

Mouse Woman
and the Monster
Killer Whale

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5 

MOUSE WOMAN and the MONSTER KILLER WHALE

IT WAS IN the time of long ago, when things were very, very different. Then, supernatural beings roamed the vast wildernesses of the Northwest Coast. And Mouse Woman kept a close watch on what these nar nauks did to the Real People.

At that time, the Real People were often out on the sea in their great totem-crested canoes. For they were sea hunters as well as fishermen and land hunters; they were families who moved from place to place by water. And because the sea was deep and cold, because there were wild storms and fogs and rip tides, the Real People moved in awe of the Ocean People who could

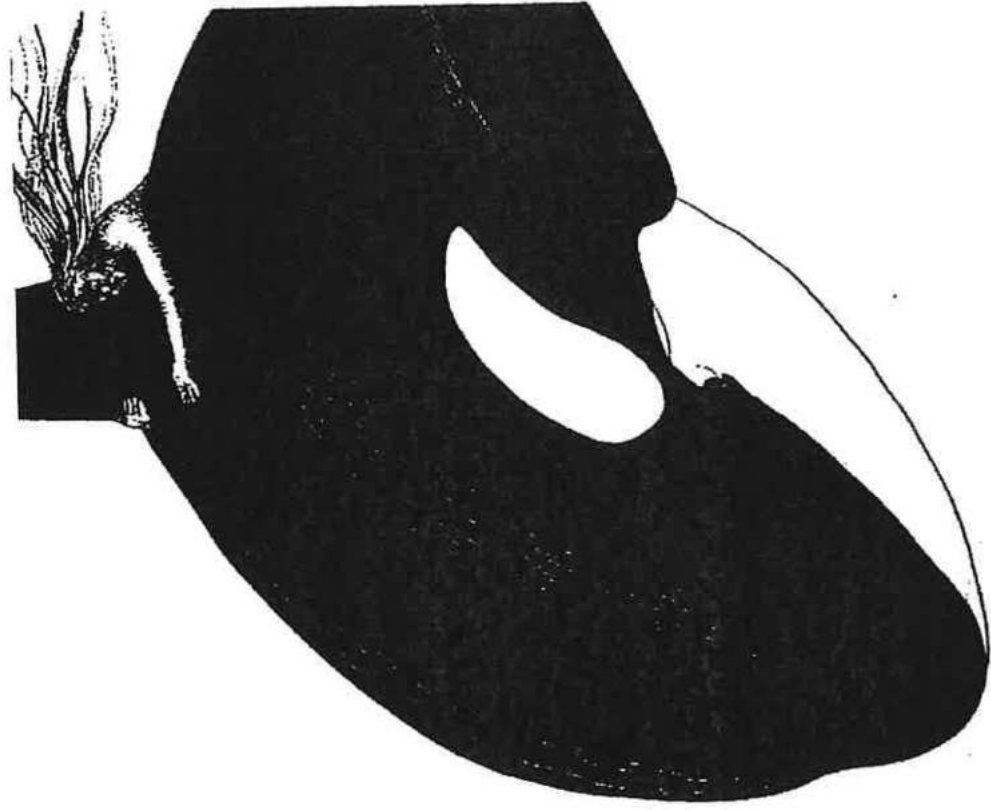
help them or harm them. People were careful never to spit into the sea. They were careful to offer gifts to the Great Killer Whale and the Great Sea Lion and the Great Sea Otter and other spirit beings. And they were even more careful not to offend the Sea Monsters. Their fear of Great-Whirlpool-Maker and the Giant Devilfish and the Five-Finned-Whale and the Monster Killer Whale kept them waiting eagle down — the symbol of peace and friendship — on certain waters.

And it kept Mouse Woman watching the sea with her big, busy, mouse eyes, even though the sea was none of her business.

At the moment, it was the Monster Killer Whale who had her nose twitching. He had taken to snatching beautiful young women away from their proper husbands.

"It's time somebody did something about that monster," she told herself, without a thought for his size and her size, or a thought for the sea being none of her business.

Now at that time the lustrous black pelts of the sea otter were in great demand for chief's robes. And one young sea hunter of the Wolf Crest, Na-na-simgat, was so successful in catching them that he may have angered the Great Sea Otter. And he may have helped the Monster Killer Whale to capture Na-na-simgat's beautiful young wife.



