



**The
TALES
from
MEDNIGHT
Junior Edition**



MEDNIGHT

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MEDNIGHT**

Junior Edition

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The TALES from MEDNIGHT

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1

Nu'usha: The Grim Bird

Hager Chaouch



Kenza sat in front of the TV, tenderly holding her mother's arm as they watched one of the daily shows discussing matters relevant to everyday life. Suddenly, the show presenter began talking about one of the scary stories about Tunisia, revolving around a bird known as "Nu'usha" (the grim bird). The presenter continued talking about folklore stories recounted by old women describing the bird as a horrible creature, which induces fear among people. Kenza sat up suddenly, her attention completely caught by this mysterious and terrifying bird.

"Mom, what is Nu'usha?" she asked hesitantly.

Her mother looked at her in surprise and answered briefly, "It's just a myth. Now go to your room and play with your toys."

However, what the presenter said about this scary bird stayed with the little girl, lingering in her mind even after her mother dismissed her question. No one answered her curiosity, leaving her unsatisfied.

One summer day, Kenza accompanied her parents to visit her grandmother's house in the countryside, who warmly welcomed them, after eagerly awaiting their arrival. The house was full of the joyful sounds of family members, and Kenza enjoyed meeting her cousins. However, as the sun began to set, you could hear the mixed sounds of birds returning to their nests.

The joyful atmosphere suddenly changed when her grandmother heard this gloomy sound: "Hoooo hoooo hooo". Her face turned serious as she shouted:

"Children, come inside! The Nu'usha is coming! Give me the old sieve!"

Kenza froze in place. She heard that name again! She recalled the mention of this creature from the TV program.

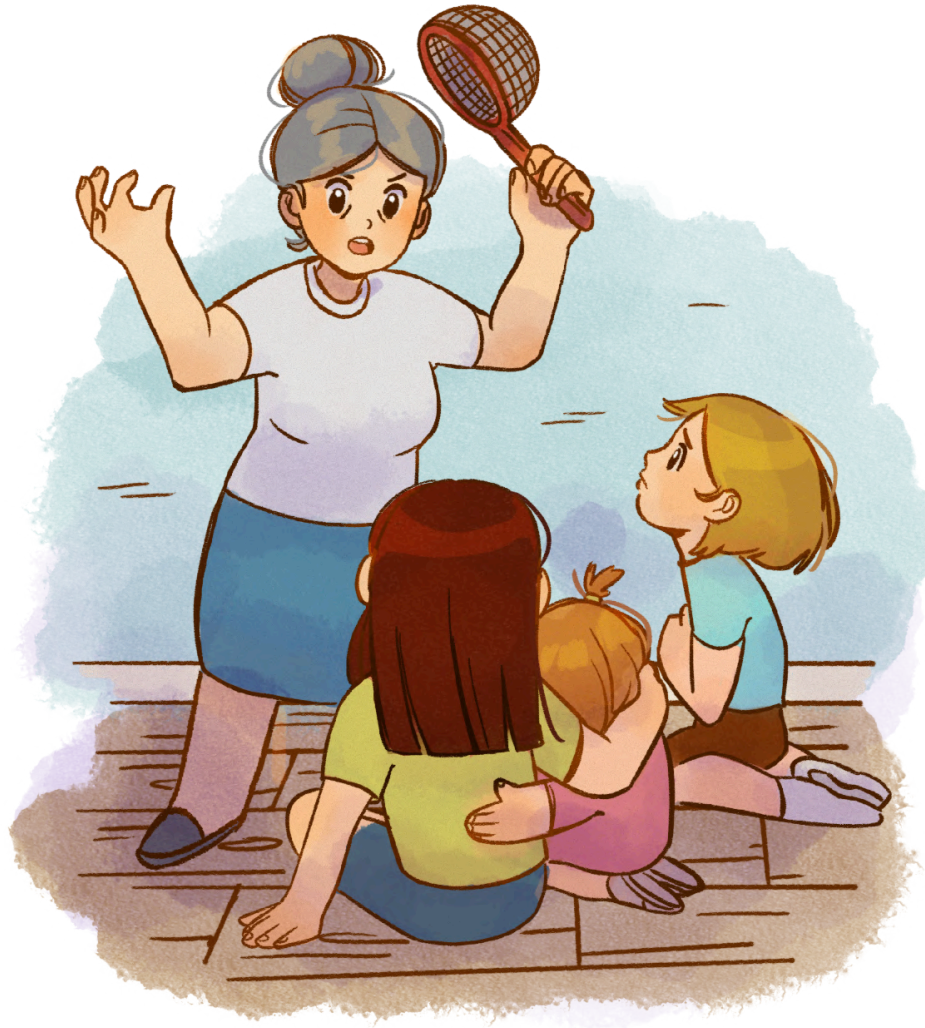
"Oh My God, who is this Nu'usha? Even my grandma fears it" she wondered in fear, but her grandmother's urgent tone broke her thoughts.

