made them obey him. Often he would ride on the South Wind and on the North Wind in pursuit of the West Wind, and sometimes when the West Wind blew gently, men knew it was because it was tired out flying from Maui.

How Maui, being taunted with laziness, made a big fish-hook out of his grandmother's Magic Jawbone, went a-fishing one fine morning and caught an Island. Also an account of the way in which his greedy brothers formed the mountains and valleys of the North Island of New Zealand.

Now for all Maui could do such wonderful things, he was really a very lazy fellow, and did not like to help with such work as had to be done every day. One day his brothers said to him, “Maui, you never go out with us and help catch fish for food.” And as a great many other people complained of his laziness, at last Maui said to his brothers: ‘Have I not done a great many things that you could not do, and do you think that getting food is too hard for me? ‘You are always fishing ; but the truth is, there is too much water and too little land. I will go with you and show you what I can do.” You see, at that time there was only one large island in New Zealand, instead of two, and although it was a very large island, it seemed a very little bit of land for all that great ocean. So Maui went out with his brothers in the canoe to fish, but first he made a big fish-hook out of his grandmother's jawbone. “I want to fish in deep water,” he told them. “Go far out to sea.” When they had gone out a long way, Maui told them to throw their lines into the deep water, and in a minute countless fish came around the canoe, which was soon filled. “Now,” said Maui, “we will see what I can do.” Then he drew from under his mat the line

with the magic fish-hook on it, and smeared the hook with blood from his own finger for bait, for his brothers would not give him any bait. Then he let his line down into the deep blue Pacific, and sang a magic song, and presently the line was roughly pulled about, the waters rose up in great waves, the canoe was rocked violently, and his brothers were afraid he had brought them there to be drowned.

But Maui went on pulling at the line and singing, and all the time the waves rose higher and higher. At last he called out to his terrified brothers: "Here is the fish I came out to catch!" and with many struggles he pulled out the whole North Island of New Zealand, which to this day the Maoris call "Te Ika a Maui," which means the Fish of Maui. As for the canoe, it lay high and dry upon the middle of the North Island. "Now," said Maui to his brothers, "do not meddle with this fish until I come back. "I am going to offer the firstfruits of this land to the gods, and they will scrape with shells the evil spirits who tempted us to take this sacred fish out of the deep pit below the sea. When I come back we will divide the land." But just as soon as Maui was out of sight his brothers began to quarrel as to how they would divide the prize, which they were trying to cut up with their knives.

The fish wriggled with its head and tail and fins while the brothers hacked at it, and in this way the mountains, the gullies, and the rough cliffs of the North Island were formed. When Maui returned, he was very angry, and said to his brothers: "If you had not been so greedy and quarrelsome, my land would have been smooth and level." And this is the reason why the North Island of New Zealand has so many mountains and gullies and rough places, and is not a level land at all.

A short chapter relating the disposition Maui made of his two mischievous sons, being incited thereto by a desire to possess their jawbones. An interesting relation concerning the Evening Star, the one that comes out first of all, and the Morning Star that shines after all the other stars have left the sky.

Maui was SO pleased with the fish-hook made cut of his grand-mother's jawbone, that he thought he would like to have some more jawbones, so as to have hooks of different sizes. He had two very mischievous sons; but though he was so mischievous himself, he did not like other people to be like him in this respect. So one day he said to his sons: "You talk too much and work too little, my sons. I am going to send you up into the Sky. Perhaps you will keep out of mischief up there, and do some work."

"Besides," he added to himself, "I want your jawbones, for I think they are good ones." Now the sons thought it would be a very fine thing to go up into the Sky, so they said: "Very well, father."

"It will not be best for you to be together there," he added, "for you would only get into more mischief." That

very night Maui tossed one son high into the Sky, and he became the Evening Star, the one that comes out first of all, and you can see him shining there every fine evening. The other he tossed up at dawn, and he became the Morning Star, the star that you see shining after every other star has faded from the Sky. The Evening Star has to watch to catch the last rays of the Sun as he goes down at night; and the Morning Star has to shine upon the road along which Tane, the god of Light, comes, and heralds the rising of the Sun.

