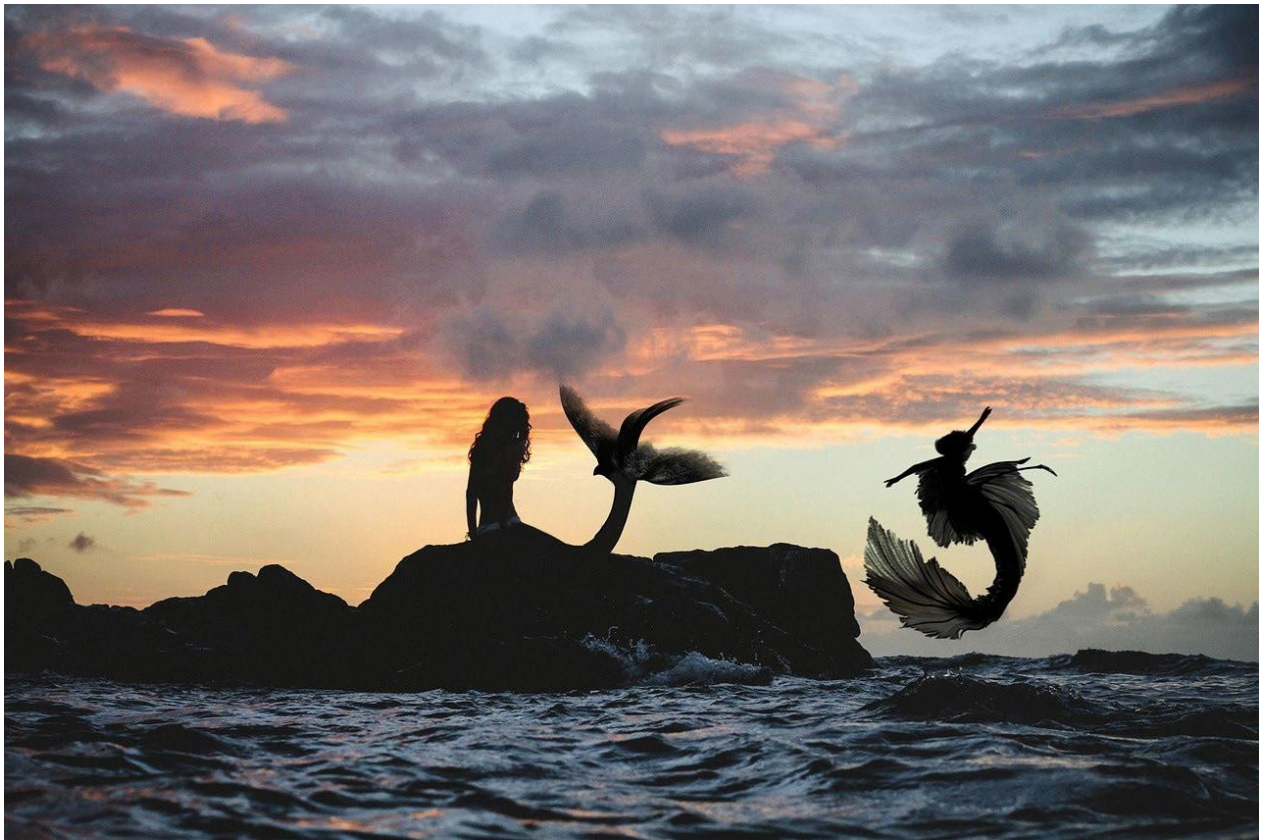


Abby and Josh Meet the Lake Erie Mermaid Monster



Abby was a problem child and she enjoyed it.



In fact, she enjoyed being a problem child so much that whenever her mom called her a problem child she smiled.

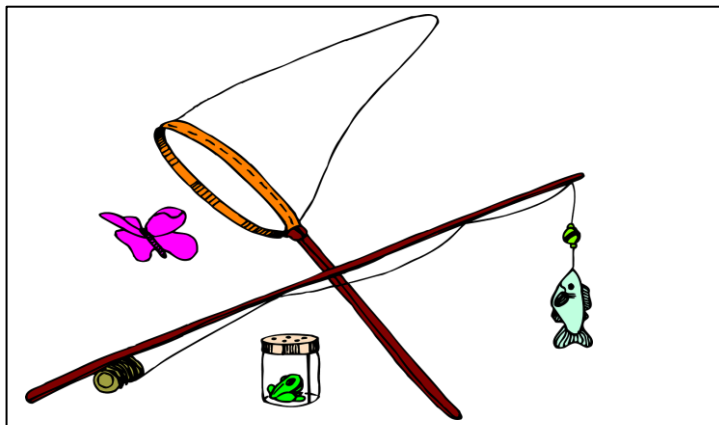


When her brother Josh called her a problem child she laughed right aloud.

