

Maloo and the Jewel

Mab O'Farrell



An Eskimo Fairy Tale

Away up in the far North, Maloo worked and played among the frozen waste lands in the very tip of Alaska. His igloo, where he lived with his brothers and sisters, was bigger and better than any other, for his father was very skilled. It was made of tight packed snow like all the others, and was as hard as bricks. Inside it was very warm and cozy and Maloo was well used to the smoke from the fire, though most of it rose straight up through a hole in the roof.

Maloo was small in stature, with a chubby, round, shiny brown face and black snapping eyes that always seemed to be laughing. That was all you could see of him for he was covered, from head to foot, in skins. Even the boots on his feet were made from reindeer skin, and they were warm and snug, and kept his feet perfectly dry. Maloo was growing quickly, but he was also very quiet and shy, and didn't talk to the other eskimo children very much. Because of that he had more imagination than his playmates and loved to wander off by himself to see his pet seal, whom he had christened Taki when it was quite tiny. He had found it in a crevice of an ice floe with one flipper injured. Maloo had carefully bandaged up the tiny flipper and brought Taki back to his igloo for safety while the flipper healed. They had become very attached to each other.



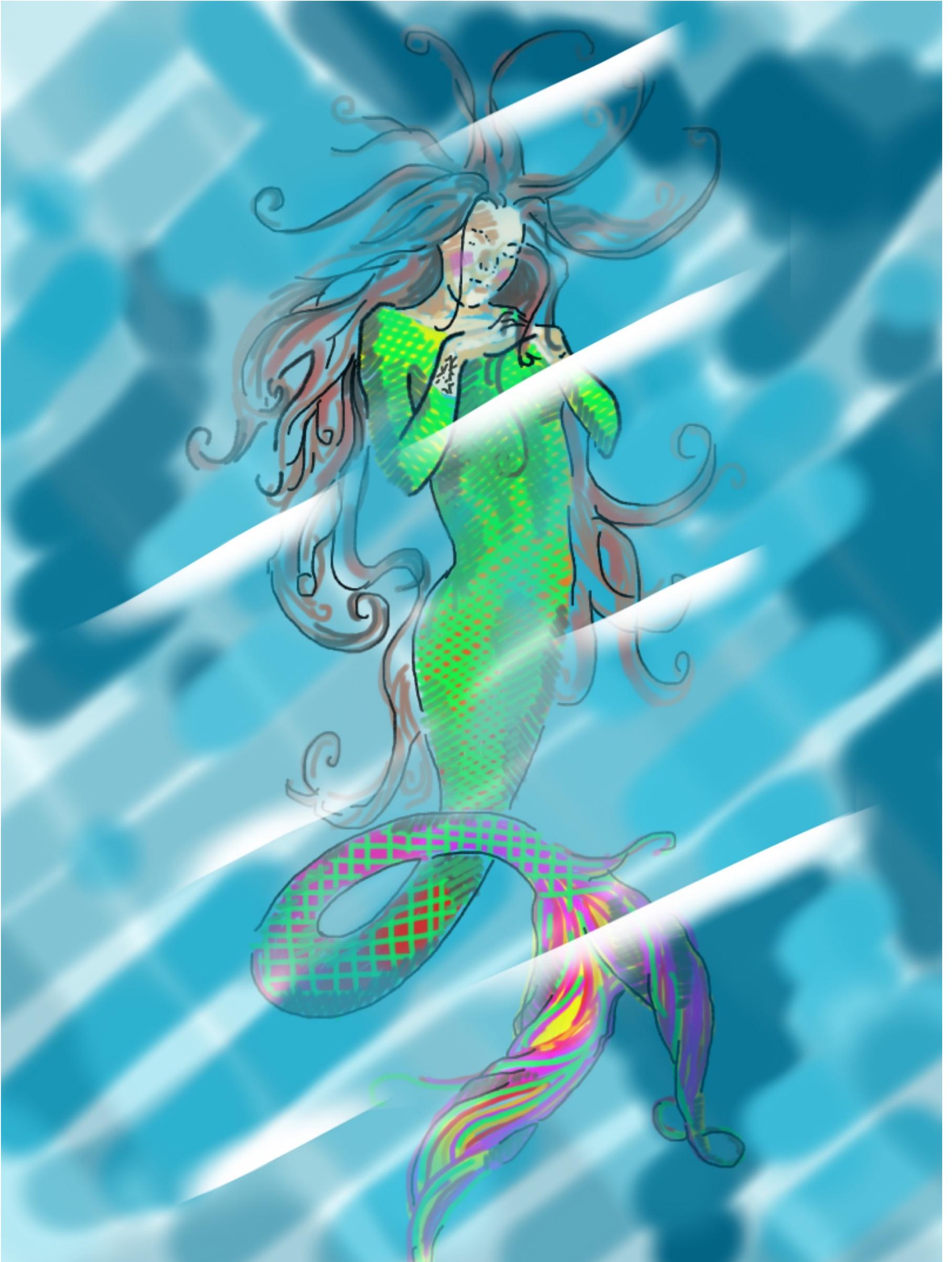
Taki was a huge seal now and lived with the herd out to sea where an enormous ice floe rose out of the sea. It was just like an iceberg, and was as big as a castle and had turrets and pinnacles all around. The bottom part was dotted with violet patches which Maloo knew were caves where the sea creamed and foamed. Maloo told Taki that one day he would visit the huge ice floe, and would go right into the caves. Taki only grunted and said: "It holds a jewel. Many times have I seen it, but no man has yet set eyes upon it". "A jewel", said Maloo "then I will surely find it, and you will come with me". Taki only grunted, and with a quick flip of his big tail was soon far out to sea. Maloo shook his fist at him and laughed and ran back to eat his evening meal of a nice big piece of whale blubber.