"Kenza, get inside!" her grandmother's voice snapped her out of her trance.

As the children rushed inside, Kenza's curiosity grew even stronger. She finally mustered the courage to ask her grandmother, "Grandma, who is Nu'usha?"

Her grandmother sighed deeply before replying, "Nu'usha is a scary creature, bigger than an owl, and it preys on children. It sucks their breath while they sleep, sometimes causing them to suffocate to death. It's said to be a bird of death that brings nothing but doom."

Kenza was both frightened and intrigued by what her grandmother had just described. The other children huddled around, their fear growing as they listened to the chilling tale.



"But Grandma..." Kenza interrupted suddenly, "why did you ask for the old sieve? Why did you ask us to come inside? My mother told me that Nu'usha is just a myth..." She was referring to the strange request her grandmother had made when she shouted for the children to come inside.

Her grandmother, clearly tired from this conversation, sighed and straightened up in her seat. "The sieve is used to protect us from the evil of this bird," she murmured, half-closed eyes reflecting her exhaustion. "Even if it is a myth, this story has been passed down from our ancestors to warn us of the dangers. I don't know anything more than that."

Hearing the conversation, Kenza's mother stepped in. "Enough, Kenza, you've asked enough questions for today," she said, attempting to diffuse the situation. However, her mother's firm tone only deepened Kenza's frustration, especially since this was not the first time her mother had dismissed her questions about the Nu'usha.

Seeing this, Kenza's mother returned to her, regret clear in her voice. She had realized her mistake in ignoring her daughter's curiosity. Holding Kenza's

small hand tenderly, she suggested, "Let's go talk in the garden."

"Mom, it is sunset soon, the bird is waiting for us" Kenza responded, her voice hesitant, still holding onto the fear the story had planted in her mind.

"Come on, don't be afraid," her mother reassured her. "I'll protect you."

The two sat on an old wooden bench under a mulberry tree, Kenza resting her head on her mother's lap. Her mother began to speak gently:

"Kenza, I'm sorry for what happened yesterday. I am proud of your curiosity and love of knowledge, but I did not know how to handle it properly. I don't always have the answers, but what's important is that I share what I know with you."

She continued, "The story your grandmother told you and what you saw on the television are just funny and weird folktales, they are just myths created to scare children. The Nu'usha is just a bird, not a monster. The bird that people fear is an owl, the 'Long-eared Owl,' known in French as 'Hibou moyen-duc'. It's a bird, like any other, with its only crime being that it looks and sounds scary."

"So it is just an owl?!!"

"Yes, it is usually found in northern and southern Tunisia and plays an important role in maintaining ecological balance by hunting rodents and other small creatures like snakes that are the true danger to agriculture."



"Unfortunately, this bird has been unfairly blamed for the deaths of children in folktales while we should protect it from illegal hunting in forests, as it is now an endangered species."

"But Mom," Kenza asked, "Do people hunt it for food? Is it delicious?"