Whatever the reason, a very strange thing happened. One day a white sea otter came into the bay in front of Na-na-simgat's village. And for several days it swam about close to the shore.

"A white sea otter?" people murmured, with some awe. For no one had ever before seen a white sea otter.

Finally, Na-na-simgat could not resist the challenge. He went out on the bay and shot the white sea otter. And though he was careful to send his arrow through the tail, not to harm the rare pelt, though his men were careful in taking it ashore and even more careful in skinning it, there were blood stains on the white fur.

"Such beautiful fur!" his wife said, stroking the lustrous white pelt. "I shall stay here and cleanse it in the sea."

So it was that while the others went back to their houses, she stayed alone at the edge of the sea, washing the white fur in the splashing surf. Concerned for the strangely strong tug of the sea, she stood on one edge of the fur, to anchor it.

Yet the sea tugged it from her.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I can't lose this beautiful skin." So she waded out into the water and grabbed it.

But again the tug of the sea caught it. And this time it pulled the fur out into deep water.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I can't lose this beautiful skin." So she swam out after it. And just as she was reaching for it, a killer whale surfaced right under her and carried her off.

Terrified, she clung to the whale's dorsal fin while the great black and white beast raced away through the waters.

After some time, when she did not return to the house, Na-na-simgat was anxious about her. He ran down to the beach. But his wife was gone.

What could have happened to her?

He raised the alarm in the village, and people searched the shoreline. They went out on the water. But there was no trace of her, anywhere. And no trace of the white sea otter pelt.

Na-na-simgat was desolate. For he loved his wife dearly.

What could have happened to her?

Clearly there was only one way to find out. So he called the famous shaman.

The shaman put on a dancing apron that clattered with bird beaks. He put a crown of grizzly bear claws over his long straggly grey hair. He picked up his medicine rattle and his white eagle tail feather. Then, as clappers clacked and plank drums thudded hypnotically through the big windowless house, he began to circle the fire in a wild leaping dance. The dance grew wilder and faster, wilder and faster, wilder and faster, until suddenly the shaman collapsed and lay as though dead.

The people hushed themselves. For the shaman's spirit self had left its body to make a spirit journey in search of the lost wife.

At long, long last he seemed to stir. So the people began to chant softly, luring his spirit self back to its body. Then he sat up. And his eyes were a wild glitter.

"She has been carried off to the Mountain of Qwawk," he said.

People gasped in horror. For the Mountain of Qwawk was in the spirit world under the ocean. It was the home of the Monster Killer Whale. And it was guarded by a fearsome double-headed monster. The people almost held their breath to hear what else the shaman would tell them.

"The gateway to the Mountain of Qwawk is marked by two great kelp heads," he went on. And his eyes were still a wild glitter. "But they can be found only with the help of spirit beings. And they can be reached only by a certain canoe that will be found on the shore at the end of a journey."

People gasped. For it would be a fearsome journey, into the spirit world. All eyes turned on Na-na-simgat.

"I have the Marten and the Swallow," he reminded them boldly. They were his two guardian spirits, invisible to other people, but visible to him. "They will help me, first, to find the canoe, and then to find the two great kelp heads that mark the gateway to the Mountain of Qwawk."

To strengthen his own spirit power for the journey, he fasted and prayed. Then he chewed devil's club and cleansed himself with sea water. He put many pieces of mountain goat fat into a large pouch; for it was well known that the Ocean People always craved fat. And into a smaller pouch he put the sacred herbs that his spirit guardians had given him. He would need much spirit aid on so perilous a journey.

When all was ready, he started out.

His glossy little Marten went ahead of him, sniffing the earth and the air for what his nose could tell him; while his graceful Swallow wheeled and darted above him, riding the invisible air waves as he sought the way to the only canoe that could reach the two great kelp heads that marked the gateway into the Mountain of Qwawk. The lovely bird brightened the world for Na-na-simgat with flashes of green and violet, and the shining whiteness of its underbody.

They travelled for a long, long time. Sometimes Na-na-simgat grew weary. But always his longing for his beautiful young wife urged him on and on. Always his glossy little Marten went ahead, sniffing the earth and the air for what his nose could tell him. And always his graceful Swallow wheeled and darted above him, seeking the way to the only canoe that could reach the

two great kelp heads that marked the gateway into the Mountain of Qwawk.

Then one day he sensed excitement in the sniffing and wriggling of his glossy little Marten. He saw joy in the swoops and sweeps of his graceful Swallow.

