

# Sedna

## An Inuit legend

*In every sea culture in the world there exists a story of people who are half human and half sea creature. The legends vary from place to place, but the essential story is similar. This Sedna story comes from Baffin Island, Nunavut. She has various names in different dialects, but this is the easiest to pronounce.*

This is the story of a young girl named Sedna who lived a long time ago in a small arctic village on the edge of the ocean. They lived a life of hardship on the land, always trying to find enough food, preparing skins for clothing and their qammaq (tent). Each day was filled with tasks for their survival, and yet the village was a happy place where songs were sung, games were played and the heartbeat of the drum could be heard through the long nights.

One day there was a tragic hunting accident in which Sedna's parents and several of the best hunters were killed. It fell to the others to care for Sedna and to provide her with food as she was too young to care for herself. The village came upon hard, hard times, there was very little to eat and few skilled hunters left among them. A meeting was held at which the Shaman (spiritual leader) announced a sacrifice was to be made to please the Creator - Sedna was a burden and would have to die (so that others could survive).

The next night the village elders took her far out to sea in their boat and with their prayers on the wind, threw her into the icy grey waters. The waves at that moment began to grow in intensity, the boat was rocked to and fro. Sedna cried out, pleaded for her life and desperately tried to climb back into the boat. The men took the ulu and sliced off her fingers at the first joint. The finger tips fell down into the water and Sedna flailed in the waves. She tried again to climb in and they cut her fingers off at the second joint. The water was an angry boil now, tossing the boat like a toy. Thrice, she tried to climb into the boat - they cut off the rest of her fingers and Sedna sank silently down into the cold, dark depths of the ocean. The water was still and flat as glass. The elders sang their song of loss and grief and rowed for the shore.

Beneath the dark water, a transformation was taking place. Sedna watched as the pieces of her fingers changed and grew into new sea creatures - seals, walrus, and whales. Sedna herself transformed into a strange and powerful sea animal with long flowing hair, a sleek body and a powerful tail. She became the Goddess of the Sea and she controlled all life that was within it. Sedna made the tide move and the sea animals did her bidding. This meant Sedna could also determine if a hunt was to be successful or not. The power was in her hands.

The villagers regard Sedna with great respect - for if they do not gain her favour they may easily die of starvation. Once a year the Shaman must swim to her, down into the cold watery depths, and once there, sing to her and comb her long hair to remove the memory of their wrongdoings.