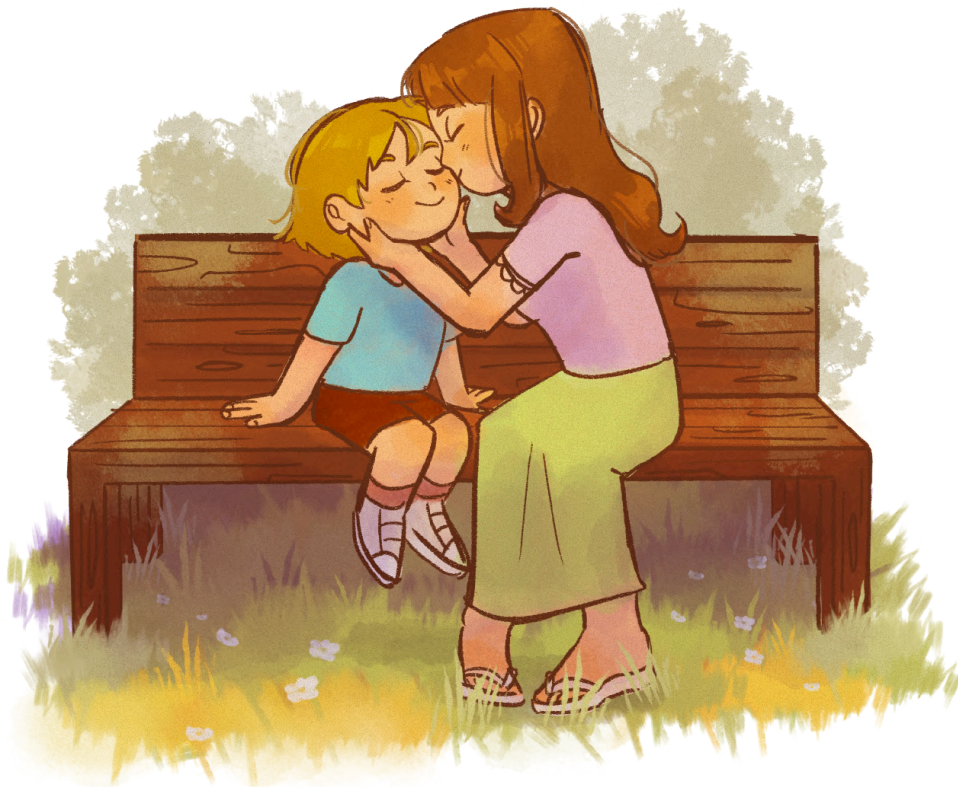
"No, sweetheart," her mother answered, laughing. "People believe its blood has magical properties and can cure diseases like leprosy and other skin diseases such as albinism and shingles and treat skin tumours and cancer. This belief, firmly established in the minds of some people, has nothing to do with medicine or pharmacology; and these superstitions have the worst impact on society.

Depleting this bird and overhunting it, even during its breeding seasons, would disrupt the natural system and biodiversity in the country; it is truly a sad thing."

Kenza's mother shook her head in pity as she spoke about the harm these myths had caused, leading to the owl's endangerment due to illegal hunting. The more Kenza learned the more determined she became to protect this misunderstood creature.

"Mama please do not be sad, I promise you when I grow up," Kenza declared with enthusiasm, "I'll be a bird expert, and I'll protect the Nu'usha from hunters!"

Her mother smiled and kissed her on the cheek, happy to see her daughter so passionate about nature.