They had found the canoe.

It was a strange canoe, carved and painted so powerfully in sea patterns that its seaweeds seemed to wash and wave; its starfish seemed to move among them.

"It's only the reflections of the moving water," Na-na-simgat told himself. But he stepped into the canoe with awed respect for its spirit power. His glossy little Marten bounded onto the high prow to sniff the ocean breezes. And his graceful Swallow wheeled and darted above them, riding the invisible air waves.

Na-na-simgat grasped the paddle. But the strange canoe seemed to move almost of itself, following the flight of the Swallow. It moved off from the shore, out through the narrow channel, out past the green fringe of islands, out beyond the reefs where the surf was as white as the flashing sea gulls. It moved out into the vast lonely spaces of the ocean. On and on and on and on it went.

Then once more Na-na-simgat sensed excitement in the sniffing and wriggling of his glossy little Marten. He saw joy in the swoops and sweeps of his graceful Swallow.

They had found the kelp heads.

They were strange kelp heads; dark as a wet seal's body; wide as an eagle's wingspan; rising and falling in the mighty sea swells, in the quiet of the lonely ocean. And nearby was a floating platform of tangled kelp tubes: dark as a herd of wet seals; wide as the wingspan of many eagles; rising and falling, washing and weaving in the mighty sea swells, in the quiet of the lonely ocean.

"PHUUUUUUUUUUUUU!"

The terrifying sound made Na-na-simgat jump. "PHUUUUUUUUUUUUU!" Like the screaming whistle of a thousand killer whales shrieking through their blow holes.

"The blow hole of the Mountain of Qwawki!" he murmured as he saw the dark peak of the mountain under the water. Swallowing his terror, he peered down below the two great kelp heads, and he caught his breath. For there was a ladder. The two great kelp heads were the top of a kelp ladder, a ladder that moved with the movement of the ocean.

That was the way into the Mountain of Qwawki; the way to the house of the Monster Killer Whale. And somewhere that house was guarded by a fearsome double-headed monster. The sea hunter's shoulders sagged in despair.

Then they lifted and squared with purpose. That ladder was the way to his beautiful lost wife.

"Wait here for me," he said to his guardian spirits. For they could go no farther with him.

He tied the canoe to the floating platform of tangled kelp tubes, and he dived into the sea and swam toward the fearsome ladder. Before he reached it, though, he creaded water while he filled his lungs with sea air. Then he reached for the ladder.

But just as he was reaching for it, a killer whale surfaced right under him and carried him off.

Terrified, he clung to its dorsal fin as the great black and white beast circled through the waters. Then, expecting a dive, he took another gulp of sea air.

The killer whale dived. And Na-na-simgat, still clinging to the dorsal fin, felt the rush of the water. Almost before he could blink his eyes, he was flung off, through an opened doorway. And the door closed behind him fast, like the shut of a clam shell.

He was alone in a strange world. Alone in the spirit world of the Ocean People, under the ocean.

There were trees, but not trees as he knew them. For they seemed almost to wash and wave, as though an invisible sea moved through them. And there was a marsh at his feet, a marsh with reeds that also seemed to wave and wash as though an invisible sea

moved through them. It was strange and terrifying.

But there was no sign of the fearsome double-headed monster. Perhaps he was watching from beyond the waving trees. Na-na-simgat swallowed.

Then he saw something moving in the reeds.

"Geese!" He scarcely breathed it.

But they were not geese as he knew them. These geese were grubbing among the reeds, bumping into one another and hissing angrily as they bumped.

Peering closer, he saw that they were blind. Their eyelids were closed, as if by some spell.

With instant compassion, he opened his small pouch, took out a few leaves of his sacred herbs, chewed them, spat on his hands, and murmuring softly to one goose, he touched her eyelids with his fingers.

