

# The Legend of the Maiden of Deception Pass

(as told by Charlie Edwards to Martin Sampson, 1938)

Ko-Kwal-alwoot and other maidens were gathering sea food on the beach one day, when one of the shellfish slipped from her grasp and fell into deeper water. She reached for it, and it slipped from her hand again and again, and she kept following it until she was in deep water, well over her waist. Suddenly she realized that what seemed to be a hand had grasped hers and was holding her there. Terrified, she attempted to free herself, but a voice told her not to struggle or be afraid, that she was very lovely, and he was merely holding her there so that he could look upon her beauty. Soon her hand was released, and she returned to her people.

After a number of such meetings, during which the spirit held her hand longer and longer each time, and spoke soothingly to her, telling her of the many beautiful things which were in the sea, there came a day when a young man emerged from the water, and accompanied her to her father's house, to ask for her hand in marriage. The people of the village knew not from whence he came, or who he might be, but they noticed that in his presence they were chilled, as though icy winds were blowing. At first when he asked for Ko-Kwal-alwoot's hand, her father was indignant and said "No, my daughter cannot go into the sea with you—she would die." "On the contrary," said the young man, "she will not die; we will give her eternal life, and we will be very good to her, for I love her dearly."

Then he warned the father that if he could not have Ko-Kwal-alwoot for his bride, all the sea food would be taken from them, and they would be very hungry, but the father still would not agree. As time went on, there was a great scarcity of food of all kinds, and even the streams started to dry up, so that they could have no water to drink.

When she could stand it no longer, Ko-Kwal-alwoot went out into the water, and called the young man, begging him to give her people food. But he replied, "Tell your father that only when you are my bride, will the waters teem with fish, and your people may again live in plenty."

At last her father, realizing that his people were starving, reluctantly agreed to give up his daughter so that the many members of his tribe might live. He made one stipulation, however, and that was that she was to return to her people for a visit once a year, so that they could see if she was being cared for and was happy. This was agreed upon, and Ko-Kwal-alwoot, wrapping her garments about her, walked into the water, farther and farther until she was out of sight, and only her hair could be seen floating in the current.

True to the agreement, there was food in plenty, and the tribe prospered. And Ko-Kwal-alwoot returned to her people once each year, and before her coming there was always more food than ever before. Still each time she came, her people noticed more and more of a change in her. Barnacles grew upon her hands, up to her arms, and the last time she came they had started to grow upon the side of her face which had been so beautiful, and her people felt the chill winds wherever she walked, and they noticed that she seemed to be unhappy out of the sea. On her last visit they told her she did not need to return to them again, unless it was her wish to do so.

Since that time she has been their guiding spirit, and through her efforts there has always been plenty of shell fish and food of all kinds in that vicinity, and the spring water has always been pure and sweet.

The Samish Tribe believes that as the currents flow back and forth through Deception Pass, her hair may be seen drifting gently with the tide, and that she is always there to look out for the welfare of her people.



Deception Pass Bridge on Whidbey Island, Washington



Bull Kelp in Deception Pass