The next day he dragged his father down to the beach asked him imploringly to borrow the kayak in which they went fishing. He promised that he would bring it back safely, and full of fish. His father laughed, then consented, for he knew that Maloo was a wonder with fish and could catch them even with his bare hands. He warned him only not to go too far out among the great ice floes, for there the currents ran strong and swift and he might be swept away. Maloo nodded his head and eagerly climbed into the kayak.

He paddled skilfully, and soon made his way through the inlets of the creek and out to the open sea.

He paddled swiftly and soon the kayak was dancing across the waves towards the huge ice floe which rode in majestic splendour on the deep green sea. As he neared it he saw the crags and crevices shining in the light. They were covered with birds which screamed at him as he drew near. He paddled around the deep caverns which pitted the sides and into the largest of these caves he manoeuvred his kayak. Maloo rested on his paddle and gazed about in the greenish light. Suddenly he caught his breath, for there, inside the wall of ice was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. Her eyes were closed and her arms were folded, and as he looked closer he saw that she had a fish's tail. She was trapped, frozen solid in a prison of clear, hard ice. She lay there, suspended with her long brown hair seeming to float around her.

“A mermaid! A mermaid!” Maloo exclaimed to himself, and straight away decided that he must set her free so that he could be her friend, for she must know many secrets of the world in which they lived. Mermaids were seldom seen, and then only at a distance, for they were the shyest of all the creatures of the sea. She was so beautiful and her mouth smiled softly as if in sleep. “She is dead” mourned Maloo,



“how shall I bring her to life?” Determined to find out, he sailed away.

First of all he asked Taki. “I have found your jewel, Taki” he said, “but she is dead. If only she was alive and I could set her free from her icy prison”. Taki only shook his head and grunted. “What would you want with a mermaid? She would drag you down into the depths of the sea. In any case I only know that she lies there. How to release her I know not”.

Maloo could not rest. Find out about her he must. Again he paddled off, and visited the long beach where the penguins gathered to feed their young. He walked among them and laughed, as he always did to see their important looking waddling walk, looking like little fat old gentlemen in black and white. He walked up to the biggest and fattest of them all: “Kamoo, tell me about the imprisoned mermaid in the ice floe yonder. Can she be brought to life? How can I free her?”

Kamoo only grunted and squawked most unmusically and replied in his joking way, for he was quite a comedian and he stuttered: “W-w-ell now, M-m-maloo if I knew that I



m-m-might have her for m-m-myself. But no, I w-wouldn't be b-b-bothered with a m-m-maid. She'd eat all my f-f-fish", and he quickly dived down into the snow, made a hole in the ice and caught up a big fish which he gobbled up on one gobble. Maloo turned the penguin over on to his back and laughed to see him helplessly kicking his legs in the air, looking sillier than ever.

He wandered off and sat down by a snowbank and thought hard. Suddenly he jumped to his feet: "I have it" he thought "I'll ask Haloa, the whale, he ranges the sea for many miles and may be able to tell me all I need to know. He is very wise".

