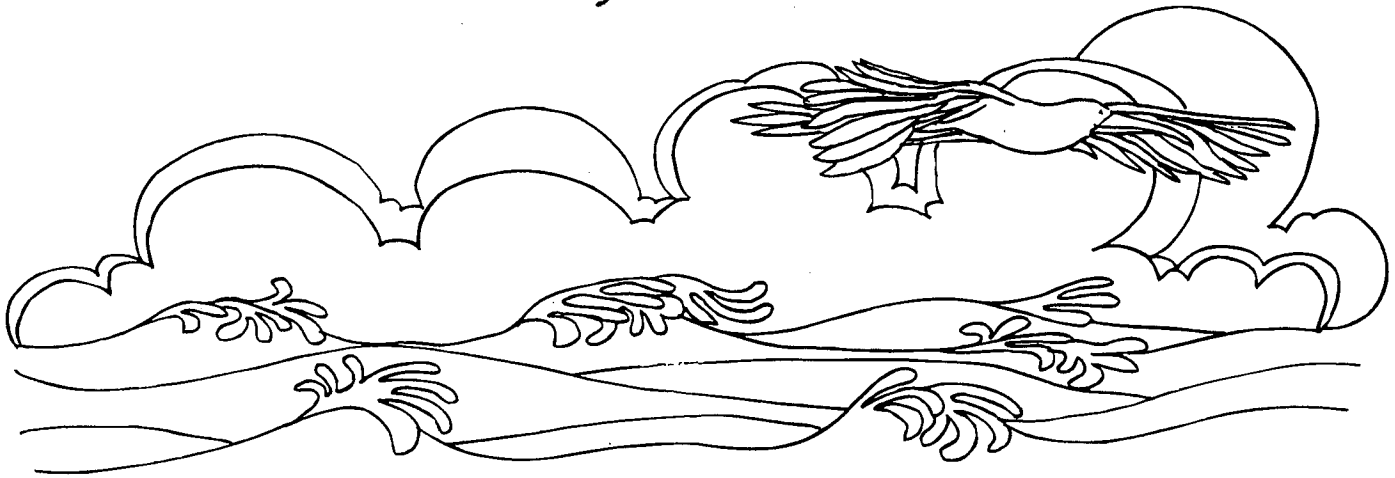


# Sedna, Goddess of the Sea

## An Inuit Myth from the Arctic



**S**edna lived with her father in the land of ice and snow. Their tent was near the sea. Most of the year, a cold, bitter wind swept across the frozen water and ground. Sedna and her father went hungry when it was too cold to fish.

There were two months in the summer when the ice melted. During that time, men from nearby settlements would paddle their kayaks to Sedna's house and ask to marry her. She refused them all—young, old, short, and tall. She felt none of them were good enough for her. "I will wait for someone who is rich, handsome, and very generous," she said.

One day a seabird stopped to rest near Sedna's house. He watched her as she sewed a fur parka. "She is more beautiful than any bird I have seen," he whispered to the wind. "I will ask her to marry me."

The bird flew back across the water to his home. He changed his form into a man and made a kayak. He returned to Sedna's house and called to her from the water, "Sedna, come with me to a warmer land. You won't need to work, and you'll sleep in a warm bearskin bed in my fur tent. I am a great hunter, and you'll never be hungry again. My friends the birds will see that you have everything you need."

Sedna could see this man was different from the others. He wore a white and gray cloak. His beaklike nose made him seem more handsome than any of her other suitors. A warm house and bed, lots of food, and a handsome husband were what she wanted.

"Daughter, don't be hasty," warned her father. "What do you know about this man? You would be better off as the wife of an Inuit hunter. Stay here with me."

Sedna didn't listen. She left with the handsome stranger. They paddled to a distant, rocky island. There the winds blew as fiercely as they had around her old home. The fur tent she was promised was a smelly house made of fish skins. There were cracks and holes everywhere. The bed was a hard mat covered with damp feathers. Her handsome husband changed back into a bird.

All day long the birds fought over each scrap of raw fish. They screeched and pecked at Sedna when she took a piece for herself.

"Be content with your new home," her husband said, "and groom my handsome feathers."

Sedna wished she had listened to her father. "If he knew how I suffer," she thought, "I know he would come for me."

The following summer, Sedna's father paddled his kayak in the direction Sedna had gone. He found her on the rocky island.

"Father," she called, "take me away from here!"

Sedna's father pulled his kayak out of the water and went with her to her tent. She bundled up her parka and bone needles. The birds had stolen most of her clothes. Her only pair of boots served as warm nests.

Sedna and her father hurried to the kayak. Before they reached the water, Sedna's husband swooped down on them. He beat her father with his wings and pecked at him. Sedna's father killed the seabird with his hunting knife. Then he and Sedna paddled out to sea.

In the middle of the water, the wind and waves rocked their boat. Birds screeched overhead and threatened them. With the power of their wings, they created a stormy sea.



"The birds are angry because you killed my husband," said Sedna. "What can we do?"

"If they think I have thrown you into the water to drown, they will fly away. I will rescue you later," said her father.

Sedna begged her father to let her stay in the kayak, but he threw her into the icy water and paddled away. "See!" he yelled. "I have sent Sedna to her death. Leave me in peace, and I will return to my home."

The seabirds continued to circle. Sedna grabbed the side of the kayak, tipping it to one side.

"Let go!" said her father. He pushed her fingers away. The ends of her fingers fell off and swam away as whales.

Once more, Sedna grabbed the kayak. Her father shoved her fingers into the water. The rest of her fingers fell off and became seals. Sedna drifted down into the sea.

The birds thought Sedna had drowned, and they flew back to their island. Sedna's father pulled Sedna into the boat. When they arrived home, she jumped back into the water and became the goddess of the sea. She lived there with her children, the seals and whales.

When Sedna was displeased with the hunters, she told the sea animals to hide, and the people went hungry. Each time the animals disappeared, the shaman sent his spirit to comb the tangles from Sedna's hair. This pleased her since she didn't have any fingers to hold a comb. When the shaman's spirit assured Sedna that the people would be respectful, she let the whales and seals return.