Abby's dad frowned at her and said, "Don't be

a problem child, Abby. You are too young to go fishing with Josh and me."

Abby felt so sad that she ran out to the garage and cried in the corner where dad kept his fishing poles.



Abby's dog Brownie licked the tears from her face, and she felt better. "We can go fishing together, Brownie, just a girl's fishing trip," she said. "We'll show Josh and Dad that I know how to fish too."



Josh knew most of her hiding places, so he found Abby and stuck out his tongue at her. "Dad is going fishing for Big Buffalo,

and I am fishing for Lake Sturgeon.



Don't you wish you could come?" he teased.



Abby put on her monster face and stuck out her tongue at Josh.

"I am coming," she said.

“Am not,” Josh said back.

Abby watched dad and Josh pull out of the driveway of their house on Harbor Street on their way to Conneaut Harbor to go fishing.

Mom did not see Abby put on her ripped knee jeans, tee shirt, and floppy fishing hat. Mom did not see Abby scoop out some of dad’s corn bait that he used to catch Big Buffalo fish.

Mom did not see Abby take a small cooler and fill it with ice. She had to keep Big Buffalo cool when she caught him. Mom did not see Abby wheel her bicycle out of the garage and pedal quickly down the driveway with dad’s next best fishing pole waving hello to the world from the basket on the front of her bike.

Brownie ran alongside her, barking a song:

“I am happy that instead of wishing,

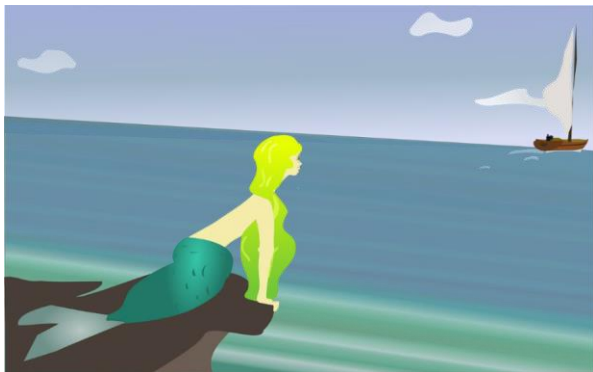
We are really going fishing.”

Abby sang along with her barking,

“I am going to catch a monster Big Buffalo,
Whether it runs fast or slow,

I will show Josh very clearly,

I can catch monsters in Lake Erie!”



It did not take Abby and Brownie very long to get to Conneaut Harbor. In fact, Abby had to slow

down to keep from running into dad and Josh who were unloading their fishing equipment from the car. She and Brownie watched them walk down the pier.

“Stop barking or they’ll hear us” she warned Brownie.

Brownie kept barking. Abby turned her bike around and rode around a curve to a sandy beach where the trees grew down to the water. She laid her bike down in the sand and put some corn bait on her fishing pole.

Abby sat the cooler that would hold Big Buffalo next to her bicycle. Brownie stood at the water’s edge barking at the waves. Abby did not worry about Dad and Josh hearing her bark. Here, they were far enough away from the pier and the sound of the waves slapping against the shore covered Brownie’s barks.

“Come on Brownie, we are going to catch

a big fish. It will be enough of a monster to beat Josh and show Dad that I can fish too.”

Abby stood ankle deep in the cool Lake Erie water, with ripples of waves dancing at her feet. She cast out as far as her arms would reach. “Be quiet, Brownie. “You’ll scare the fish!”

Brownie’s barking did not scare this fish. Abby felt a tug on her line that felt like holding a boulder on her fingertips. Her arms felt like they each had a boulder weighing them down, but she managed to reel in the fish.

“This is going to be a giant Big Buffalo,” she told Brownie.

The Big Buffalo turned out to be a Mermaid. Only this Mermaid was not beautiful like a fairy tale Mermaid.

This Mermaid had long, straggly seaweed hair that covered her face except for her eyes.

Her fingernails had handkerchief sized Lake Erie algae blooms under them, and eight fish swam around her tail. Several gulls swooped down to eat the fish. “Get away,” the mermaid snarled at them.



