Where Have All the Fish Gone?

A Retelling of a Hawaiian Folktale

Many years ago in Hawaii there was a shark named Mano. Like many sharks back then, Mano could take the form of a human. He enjoyed life as a shark, but he wanted to experience more. He wanted to see a human village and find a human friend.

“Son, that may not be a wise idea,” warned his mother. “Humans might not care for your shark habits.” Still, Mano wanted badly to see how humans lived. He would just have to be very careful.

One day, while he swam near the shore, he heard a cry for help. It was a young woman named Makana. Makana swam in the ocean each morning. That particular day, the waves were rough. She could not get back to shore. Mano saw his chance! He took his human form and carefully rescued Makana from the rough water.

On the shore, Makana said, “Please tell me your name, kind stranger. How can I ever repay you?”

“I am Mano. I ask for no repayment other than a visit to your village.”

“Of course! My friends and family will be grateful for the help you gave me.”

That night, the caring villagers made a feast to celebrate Makana’s rescue. There were plates piled with sweet fruit, boiled taro root, and fresh fish. Mano ate several helpings of fish. He was, after all, as hungry as a shark.
Makana asked Mano to stay. He agreed because he enjoyed the village. The villagers were great fishermen and showed Mano secret places in the lagoon that held the most fish. At night, hungry for more fish, Mano would take the form of a shark, dive into these secret places, and carelessly gobble up the fish. He knew it was greedy, but he could not help himself!

The villagers noticed that the fish were disappearing. Where were all the fish going? Soon there would not be enough to eat. Finally, Mano told Makana that it was he who he had eaten the fish and explained who he was. Unable to look at Makana’s saddened face when she heard the truth, he took the form of a shark and jumped into the ocean. “If I had not been so greedy, Makana would still be my friend,” thought Mano as he swam away quickly.

To this day, sharks know that it is their greedy habits that cost them friendship with humans. No shark has ever dared to take human form again.