“We must hurry.” Keku‘iapo‘iwa’s long black hair streamed past her face as the canoe surged through the swells toward Kohala. “I can feel the baby.” She placed her hand beneath her heart. “He is ready to be born.”

The canoe rounded the northern tip of the island of Hawai‘i. Storm clouds rolled in front of the setting sun. Gusts of wind spun the sea into sharp peaks as the paddlers fought to keep a straight course. At last the canoe plunged through the surf and scraped the sand.

Darkness came with the rising wind. Thunder crashed and lightning pierced the sky. This was ‘Ikuwā, the Hawaiian season of stormy weather. The comet, which had blazed in the sky the
night before, lay behind the clouds. A chief would soon be born, for comets were signs of important births.

And Keku‘iapoiwa’s baby would be a chief. Not only were she and her husband, Keōua, ali‘i, chiefs of high birth, but many believed that the baby’s true father was none other than Kahekili, the great warrior-chief of Maui. Half his body was tattooed black from head to foot, giving him a ferocious look. For sport, he liked to dive from a high cliff several hundred feet into the sea below. He was a fierce warrior in battle, and his name meant “thunder.” A son of Kahekili would have great mana, divine power from the gods, and this baby would have double mana, since both Keōua and Kahekili were chiefs.

Now, on this night of ‘Ikuwā, a baby’s cry carried through the sound of surf and falling rain. The chiefess Keku‘iapoiwa held the baby in her arms. She smiled as she watched him wave his tiny arms and legs. “You are like a little crab,” she crooned. “I will call you Pai‘ea. But now,” she said sadly, “I must send you away so that Alapa‘i doesn’t find you.”

Alapa‘i, the king of Hawai‘i, had been warned by a prophecy. His high priest, a kahuna, had predicted that a child would soon be born who would one day slay all rival chiefs and conquer all the islands. Alapa‘i ordered his warriors to find the baby and kill him. “Nip off the wauke bud while it is still young,” he said to them, “lest it grow into a strong plant.”

Keku‘iapoiwa had made plans so that Alapa‘i wouldn’t find her baby. She wrapped her little son in a cloth of kapa and laid him in a basket made of olonā fibers. She handed him to her trusted friend, Naeʻole, who was a chief of Kohala.

“Here, Naeʻole,” she said. “We have no time to lose. Take the
baby and run as fast as you can to the cliffs of ‘Awini. Hurry, before we hear the pounding feet of Alapa’i’s men as they come to snatch the newborn chief. Take him there and hide him until it is safe for him to return to me. Hurry, and do not let yourself be seen. The rain will wash away your footprints.”