

THE GOLDEN LEHUA TREE

INTRODUCTION

MOTHER WAS *ONO* (hungry for) sweet mountain watercress.

“Sure” said brother Towhead. We saddled our horses and meaded *mauka* (toward the mountains) above the reservoir of *Kamuela* town.

I loved my horse *Kahua*. He was a Lord Brighton thoroughbred, stood 18 hands high, and was single gaited! What a joy it was to ride him, like sitting in a comfy easy chair, the hoofs all hitting. It made me sit tall in the saddle and survey the town nestled in the green crazy patterned landscape below. It was an exhilarating gallop to the top, riding easy up the gentle slopes. Now we turned laughing, gasping, happy!

We had empty *poi* bags tied to the pommels of the saddle. They were the old fashioned cloth *poi* bags like half-size pillow cases of strong muslin. When we got to the reservoir we found the large leaf, sweet mountain watercress, sometimes tough to pull up by the roots. We filled our bags and thought how happy our dear mother would be to have so much sweet watercress. We could hear her light laughter and we spoke about it, laughing out loud. As we turned to begin the downward trot, I saw a brilliant yellow tree halfway down the slope.

“What is that tree?” I asked my handsome brother.

“That bright yellow one? A *ma-ke* (mah-kay). Die, dead tree” he replied. “You wanna see it?”

Can't be *ma-ke*, die dead tree” I said. “It's too bright and yellow.”

Were we surprised when we circled it and all but embraced it with wide open arms. It was a vibrant golden *lehua* tree, the '*obi*'a *mamo* - the first golden *lehua* tree we

had ever seen! How gorgeous! I began to pick branches and lay them across the saddle until the pile came up to my chin. I would have enough to box and send to several friends. We had found the rare golden *lehua*!

Later, when my children were little, I thought it would be nice for them to hear stories with a Hawaiian background, and from this charming *Kamuela* experience I told them the story of the golden *lehua*.