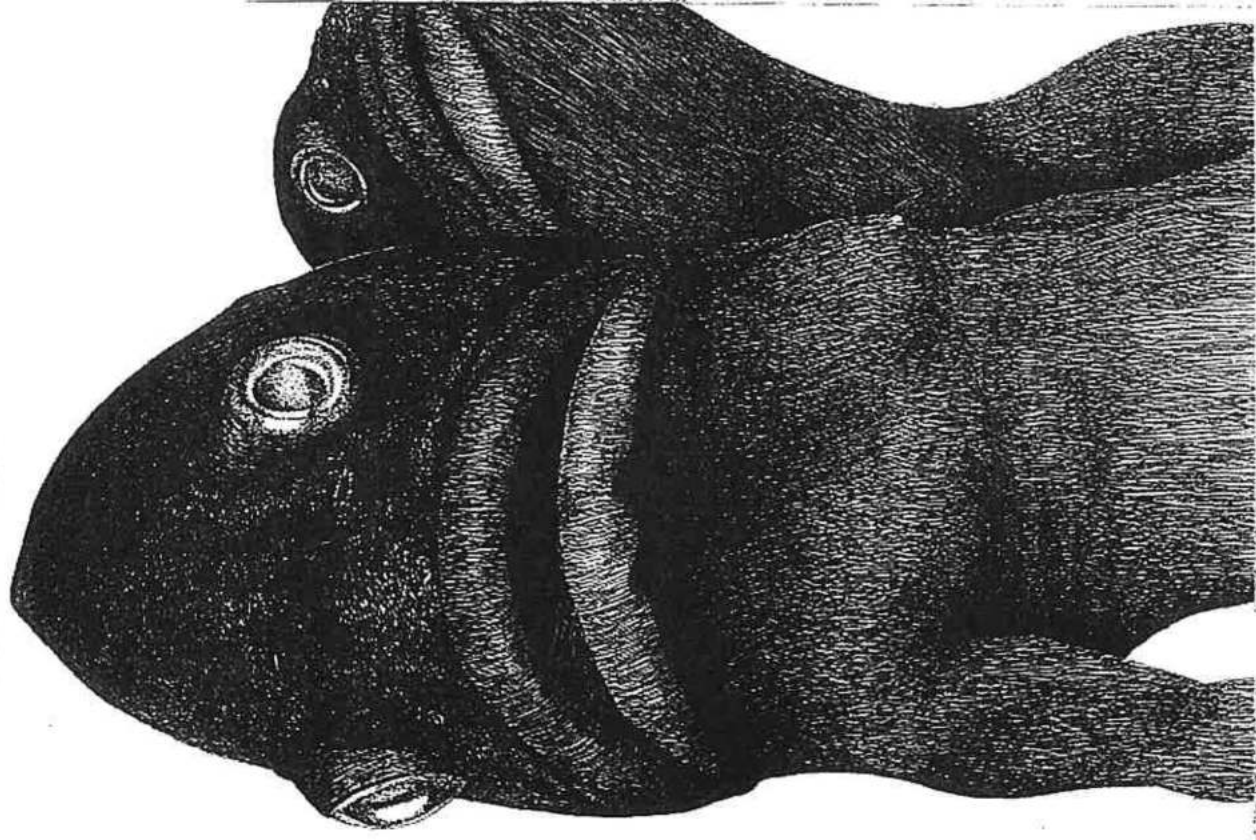
Her eyes opened.

"I can see!" she cried out, speaking like a Real Person. Then she hushed herself and glanced fearfully about, as if fearing that somebody heard her.

"I can see!" she said again, in a grateful whisper.

So, murmuring softly to all the geese in turn, Na-na-simgat touched their eyelids. And all their eyes opened.

"I can see!" each cried out, speaking like a Real Person. Then each hushed herself and glanced fearfully about, as if fearing that somebody heard her.



At last all could see and speak.

"Once we were women," the first goose whispered to Na-na-simgat, "carried off to be the wives of the Monster Killer Whale. But as soon as we were no longer young and beautiful, we were made slaves. Then changed into geese, blind geese who would be startled by any stranger who came along and so give the alarm to our master's guard." Again she glanced fearfully about, as if fearing that somebody heard her.

Then she stiffened. All the geese stiffened. They stretched out their necks and hissed toward the place where a path led through a narrow cut in the rocks.

"Dzenki!" the first goose warned Na-na-simgat, while she and the other geese went back to grubbing among the weeds. Sometimes they bumped into one another and hissed angrily as they bumped, acting as if they were still blind, as if nothing had happened.

Na-na-simgat hid himself behind a clump of ferns that waved as the trees and the reeds waved, as if an invisible sea were washing through them. And he almost held his breath when he peered out through the tall fronds.

Soon he saw Dzenk emerging from the cut in the rocks. Dzenki! The Monster Killer Whale's guard. He was a fearsome being, like a man, yet strangely like a fish, too. He had two heads. And the heads kept looking

around in different directions, the fishy eyes peering this way and that way.