2

The Food Explorers

Samira Smajlović



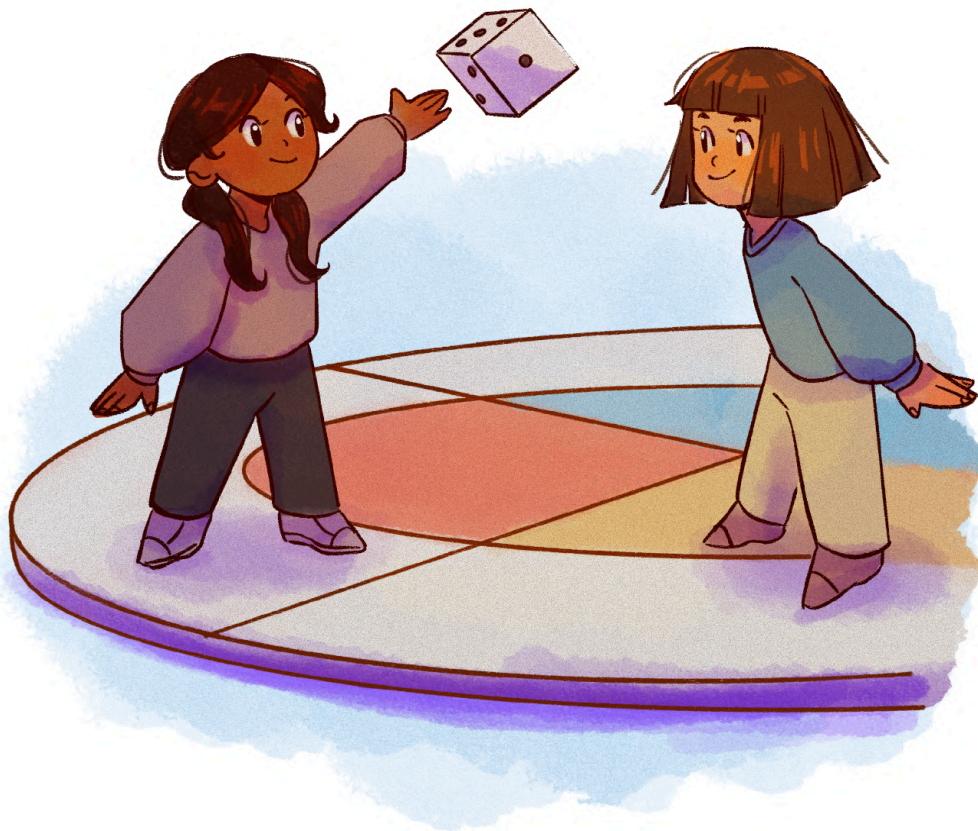
Once upon a time, in a land called Foodlandia filled with colourful vegetables, juicy fruits, and delighted grains, lived a group of little friends. They were called the Food Explorers, and they loved of course to explore, discover, and learn new things through adventures every day. One sunny day, as the Food Explorers gathered for their afternoon meeting, they noticed that their friend, Fatima, seemed sad and tired. Despite getting enough sleep, she was lacking the energy to enjoy her day. It looked like something was having a significant negative impact on her everyday life. Concerned about their friend's well-being, the Food Explorers decided to investigate what could possibly be causing Fatima's fatigue.

Usually, they thought, young children are full of boundless energy, constantly on the move and exploring the world around them. However, they were thinking, there are obviously occasions where they experience fatigue and lack the energy to engage in their usual everyday activities. So, after thinking over it deeply, they reckoned that if it is not sleep that is causing the problem then it must be diet. Because, what else do young children who still don't go to school do except eat, play, sleep, and repeat all day long. So, they decided to take out their magnifying glasses and examine the food she had been eating. They started to realize that although Fatima's plate was filled with colourful food, they were lacking in diversity and balance. The Food Explorers concluded that Fatima's diet low in essential nutrients might be the reason behind her tiredness.



So, they put their brains together and came up with a plan to help Fatima. First, they went to the library to research nutrition for young children. They learned that young children need a balanced and diverse diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy products. They discovered that each food group provided essential nutrients necessary for growth and development. Essential nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, and fibre play a crucial role in maintaining optimal health and energy levels. Fruits and vegetables, for example, are rich in vitamins which are essential for the proper functioning of the body. Mr. Tomato, for example, is a friendly red fruit high in vitamin C content, essential for healthy skin and a strong immune system. On the other hand, eating Mrs. Carrot, a vibrant orange vegetable, whose juicy insides are filled with beta-carotene, helps improve eyesight, they learned.

The Food Explorers couldn't wait to share their findings with Fatima, but they wanted to do it in an enjoyable and appealing way. So, they created a game called "Nutri-Joy Adventure". They designed a colourful board that resembled a giant plate, divided into sections representing the different food groups. The friends took turns rolling the dice and moving their game pieces along the board. Each time they landed on a food group, they had to recite a fun poem about the benefits of that food group. For example, when they landed on fruits, they recited:



"Apples, bananas, oranges so bright,
Fruits are a colourful delight!
Vitamins and fibre they contain,
Helping our bodies stay healthy and sustain!"