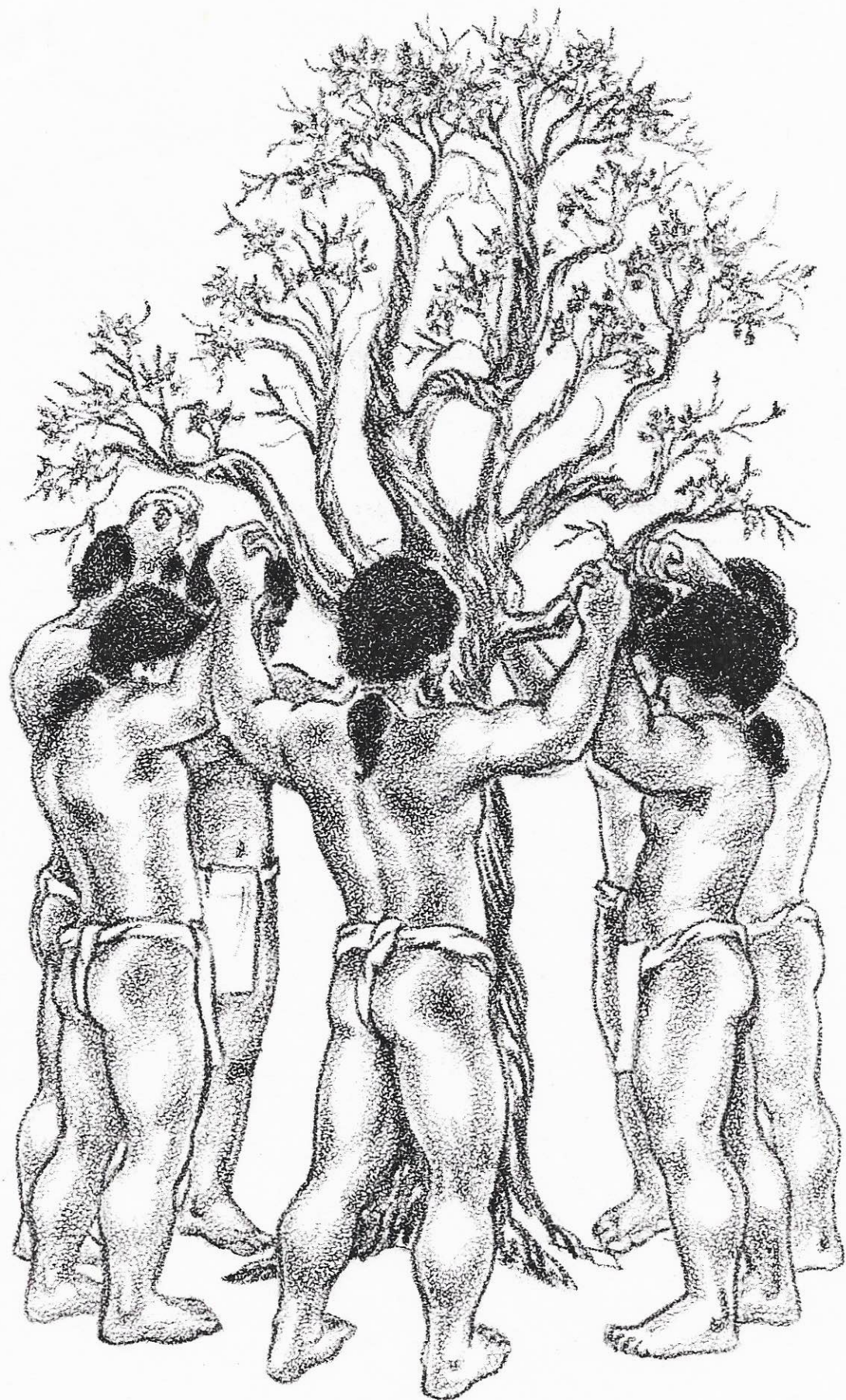
THE GOLDEN LEHUA TREE OF HAWAI'I

ON THE ISLAND of *Hawai'i*, the largest island in the Hawaiian group, there are miles and miles of *lehua* trees growing in great numbers. They grow out of the lava rocks, covering the land with beautiful soft green leaves and brilliant puffs of red fluffy blossoms.

At the time of our story, the forest was aglow with *lehua* trees, all in bloom. In the midst of the forest, there was a little *lehua* tree that was very, very sad. Its limbs drooped, almost touching the ground, and its branches had very few leaves. Every night, the sad *lehua* tree could be heard sobbing and sighing: "Oh dear, I wish I were beautiful like all the other trees." And then, the little *lehua* would sob and sob until it fell asleep.

One night when the forest was very quiet and a beautiful full moon was shining brightly, the *menehune* (elves) heard the little tree crying. They looked and looked, and when they found the sad *lehua* tree they formed a circle around it and asked, "Little *lehua* tree of the woods, what makes you so unhappy?" The tiny tree answered, "I wish I were as beautiful as the other *lehua* trees in the forest."

Then it cried and cried until it fell asleep.



When they found the sad lehua tree they formed a circle around it.

The *menehune* disappeared into the forest to think about the unhappy tree and, when they saw that the little tree had fallen fast asleep, they silently tiptoed back and joined hands in a circle around it. They bowed their heads and said a very special blessing for the tree. As soon as they had finished the blessing, they quickly scampered away to hide behind the rocks and other trees.

When dawn came into the sky, all the trees began to awaken and whisper excitedly to one another. They were saying, "Oh, look everyone! Will you look at the little *lehua*!"

The noise awakened the sad *lehua* tree. It rustled its branches and, to its great surprise, it found itself covered with beautiful green leaves and the most glorious *lehua* blossoms. But its were not red blossoms like those of the other trees; they were beautiful golden blossoms.

"Oh dear," said the little tree, "Will you look at me! Am I not the most beautiful *lehua* tree in all of *Hawai'i*?"

The *menehune* were hiding behind nearby rocks and, when they saw the happy little tree, they just couldn't be quiet any longer. The forest was filled with the tinkling sound of their joyous laughter.

"Oh," said the *lehua* tree.

"That sounded like the laughter of the *menehune*." Then it looked down at the soft earth near its roots and saw many tiny footprints. "Oh my," it cried with happiness.

"The *menehune* were. I can see their footprints. They have given me a special blessing. I am truly the happiest *lehua* tree in all *Hawai'i*!"

That is why to this day, the Golden *lehua* tree is the most beautiful *lehua* tree in the forests of *Hawai'i*, for it was given an everlasting blessing by the Hawaiian *menehune*.