Na-na-simgat shivered. For it was well known that Dzenk had a terrible power. If he grew angry, he could swell up to block any passage. Nobody could get past him.

SQUEAK!

Na-na-simgat jumped at a sudden sound behind him.

"Have you any fat?" a voice said, so suddenly that he jumped again. It was a small, squeaky voice that seemed to come from down low behind him. Yet when he glanced back, there was nobody near him.

"Have you any fat?" the voice asked again. And though it was still small and squeaky, he knew it for the voice of a Chief-woman.

He glanced back again. And there was Mouse Woman, watching him with her big, busy, mouse eyes. "Have you any fat?" she demanded. And now her nose twitched.

"Yes, Grandmother," Na-na-simgat answered, as soon as he was over his surprise. And he indicated the large pouch that was crammed with pieces of mountain goat fat.

"Give it to me, my dear!" Mouse Woman ordered. "For I can make better use of it than you can."

"Yes, Grandmother," he agreed. He gave her the pouch, though it seemed a heavy pouch for such a tiny nar-nauk. But as he did, he glanced fearfully toward the spot where Dzenk was now sitting against a tree, waving with the tree's waving.

"Leave him to me, my dear!" Mouse Woman ordered. And she bustled off to speak to the fearsome monster who was like a man, yet strangely like a fish, too. His two heads were still looking around in different directions. Until one of them saw Mouse Woman.

"You!" that head thundered; while both faces scowled at the busiest of busybodies. The sea, after all, was none of her business.

"Fortunately for you, yes," she answered, taking a piece of mountain goat fat out of the large pouch.

The monster's four fishy eyes looked greedily at the fat. His two tongues licked his four lips as the tiny nar-nauk began rolling the fat in her hands in a very peculiar manner. When she held it out to him, he snatched it and put it into one mouth . . . then the other mouth . . . then the first again, as if neither mouth could bear to be without it.

Then Na-na-simgat, peering through the fern fronds, saw a very strange thing happen. The transfer of the fat from one mouth to the other grew slower and slower. The fishy eyes glazed with sleep. The two heads began

to nod. And the monster began to snore, with a snore that was like thunder.

Na-na-simgat shivered, listening to it from behind the fern fronds.

But Mouse Woman soon stopped his shivering. "Now be on your way!" she ordered. She pointed to the path that led through the narrow cut in the rocks. "And find what you came for!" She gave him back the large pouch.

Na-na-simgat went on his way, alert for what he might find beyond the narrow cut in the rocks. And soon he found himself following a path through a forest of trees that waved as the other trees had waved, as if an invisible sea were washing through them.

He had not gone far into the forest before he came, suddenly, to three small men who were cutting down an old hollow hemlock tree.

At sight of a stranger, they dropped their axe and huddled together.

"We're just getting wood," one of them said.

"For our master," another added quickly.

"And it must be dry hemlock or he'll punish us," the third said.

They were the strangest looking men! The color of a red cod. They had huge heads tapering down into narrow bodies without benefit of a neck or shoulders.

Their lower jaws jutted ahead of their wide mouths, and their bulbous eyes bulged in their ugly flat faces.

"Go on with your work," Na-na-simgat said kindly. And the three tripped over roots in their rush to get the dry hemlock for their terrifying master. The one with the axe hit the hollow tree with such energy that his axe broke.

Now the three really huddled together.

"Our master will punish us," all three of them blubbered.

"Not if I can mend the axe," Na-na-simgat said kindly.

All three stopped blubbering. All three opened and closed their wide mouths as they tried to think of what they might say.

"Your master is the Monster Killer Whale?" Na-na-simgat asked as he took a pinch of sacred herbs out of his small pouch.

All three nodded their red bodies, while their wide mouths still worked to say something.

"And he has captured a beautiful young human for a wife?" Na-na-simgat asked as he started to chew the herbs. All three nodded their red bodies, while their wide mouths still worked to say something.

"And you will help me if I help you?" Na-na-simgat bargained when he had spat on his hands.

All three nodded their red bodies while their wide mouths managed to cry out, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" And now that they had finally found their voices, they jabbered together.

"He's going to turn her —"

"Into what he is."

"So she won't grow old and —"

"Have to be turned into a goose."

"A blind goose."