Through the game, the Food Explorers not only entertained themselves but also educated Fatima about the importance of eating a variety of foods. They emphasized that each food group played a vital role in providing essential nutrients for her body. Inspired by their idea, Fatima became excited about trying new foods. The Food Explorers decided to introduce her to different fruits and vegetables she had never tasted before. So, they set out on a magical journey to learn about them and the importance of eating seasonal and local food as well.

They went on a field trip to a local farm, where they picked fresh products and observed the benefits of organic farming methods. There lived an elderly couple who had a love for food and the health of children. They were constantly researching new ways to make sure that the children in their village were getting the best nutrition they could. They started a small school in the village that taught the children about nutrition and the importance of a healthy diet. They also taught them how to prepare simple, nutritious meals that would provide all the essential nutrients that the children needed. With each new food Fatima tasted, she rated them using a sensory chart the Food Explorers together with an elderly couple had created. They noted the flavours, textures, and colours of each food, encouraging Fatima to express her opinions and preferences.

As they walked through the farm, the children came across a wise old man named Yusuf. Yusuf had been living in Foodlandia for almost a century and had witnessed the changing seasons and the abundance of nature's gifts. Yusuf greeted the children warmly and shared his vast knowledge about the magic of seasonal and local food. "Children", he said, "eating seasonal and local food is not only good for the body, but it also helps protect our environment and supports local farmers". The children were fascinated by Yusuf's words and asked him to tell them more details. Yusuf smiled and continued: "Imagine the four seasons as a grand feast," he said. "Each season brings forth a variety of fruits and vegetables, just like different dishes on a banquet table". "In spring," he continued, "nature awakens, and fresh, crisp asparagus, juicy strawberries, and vibrant green peas make their appearance.

"These foods provide us with the nutrients needed to grow and thrive". The children's eyes widened with excitement as Yusuf described the bounty of

summer. "Summer brings a delightful array of fruits like succulent watermelons, sweet cherries, and golden peaches," he said. "These refreshing treats keep us hydrated and give us energy for outdoor adventures". As the story progressed, Yusuf painted a picture of autumn's harvest. "In autumn," he explained, "we are gifted with an abundance of earthy pumpkins, crunchy apples, and colourful bell peppers. These foods help us prepare for the colder months ahead and keep us healthy". Finally, Yusuf reached the grand finale of his tale: winter. "Winter may seem barren, but it offers its own special treasures," he revealed. "Savour warming soups made from hearty root vegetables like carrots and potatoes. Enjoy cosy dishes made with winter greens like kale and spinach". The children were spellbound by Yusuf's storytelling and couldn't wait to embrace the wisdom he shared. With hearts full of gratitude and excitement, they bid Yusuf farewell, knowing that their journey had just begun.