“You have a monster personality as

well as being a mermaid monster,” Abby said, reeling in the mermaid. “What are you doing on the end of my fish line? I was fishing for Big Buffalo, not a mermaid!”

“I do not want to be here anymore than you want me to be on the end of your fishline. Just let me go and I will be on my way,” the Mermaid said.

“I am not going to let you go. I going to show you to Josh and Mom and Dad so they will see that I can catch fish too.”

The Mermaid flopped and flipped until she wiggled off Abby’s fishing line. She stood straight up on her tail, glaring at Abby. “I am not a fish. I am a Mermaid. My name is Manda if you please.”

“I am pleased to put you my cooler and

show you to Josh,” Abby said. She stared at the Mermaid. “You look like you will just fit into my cooler.”

“I am not going anywhere with you. Now go away and do not bother me anymore.

I am going to splash these seagulls and go back in the lake and swim home.

I am going to take a break. Lake Erie has a nice rocky bottom here and I can sit on a comfortable rock and count the ship bottoms passing by.”

Abby whistled to Brownie. “Fetch, Brownie, fetch,” Abby said, pointing to Manda. “Fetch the Mermaid, Brownie.”

Brownie fetched Manda, tail first. Her body made a crooked trail in the sand. She flung out her arms and changed the sand trail into a sand angel with a tail.

“Turn me loose,” Manda growled in Brownie language.

“I have to obey Abby,” Brownie growled back in Manda language.

Abby raced around the point and waved to Dad and Josh who were still fishing on the breakwater.

“Dad, I caught a monster,” she shouted.

“Josh, I caught a monster fish! Come over and see how big she is!”

“I’m busy catching a Sturgeon,” Josh shouted.

“I got a bite!” Dad shouted. “I will come over to you later.”

“Wait until I brush my teeth,” Manda said. “I brush my teeth with Lake Erie water every morning, noon, and night.”

Abby took the lid off the cooler. The ice

had melted into water by now. She tested it with her finger. “The water feels like it is mermaid comfortable. Put her in there, Brownie and let us go home. I have a monster as good as Josh’s to show Dad.”

Brownie put Manda in the cooler and Abby snapped on the lid as fast as she could. She was not fast enough to keep Manda from flipping her tail and rocking the cooler back and forth, making a puddle in the sand.

“Stop rocking the cooler,” Abby said. “It won’t take me very long to get you to my house.”

“I want to be rocking a boat,” Manda gurgled. “Let me out of here!”

“In a few minutes,” Abby said. “You run behind the bike Brownie and make sure

she doesn't get out."

Brownie ran behind the bike and Abby peddled as fast as she could toward her house on Harbor Street. She heard Manda kicking and splashing in the cooler trying to escape. They left a water trail all the way to her house.

When Abby stopped her bicycle in front of the back door, the cooler on the back of it was rocking back and forth so hard from Manda's efforts to escape that it rocked off the seat and fell to the concrete patio. Water splashed on Abby's jeans and shirt.

"Brownie, catch and fetch, Manda," Abby ordered. "Hurry!" By this time Manda was standing up and shaking a small rain shower on the patio.

"Fetch Manda upstairs to the bathroom, Brownie. We need to keep her in

water.”

Manda snarled and her hair looked as tangled as morning glory vines, her fingernails had grown into claws and by now her tail was covered with a giant Lake Erie algae bloom.

“Are you sure?” Brownie barked in Brownie language.

“Fetch, Brownie!” Abby ordered in Abby language. “And be quiet so Mom doesn’t hear you.”

“I don’t need to be in water all of the time,” Manda said. “I can rock and roll across streets and sidewalks. I have done that quite a lot lately.

People scream and run away when they see me coming. I am not a monster; I am just a mermaid.”

“Do mermaids have a reputation as monsters?” Abby asked as Brownie fetched Manda through the kitchen and they started up the back stairs to Abby’s bedroom.

“It deepennnddddssss on who you talk to,” Manda said as Brownie fetched her up the stairs step by step. “In Great Britain, mermaids are considered bad luck. They can also be a sign of severe weather coming, and some stories say that they sing to sailors so sweetly that the sailors crash their ships on the rocks because they are listening so hard.

Some mermaids are described in folklore as beautiful. Some are described as monsters up to 2,000 feet long.”

Manda spluttered as Brownie dragged her up the last two steps to the landing on

top of the stairs.

“Are storms coming?” Abby asked Manda.