Hearing them as he rubbed his hands over the broken axe, Na-na-simgat's eyes flashed. His mouth clamped shut.

Then the parts of the axe came together. As good as new.

Grabbing it thankfully, the three slaves stumbled over roots in their rush to get the dry hemlock for their terrifying master. Not until it was ready did they listen to the plan for the rescue of the beautiful young wife. And as they listened, they nodded their red bodies in agreement while their wide mouths worked to impress the plan on their minds.

"I will take the water to the fire," the first slave said, to be sure he had the plan straight.

"I will put my wood down close to his water," the second slave said.

"And I will start to throw my wood on the fire,"

the third said. "Only I will trip over his wood and knock over his water."

"Which will make a great fog," Na-na-simgat went on, "so I can snatch up my wife." His voice was strong. But his eyes were anxious. For he did wish he had a good way to get into the house. He did wish he had a good way to warn his wife not to seem to recognize him or else not to cry out and resist when somebody grabbed her whom she did not recognize as her husband. Most of all, he did wish he had a way to put the Monster Killer Whale to sleep as Mouse Woman had put the guard to sleep — even if the snoring might deafen him.

The third slave's eyes were as anxious as Na-na-simgat's. "I do hope I can trip," he said.

"Oh, you'll trip," the sea hunter assured him. He only wished everything else was as sure as the slave's tripping. For all three slaves were masters at tripping.

"But now, what'll they do with the killer whale robe?" the second slave wondered.

"And with the dorsal fin they're making?" the third added.

"What robe? What dorsal fin?" Na-na-simgat asked them.

The slaves told him about it as they all followed the path to the Monster Killer Whale's house.

"They're making a killer whale robe for your wife."
"And a dorsal fin."

"So they can turn her into a killer whale before the Monster takes her for his wife."

Before Na-na-simgat could say that this would never happen, another voice spoke up, a small, squeaky voice that seemed to come from down low, behind him. "Wáiti!" the voice said.

"Mouse Woman!" he cried out, thankful that she had turned up again. He spun round. And there she was, looking up at him with her big, busy, mouse eyes.

"Hide behind the house, my dear!" she ordered, in the voice of a Chief-woman. And her nose twitched.

"Yes, Grandmother," Na-na-simgat answered. As he neared the house, he crept around to the back and watched through a big crack. Mouse Woman had taken over!

Then he caught his breath. For he saw his wife, warming herself by the fire. She looked very forlorn there in the vast murky house of the Killer Whale Monster. But, even as he watched, a mouse scurried up onto her shoulder. He saw his wife start. Then he saw her stand very quietly, alert for what was to happen.

Mouse Woman had taken over.

Mouse Woman had indeed taken over. Suddenly, there she was, confronting the Monster who sat at the

rear of the fire. He was like a giant man, yet like a whale, too, with his small eyes and his enormous mouth set with conical teeth.

"YOU!" he thundered, glaring at the tiny narnauk.

"Fortunately for you, yes," she answered. "For there is fat in this for you."

"FAT!" The Monster sat up. And his huge mouth slavered. "Where is the fat?" he thundered at her.

"A grandson has it," she answered calmly. She did not say whose grandson. "And he wishes to feast you."

"A GRANDSON?" the Monster roared, clearly angry that anyone had managed to get past the guard, Dzen. Then his mouth slavered again. "Tell him to bring the fat in!" he ordered.

Mouse Woman bustled toward the door. The watching sea hunter slipped around the house to meet her; while the three slaves just stood there with their wood and water, waiting for their part in the rescue of the beautiful young wife.

Mouse Woman whispered to the three small men who were so strangely like red cod. Then she turned to Na-na-simgat. "When the time comes, give the fat to me, my dear!" she ordered. "For I can make better use of it than you can." Her tiny nose twitched.

"Yes, Grandmother," he agreed gratefully. And he followed her into the vast murkiness of the Monster

Killer Whale's house. He kept his eyes carefully away from his wife as he followed the tiny narnauk to the rear of the fire.

"Sit down, Grandson!" the Monster Killer Whale invited. His mouth slavered as he watched the young man take the large pouch from his waist and hand it to Mouse Woman.

She opened the pouch, rolled the pieces of fat in a very peculiar manner, put the fat in the fire, spitted it out again, and . . . and a very strange thing happened. Where there had been a small pile of mountain goat fat, now there was an enormous pile. All around the fire, wide, fishy mouths were slavering.