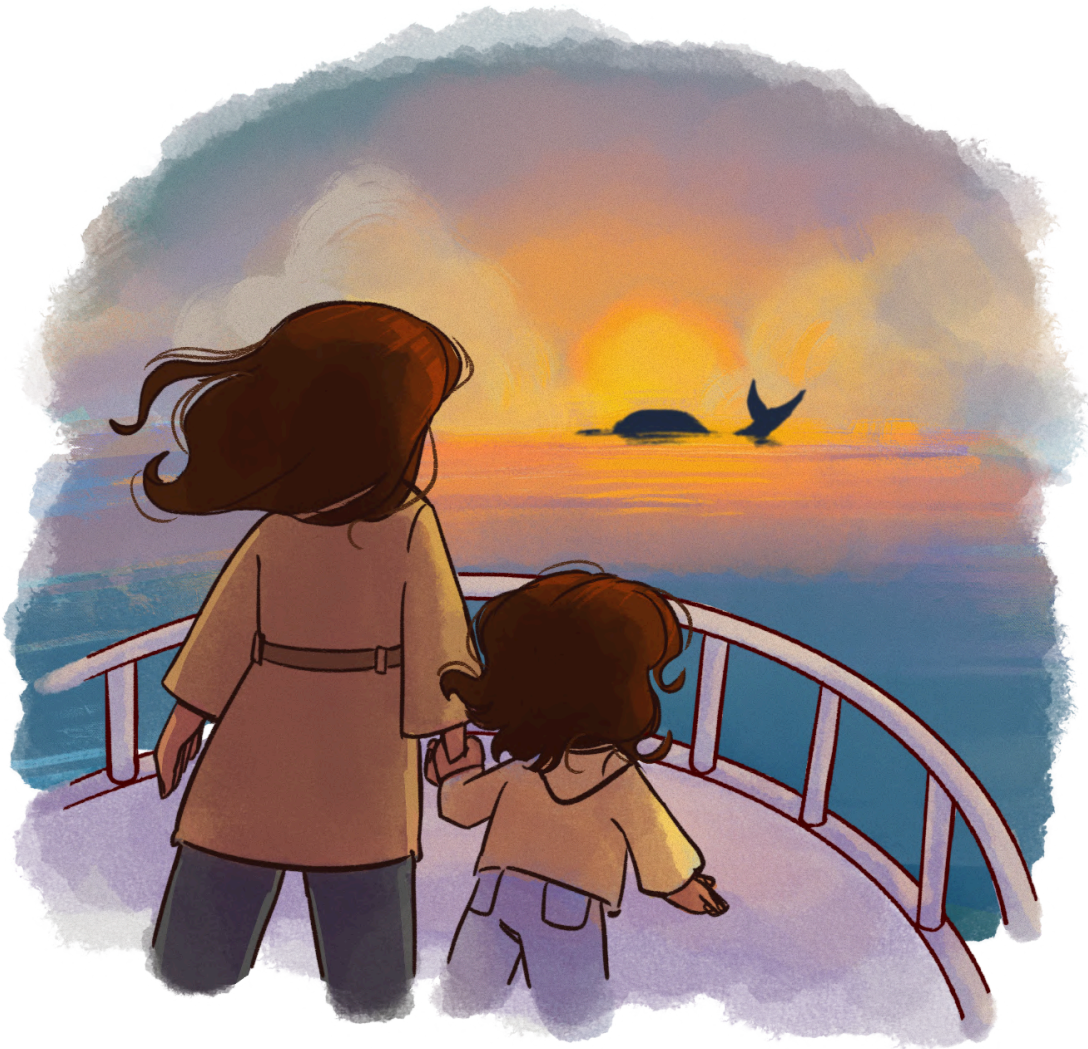
Soon, Fatima's plate started to fill with a variety of nutritious foods. She had also incorporated whole grains like quinoa and brown rice, lean proteins like chicken and fish, and dairy products like yoghurt and cheese. The Food Explorers helped her understand the importance of eating a balanced diet and how it would give her the energy to explore, learn, and play. As Fatima's diet improved, so did her energy levels. She felt more enthusiastic and active, joining the Food Explorers on their various expeditions and experiments. Her little friends were thrilled to see the positive impact their research spirit and dedication had on Fatima's well-being. They delighted in the ever-changing flavours of each season and learned to appreciate the connection between food, nature, and their own well-being.

The Food Explorers' tale about diet and nutrition for children had a profound impact on everyone in their community. Parents and caregivers began incorporating the "Nutri-Joy Adventure" game into their daily routines, making mealtimes exciting and educational. And so, in the land of scientific adventures, the Food Explorers continued to spread the importance of a balanced diet and proper nutrition among young children. They made a lasting impact on the health and well-being of children around the world.

3

Whispers of the Mediterranean: Sofia's Voyage

Sophia Kourapidi



Sofia's heart raced as she stepped onto the deck of the grand ship, her mother's hand tightly clasped in hers. The sparkling blue waters of the Mediterranean stretched out before them, inviting and mysterious. Sofia had always been fascinated by the sea, but she never thought she would have the chance to explore it up close.

