

The Mythic Whispers of the Sea



The old sailor, his face carved by salt and wind—winds that had lashed him more often than caressed him—sat at the edge of the harbor, his skin weathered by the tireless sun. He watched them quietly, gazing at the calm sea of Katakolo. In the distance, the town of Pyrgos gleamed white against the harmony of the green hills that cradled it.

The group of young boys standing nearby had forged their friendship online, bound by their shared love for the sea and the dream of becoming sailors. The old man could see it in their eyes—eyes that, like a compass needle, pointed unwaveringly to the horizon—their deep yearning for the sea.

It was their first meeting in person. They had broken through the digital barrier when they realized that a common passion tied them together, and they had arranged to spend a few days of summer vacation as one. All four dreamed of life at sea. That coming autumn, each would enroll in the naval academies of their respective countries to chase that dream. And who could say? Perhaps fate would one day bring them together again, sailing the same ships as captains and engineers. It would take great fortune indeed, but wasn't it already miraculous that four young men from such different corners of the world now stood together in this Mediterranean harbor? Nicolò from Palermo, Yunus from Istanbul, Andreas from Lefkada, and Michalis from Pyrgos—they had noticed the old man too.

“Grandpa, are you from around here?” Michalis asked first, breaking the silence.

“I was born in this port,” the old man replied, “but I’ve lived in every harbor in the world.”
Andreas seized the opportunity.
“I’ll bet you know many sea stories, old man. My friends and I would love to hear the most unbelievable one.”
“There are no tales more unbelievable than those that made me love this wild beast since I was a boy,” the old man said.
“Then tell us your favorite sea legend,” Michalis urged him. “Speak slowly, so I can translate for the others—they’re foreigners. Yunus is Turkish, Nicolò is Italian. Andreas is from Lefkada. And I’m Michalis, from Pyrgos.”
The old man nodded in greeting.
“Palermo! Constantinople! Such beautiful harbors,” he said. “I will tell you tales that bind your homelands together like the strong ropes of ships.”
The young men fell silent, ready to listen.
“Poseidon, the mighty god of the sea, did not only love the power of the waves but also their allure,” the old man began. “He fell in love with Amphitrite, the enchanting sea nymph, but she feared him and turned away. For who can stand fearless before the might of the sea? She trembled at the fury with which he stirred the waters. In his despair, the god sent her a dolphin—swift, playful—to soothe her frightened soul. And she smiled at the gentle, graceful creature. ‘Perhaps Poseidon is not only the fury of waves,’ she thought. ‘Perhaps he is also the softness of sea foam.’ And so, she agreed to be his.”
The boys exchanged glances and smiled. The sea is fierce—but above all, it is beautiful.
“Don’t be fooled by her beauty!” the old man went on. “She is a Siren, nothing less! She makes you forget yourself—makes you surrender. But you, like Odysseus, must resist. You must care for your crew, seal their ears with wax so the Sirens’ song won’t enchant them. And you, bound to the mast, must endure the torture of their magic. For if you falter even for a moment, if you lose yourself even once, you are lost! No voice, no song—no matter how beautiful—must steer you from your course.”
The young men felt a shiver in their hearts, thinking of the first voyage that soon awaited them.
“We know the sea is hard,” said Nicolò through Michalis’ translation, “but it gives back far more than it takes.”

 * The old man smiled. *
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 * “When she chooses to, young man! You can demand nothing from her—only receive *
 * what she is willing to give. Like Aesop’s fisherman. He played his flute by the shore, *
 * hoping the fish would rise from the water, drawn by the beauty of his tune. But when *
 * they didn’t come, he cast his nets instead. Soon, the fish were caught, thrashing in the *
 * mesh. The fisherman scolded them: ‘When I played for you, you wouldn’t dance. But *
 * now that I’ve stopped, you begin your writhing!’” *
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 * “Just like people,” murmured Andreas. “You can’t pin us down either!” *
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 * “We slip away too—like the fish,” the old sailor agreed. “Which brings to mind another *
 * tale. This one comes from your land, young man,” he said, turning to Nicolò. “The tale of *
 * your namesake—Colapesce, the boy who was also a fish.” *
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 * Nicolò smiled at the name of the hero whose story he had heard so many times as a *
 * child. So he began to tell it himself, with Michalis translating for the others: *
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 * “Boy or fish? Boy and fish? Who was Colapesce, really? They called him that—‘Nicholas *
 * the Fish’—because he could stay underwater longer than anyone else. Some said his skin *
 * was made of scales. Others claimed a curse was to blame: his mother had cursed him to *
 * become half-fish because he spent all day swimming! *
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 * The king of Sicily heard of him and decided to test him. ‘Colapesce, dive into the sea and *
 * bring me this golden goblet,’ he said, tossing the goblet far into the waves. Colapesce *
 * dove and brought it back. Then the king threw in a precious ring. Again, the boy *
 * returned with it. The third time, the king challenged him: ‘Dive and tell me what holds *
 * Sicily in place—why it does not sink.’ *
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 * Colapesce dove deeper than he ever had before. They say he saw, on the seafloor, three *
 * great pillars holding up the island. One of them was cracked. Colapesce never came *
 * back. But Sicily—our island—remains in its place, no matter how many earthquakes *
 * shake it...” *
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 * “What is the sea after all? Something you fear and hate or an eternal love?”, Yunus *
 * asked his friends. *
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 * “It is love for sure! Don’t you know the myth about Aphrodite birth?”, the old sailor said. *
 * “Once upon a time, where the sea embraces the sky, a goddess unlike any other was *
 * born. She was not born in a palace, nor upon a great mountain, but out of the foam of *
 * the waves! One morning, the wind blew gently and the waves began to dance... Out of *
 * their foam emerged a beautiful woman with golden hair and eyes that shone like *
 * sunlight. She was Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love. A large white shell became *
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her boat, and Zephyr, the wind, blew strong yet gently, guiding her to the coast of Cyprus. There the Hores, the goddesses of the seasons, were waiting for her. They dressed her in beautiful garments and crowned her with a wreath of colorful flowers. From then on, wherever Aphrodite walked, the earth filled with roses and fragrant flowers. People loved and honored her, for she brought love and joy to all. And so, the goddess born from the waves became a symbol of beauty and love forever”.

“And now that the myths have come to their end, I shall leave you to continue your walk,” said the old sailor. “And remember: the sea is not merely an element of nature, but a force grand and sovereign. It never ceases to inspire us, to test us, to seduce us. No one can ignore it. No one can fully master it. It is a universe of mystery and truth, and those who dare to explore it discover not only its dangers—but its spellbinding beauty.”

The young men saluted the old sailor—the one that fate, and the sea itself, had brought into their path.