How Maui, in defiance of his father's warning, went in search of the terrible Goddess Hine, and was conquered by her through the involuntary agency of a little bird. Not an especially edifying end for Maui, although one in keeping with his mischievous and eventful life.

So the years went by, and Maui was always doing some mischief or other, a nuisance to both men and gods, just as he had been when a boy. At last Maui felt that he was getting old, and as he was too proud to die like other men, he remembered what his mother had said to him years before when he visited her in the World Below. So he went to her again, and said: [65] "I am going to kill Hine, the goddess of Death." His father, who had been listening, said: "My son, you cannot do that. She is too powerful."

"But I think I can," insisted Maui. "When she is asleep I will jump into her mouth ; and if I can once get inside of her, take out her heart and come out of her mouth again, she will never again have power over men." "My son," said his father, "you cannot do that. If man once goes into the jaws of Death, he never comes back."

"But I shall try," said Maui. "Did I not nearly strangle the Sun-god, and the goddess of Death is not so terrible or so strong as he." All the time his father was thinking of the magic songs that he had forgotten to sing over his son when he received him in the World Below, and they were the only songs that could have protected him against Death. He knew that if Maui went to find Death, he would never come back alive, and so he begged him not to go. But Maui was obstinate, and only said: "Tell me what Hine is like, and where to find her."

"If you see the lightning flashes on the horizon, then you have seen the lights of Hine's eyes, his father replied. "Tell me more," said Maui. Then his father said, sadly: "Her teeth are jagged and sharp, and her jaw is like that of the great shark, and no man returns who once enters."

But nothing could prevent Maui from going in search of Hine, the Terrible One. And he went alone, for no one would go with him. Now, although Maui had often been cruel, he had always been kind to the birds, and they loved him, in spite of the way he punished them when they did not obey him. One day when he was thirsty, he called to the saddle-back to bring him some water, but it would not, and he threw it into the water. The bird

made a great noise over this, and all saddle-backs have been very noisy ever since.

Then he called the hi-hi or stitch-bird, but it would not go, so Maui threw it into the fire, and some of its feathers have been yellow flame-color ever since. Then he asked the tiny bush robin, and it brought the water, and Maui made the feathers over its bill beautifully white as a reward. But the bush robin was so tiny that it could not bring enough water, and so he called to the pukeko, or swamp-hen, and she filled her ears with water, and brought it to him ; and to reward her, Maui pulled her legs out long, so that she could easily get her food in marshy places. And the swamp-hen has long legs to this day. So it was, that when no one else would go with Maui, some of the birds who had been listening, as little birds always do, said they would go with him.

And the little robin, and the big robin, the sweet-voiced lark, the twittering fantail that spreads out its tail like a fan, the swamp-rail and many other small birds came and said to Maui: "We will go with you," and they flitted along beside him, so that he should not feel lonely. After he had traveled a long, long way Maui came to the abode of Hine, the goddess of Death; but he could only see her open mouth, and as there were no lightning flashes from her eyes, he knew that she must be asleep. Then he told the little birds to be very quiet, and on no account to laugh, lest they should awaken Hine, the Terrible One.

"We will try to be quiet," the birds replied, "but we are afraid you will be killed. Do take care, friend Maui." Then Maui took off his mats, and, after again warning the birds not to laugh, he jumped head first into the mouth of Hine. His head was down Hine's throat, and his legs were hanging out of her jaws, and he looked so funny that all the little birds had to keep their mouths shut so as not to laugh aloud. It was too much for the little swamp-rail, however, and he laughed out so loudly and merrily, and made such a noise, that it wakened Hine.

She suddenly snapped her mighty jaws together and cut Maui right in two at the waist, and his legs fell to the ground. The little birds flew away at this frightful sight, to tell the sad news of Maui's death, and they sang no more for many days. As for the little swamp-rail, he was quite cured of laughing. Since that time Maui has dwelt in the Heavens above; and when you see in the sky the hooked tail of the Scorpion, you will know that you are looking at what the Maoris believe to be his wonderful fish-hook.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com