“No storms. The weather looks fair to good until Saturday rainstorms.”



“Are you going to lure sailors to the rocks in or outside Conneaut Harbor?” Abby demanded.

“No, they can find their own rocks if they want to crash their ship.” “Are you 2,000 feet long?” Abby asked.

“I already told you I am NOT 2,000 feet long,” Manda said.

“Then why do the British and other

people think you are a bad luck monster?”

“Maybe because of the way I look,” Manda said. “I can be a little untidy at times. And the lake water messes up my hair.”

“But it doesn’t sound like you’re a real monster,” Abby said. “I am looking for a real- life Lake Erie Monster. My friend Sarah said there is one called Nessie. I thought maybe you were her until I saw your tail. But since you are not a monster, I will take you right back to the lake.”

Manda wiggled and waggled until she managed to find a level place to sit on the top stairs. She looked back over her shoulder at the bathroom. “Is that a bathtub room?”

“We have a bathtub. Here, I will show you.”

Abby squinched around Manda and turned on the faucets to the bathtub. Hot and cold running water. Which do you prefer?”

Manda scratched her long scraggly hair with her clawed fingernails. “I’ll try both.”

Abby turned on the water and Manda flip flopped into the tub like a seal arriving on a sandy beach. “We should try seals in the Great Lakes,” she told Brownie.”

Without answering her, Brownie jumped into the tub with Manda. “Let us go swimming she barked in Brownie talk. “I’ll race you,” Manda said in Manda talk.

Abby closed her eyes, opened them, and then closed them again. Her dog and a mermaid were racing in her bathtub and

the Mermaid was not a monster! What to do to do before Mom heard them, which was going to happen any minute now.

“Quick, get under the water,” Abby told Manda. “I hear Mom coming up the stairs.”

A second whizzed by and it happened. Mom stuck her head in the bathroom doorway. “Abby, what are you doing in here?”

“Nothing Mom. Is lunch ready yet? I am really hungry.”

“Lunch is on the table. What are you doing up here? And what is Brownie doing in the bathtub?”

“She needed a bath. We went down to the beach, and she got full of seaweed.”

“Well, clean her up and clean the tub

and come down to lunch.” Mom turned to go, but then Abby saw that part of Manda’s tail was sticking up out of the bath water. She grabbed a bottle of bubble bath and dumped it in the water. She grabbed a wash rag and scrubbed Manda’s tail.

Maybe the bubbles would hide the rest of Manda. Maybe Mom had not seen Manda’s tail.

Mom spotted Manda’s tail. “What in the world?” she asked as she came back into the bathroom and pushed away bubbles from the bubble bath filled tub.



“I brought home a mermaid because I wanted to show

Dad I could get a better monster than Josh and he'd take me fishing with them," Abby said.

Mom pushed away more bubbles. She looked at Manda's head. She looked down at Manda's tail which was clean of algae and clear of bubbles. "Hello, there, Mermaid. How did you get here?"

"I came with your daughter and her dog," Manda said.

"She tells me you failed the monster test. Didn't you even yell at her or snarl a little?" Mom asked.

Manda sighed. "Mermaids are not very good at snarling. According to some stories about us, we are better at singing to the sailors to get their ships on the rocks so we can hitch a ride. But

I do not do that. I just sit on the rocks and comb my hair. But it does not do any good. It still comes out full of tangles.”

“Try this comb. This is the one I use on my hair when it is full of tangles.”

Abby handed Manda a comb with fine teeth. Soon Mom was helping Abby and Manda comb out the tangles. Brownie sat on a rug in front of the bathtub, watching them.



Abby was so busy teasing out a snarl from Manda’s hair

that she did not hear Dad come into the bathroom. Mom was clipping Manda’s nails when Josh appeared

under Abby's elbow. "Wow, you found a monster all right, Abby. She is the ugliest Mermaid I ever saw."

'She's the only Mermaid you ever saw, Josh. She is the first Mermaid in Lake Erie."

"Why are you here?" Josh asked.

"I went for a swim in Port Stanley and got blown across the Lake," Manda told him.

She blew a soap bubble at him. "Why do you want to know?"

"My Sturgeon is still a bigger and better Lake Erie monster than you are. At least he was born in the Lake."

This time Manda swished soap bubbles at him with her tail. "I have lived in this Lake more years than you have been fishing for your sturgeon monster. "

"I've never seen you," Josh said.