He begged the kayak from his father again and started off once more. He paddled for many miles until his arms ached, but no sigh of Haloa did he see. He passed several shoals of porpoises and once, in the distance, saw an enormous sea lion, but no sign of Haloa. Weary and discouraged he rested his arms on the side of the kayak and gazed out to sea. The sun had sunk and the stars came out, shining and far away. He felt very sad and was just taking up his paddle to return when he saw a plume of water rising from the sea.



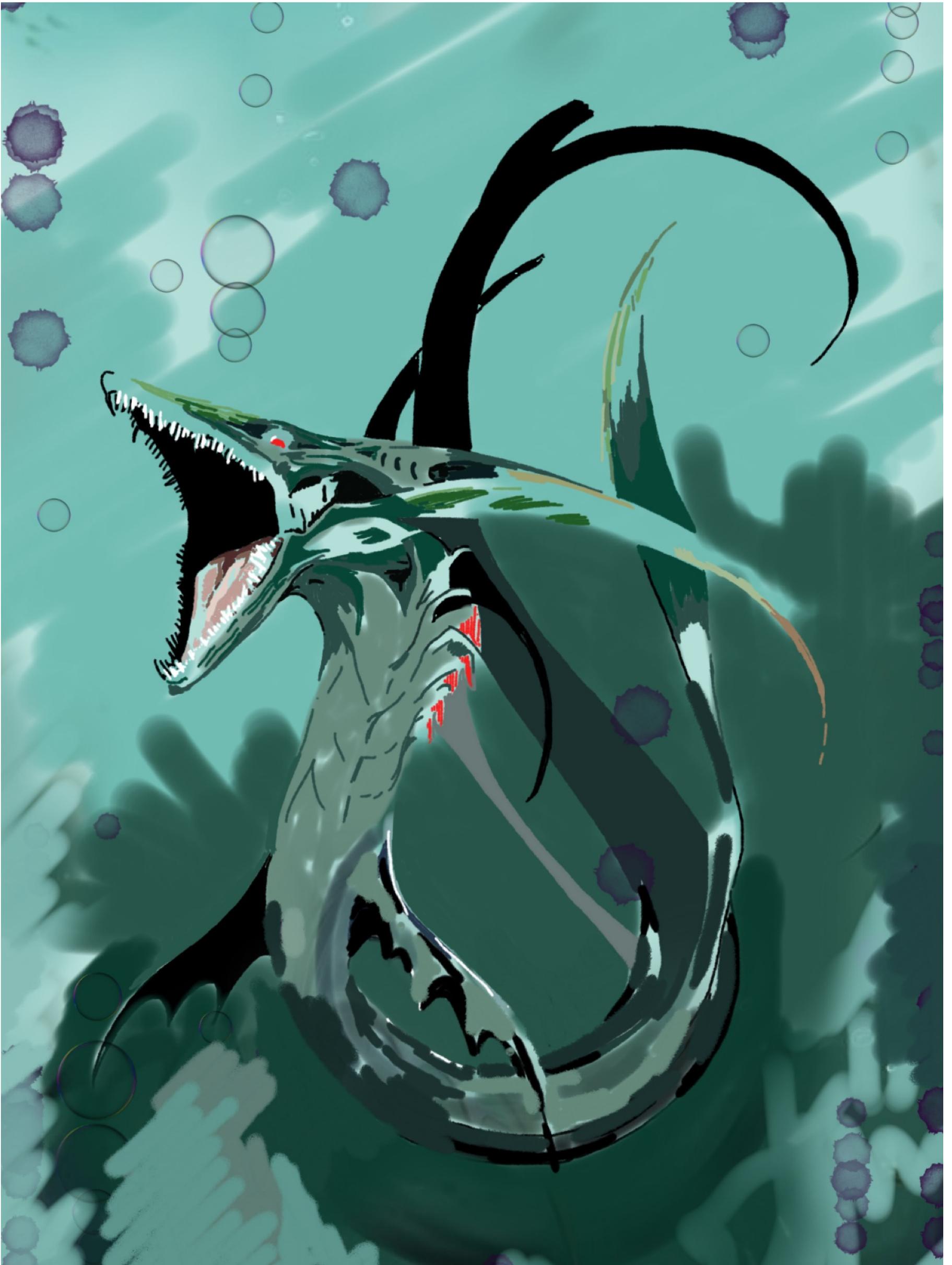
“Haloo! Haloo! “, He waved his arms and shouted as loudly as he was able. “Haloo! Haloo!” Surely the whale would never see him! He nearly fell over the side of the kayak in his frustration. Presently a dark shape rose to the surface not far from him. He watched as it rose little by little until the whole of its huge body rested on the surface of the water. It lay there like a dark, majestic island.