Soon the Monster Killer Whale and his relatives were greedily chewing the fat. As they chewed it, the chewing grew slower and slower; the fishy eyes glazed with sleep; heads began to nod, lower and lower.

The young man held his breath.

Then — before the monsters were really asleep and snoring — the three slaves stumbled and bumbled in with their wood and water, terrified of the Monster Killer Whale, terrified of his relatives, terrified of not doing their part right.

Now Na-na-simgat really held his breath.

The first put his water near the fire.

The second put his wood near the water.

And the third, lurching to throw his wood on the fire, actually did trip over the other wood and knock over the water.

There was a great hiss. A murky fog filled the air around the fire.

Na-na-simgat leaped up. He snatched up his wife's hand. And the two of them raced for the door.

But the Monster and his relatives were not quite asleep yet. Jerked upright by the commotion, they staggered to their feet with screaming whistles, like a score of killer whales shrieking through their blow holes. They bumped and jostled and staggered after the young couple. Their commotion gave the alarm to other relatives who were doing things outside.

These relatives took out after Na-na-simgat and the beautiful young wife he was stealing away from their own beloved Monster.

The couple had a good head start. But as the chase swept along the path like a gale through the forest, the relatives began to close the gap.

The chase swept on and on. Then Na-na-simgat saw the narrow cut in the rocks. And his heart fell. For he saw Dzenk, too.

And Dzenk saw them. Rudely roused from his sleep

by the commotion, the Monster's guard staggered into the narrow cut in the rocks. Charged by his own anger, he began to swell up.

He would block their passage. Na-na-simgat groaned.

But a gaggle of geese, no longer blind, hissed at the Monster's guard. They flew at him. They pecked at him from all sides and from all heights. And the failing guard, looking this way and that way to fight off the attack, knocked his two heads together with such a crack that he fell down.

While the avenging geese kept the monster busy, Na-na-simgat and his wife clambered over him and around him. Then wild with anger, Dzenk regained his feet. But now his own anger defeated him. For he swelled up so big that he stuck fast in the narrow cut. And the thundering relatives could not budge him to go after the escaping couple.

They were at the doorway of the Mountain of Qwawk.

But how could they open it?

They both sagged in despair.

How could they get out?

"Leave it to me, my dears," a squeaky little voice said. The most wonderful, welcome, thrilling, squeaky little voice they had ever heard.

"Yes, Grandmother," they both gasped in relief.

The tiny narnauk touched something. The door opened for an instant — the instant they needed. Then it closed behind them, fast, like the shut of a clam shell. And they were out in the sea, at the foot of the kelp ladder.

They saw the ladder, but they saw something else, too. Killer whales! Coming at them from all directions, with their mouths open.

At that desperate moment, a wonderful thing happened. Shoals of red cod shot into the space between the killer whales and the young man who had been helpful to three captured Red Cod People, who had been turned into slaves by the Monster Killer Whale. In a great darting, glinting red mass, in a beautiful ripple of fins, they WHOOSHED the young couple upward, sending them on their way to the surface.

Na-na-singat saw the undersurface of the sea. It was like a shining blue-green spirit blanket waving and rippling in the light of the Real World.

They broke surface. And there was the canoe tied to the floating platform of tangled kelp tubes. There were Na-na-singat's spirit helpers.

Only he saw the glossy little Marten wriggle with delight, while the graceful Swallow wheeled and dived and swooped for joy. For his spirit helpers were invisible

to other people. But they were visible to him as they guided him and his beautiful young wife back to their own village.

When they were safely home, drums thudded in the great feasthouse in the village. Voices chanted. Dancers whirled and leaped around the fire in their fringed dancing blankets.

Then, suddenly, Mouse Woman stood there, watching it all with her big, busy, mouse eyes. And people hushed themselves in awe. For Mouse Woman was a narnauk.

Na-na-singat's wife cried out, "Mouse Woman!" She threw her long woolen ear tassels into the fire. And before they were more than scorched, Mouse Woman spirited them out. Her ravelly little fingers began tearing them into a lovely, loose, nesty pile of mountain sheep wool. Clearly it was very satisfying.

It was very, very satisfying to Mouse Woman. For somebody had done something about that Monster Killer Whale. A helpful one had been helped; a small had vanquished a big, making all things equal. And a human wife had been restored to her human husband, bringing order back to the world.

Then Mouse Woman vanished.