“I never let myself be seen. Why should I? Look what happened when I surfaced. I got captured by a dog and a girl!”

Josh scowled. “You sure are an uglier monster than my Sturgeon, and a lot uglier than Dad’s Big Buffalo fish he caught. “

Abby stared at Manda and saw tears in her eyes shining through the soap bubbles that outlined them like a pair of glasses.

Josh’s words hung in the air like a fog over Lake Erie. “Ugly, ugliest, monster...”

Abby reached over and hugged Manda, soap bubbles bath water and all, “I am sorry that I ever called you a monster Manda. You are not a monster, and you are not ugly. And I do not care if I ever go fishing for Big Buffalo with

Dad.”

Dad smiled at her. “I will take my problem child fishing tomorrow.”

Mom hugged her.

“What made you decide that Manda wasn’t a monster?” Dad asked Abby.

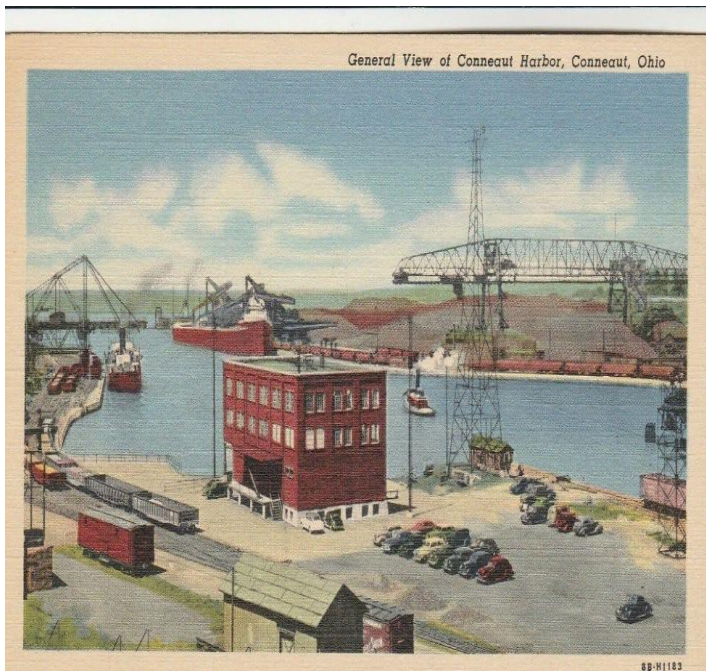
“I got to know her,” Abby told him.

Mom and Dad and Josh and Abby got to know Manda even better at supper. Everyone but Manda had Big Buffalo fish fillets, coleslaw, and French fries for supper.



Manda had a peanut butter

and banana sandwich and a glass of milk.



After supper Manda climbed back into the cooler, Dad put it in the back seat of the

car and Abby, Mom, Dad, and Josh rode back to Conneaut Harbor while Manda splashed in the cooler.

Carrying Manda piggyback, Abby and Josh and Mom and Dad walked along the beach to the beach curve where Abby had hooked Manda on her fish line.

They sat Manda on the sand and she slid along the sand and then stopped at the water's edge.

“I could sing a song so the sailors would wreck their boats, but I don't see any sailors, so let's just sing goodbye.”

Abby rubbed the tears out of her eyes and when she could see clearly again, she blinked. Was she really seeing Manda? This could not be the Manda that she thought was a blobby monster. Manda smiled and dove into Lake Erie.



She sang her goodbye song to them all of the way across Lake Erie to Canada!



The Ballad of H.O.M.E.S. : To Lakes Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior

The glaciers they crept, and they carved lake faces,
The glaciers they melted and combined with the rain,
Adding water links to all the new places,
Their melted down losses forever our gain.

Land people they paddled, voyaged lake trails,
Traveling with dugouts, skiffs and canoes,
Then ships poked the horizon with white sails,
Brought cargoes and people from wide world
views.

The schooners and steamships and ore boats they
came,
Digging trails of commerce deep in the land,
Forging light houses and keepers with landmark
names,
Leaving steel rimmed boot trails in the sand.

Lake meadow waves race the sun and the
thunder,
They're old and they're new and they roll right
along,
They travel the lakes our waters of wonder,
They're different but together they sing the same
song!

Chorus

Shining waters so blue,
Islands and lighthouses,
The chain of the Great Lakes,
Wraps tight around me
Shining waters so blue
Islands and lighthouses,
The chain of the Great Lakes
Binds me and I'm free!