Maloo paddled towards the whale, for he had no fear. He knew that of all the inhabitants of the sea Haloo was the gentlest in spite for his great bulk. He remained perfectly still until Haloo was alongside. He climbed out of his kayak, and up onto the big whale’s back. He knelt down and whispered his request into Haloo’s ear. Haloo seemed to understand, and at last he spoke: “I know the maiden. She is the daughter of Faloo, the Sea-King, and has been imprisoned in the ice floe for many years. Kraken, the great sea-serpent, who knows all the magic of the seas, has imprisoned her there because she refused to be his bride. She is not dead, but lies there with life suspended until someone as brave as a sea-lion shall dare the perils of the deep, face the sea-serpent in his den and ask for the release of the maiden. So far, no one has attempted to do that and so she lies there, locked in the ice, waiting”.

Maloo put his face close to Haloa's ear again: "I am not afraid, Haloa, show me the way and I will dare the perils of the deep". For so much did Maloo want to free her from her icy prison that he cared not what happened to him. "Are you afraid to enter my mouth?" said Haloa. "No, for I know you will not harm me" replied Maloo. "Wisely and bravely spoken. I will be there not far from you. Face Kraken boldly and ask for the life of the mermaid".

Maloo dropped from the whale's back and swam around the huge head. Haloa opened his enormous mouth and Maloo closed his eyes. When he opened them all was black around him and it was soft and warm, like lying on a pile of reindeer skins in a warm corner of the igloo. He felt a swaying motion and held his breath. Soon he felt a rush of water and opening his eyes saw that he was floating close to the sandy bottom of the sea. Around him waved huge branches of sea-weed and in and out of big rocks darted strange and colourful fish.

He walked a little way along the sandy bottom and suddenly came upon a big cave. Just within the entrance, all curled up his enormous coil lay Kraken, the sea-serpent, horny and scaled. He lifted his head and one long coil rose. His fiery eyes glared angrily at Maloo and the long coils swayed



swiftly towards him. Maloo stood firm and mustering all the confidence that he could, made his request for the life and freedom of the mermaid. Kraken swayed back and forth and continued to glare towards Maloo, and uncoiling his enormous length moved swiftly towards him.

Instantly Maloo felt himself back in the darkness and he knew that Haloa had swallowed him once more to protect him from Kraken. They rose to the surface and the whale opened his mouth. Maloo saw that they were near the ice floe where the mermaid lay imprisoned and close to the entrance to the big cave. He slid from Haloa's mouth and swam into the cave. He looked eagerly towards the ice wall, but the ice had melted and there was no sign of the mermaid. She had disappeared.

Maloo felt sick with disappointment and swam out of the cave. There he saw his kayak, and beside it the huge shape of Haloa: "She is gone, Haloa, all was in vain".

"Return to your home" said Haloa "and quickly, for your family await you. They are worried about you, and have given you up for lost".

Maloo paddled sadly homewards and landed at the village. On the beach all his sisters and brothers, together with his parents, awaited him, looking sadly out to sea. When they saw him they waved and shouted, and as he grounded his kayak, ran towards him: “We thought you drowned, Maloo. You have returned safely and all is well”.

Maloo smiled at his parents and his gaze wandered past them to a lonely figure that stood apart. He motioned to her and looked questioningly at his father who replied: “She is a stranger, Maloo. She must have wandered from some other tribe and lost her way, for she arrived yesterday, cold and hungry, but would speak no word from whence she came”.

Suddenly Maloo felt a great hope surge up within him. He walked a few steps hesitantly towards her. The lovely face looked out of the fur parka and smiled at Maloo and he saw that it was the face of the mermaid but the tail was gone and in its place two little feet swathed in warm seal-skins. Maloo gave one great shout and ran towards her, bursting into excited speech as he did so. The maiden smiled and held out her hands to Maloo, while the others looked on astonished.

So, to Maloo's igloo came the young girl and played and worked with him until, in the fullness of time, they were old enough to marry. To not a soul did they tell the great secret which they both shared, though often they would paddle out to sea in the kayak and call to Haloa and thank him for his gentle kindness to them.

Of course, they lived happily ever after.

THE END.