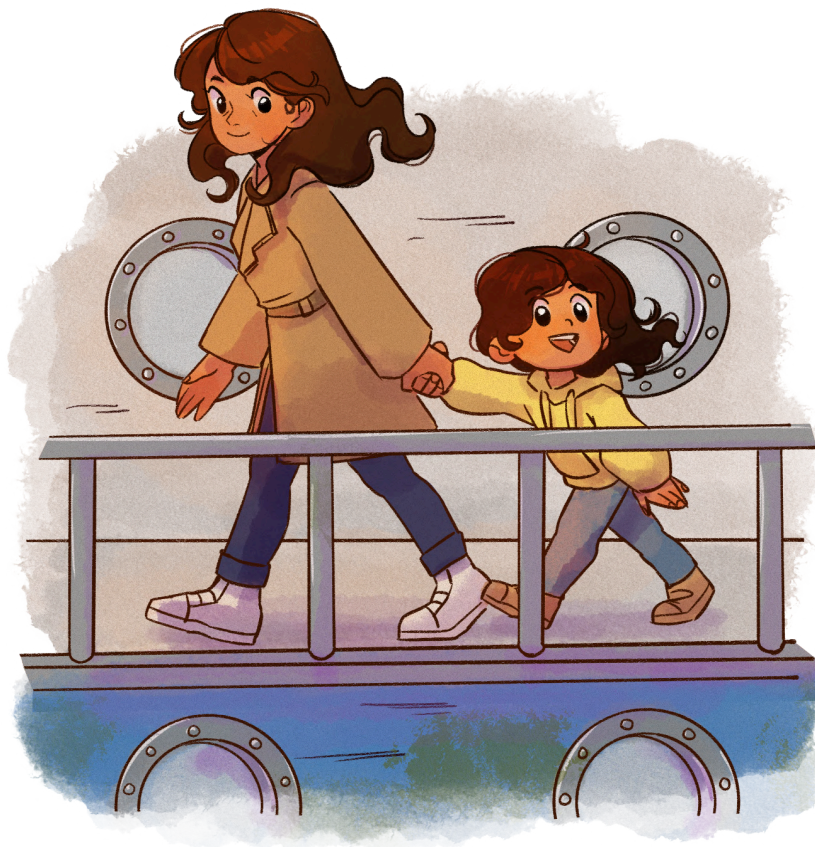
"Are you ready, my dear?" asked her mother, her dark hair whipping in the sea breeze.

Sofia nodded eagerly, her curly hair bouncing with excitement. She couldn't believe she was actually going on a voyage around the Mediterranean on the ship her mother worked on as a marine biologist. It was a dream come true.

As they settled into their cabin, Sofia's eyes wandered to the porthole, where she could see the gentle waves lapping against the ship. She imagined all the creatures that lived beneath the surface, and her heart fluttered with anticipation.

"Come on, let's go explore the ship," her mother said, interrupting her thoughts.

Sofia followed her mother up the stairs and onto the main deck. The ship was bustling with activity as people scurried about, preparing for the voyage. Sofia's eyes widened as she took in the enormity of the vessel.



"Wow," she breathed as her mother led her to the railing.

"Isn't it magnificent?" her mother said, her eyes sparkling with pride.

Sofia couldn't help but agree. The ship was like nothing she had ever seen before. She could already feel the adventure brewing in the air.

As the ship set sail, Sofia and her mother stood at the railing, watching as the land slowly disappeared into the horizon. Sofia's heart fluttered with excitement and a hint of nervousness. She had never been on a ship before, but she was ready for whatever lay ahead.

As the sun began to set, the sky turned into a canvas of pinks, purples, and oranges. Sofia leaned against the railing, mesmerized by the beautiful colours. Suddenly, she noticed something moving in the water.

"Look, Mom," she exclaimed, pointing at the water.

Her mother's eyes followed her gaze, and she grinned. In the distance, a great fin whale was swimming alongside the ship, its sleek body gliding effortlessly through the water.

"Wow, what a beautiful creature," her mother said, her voice filled with wonder.

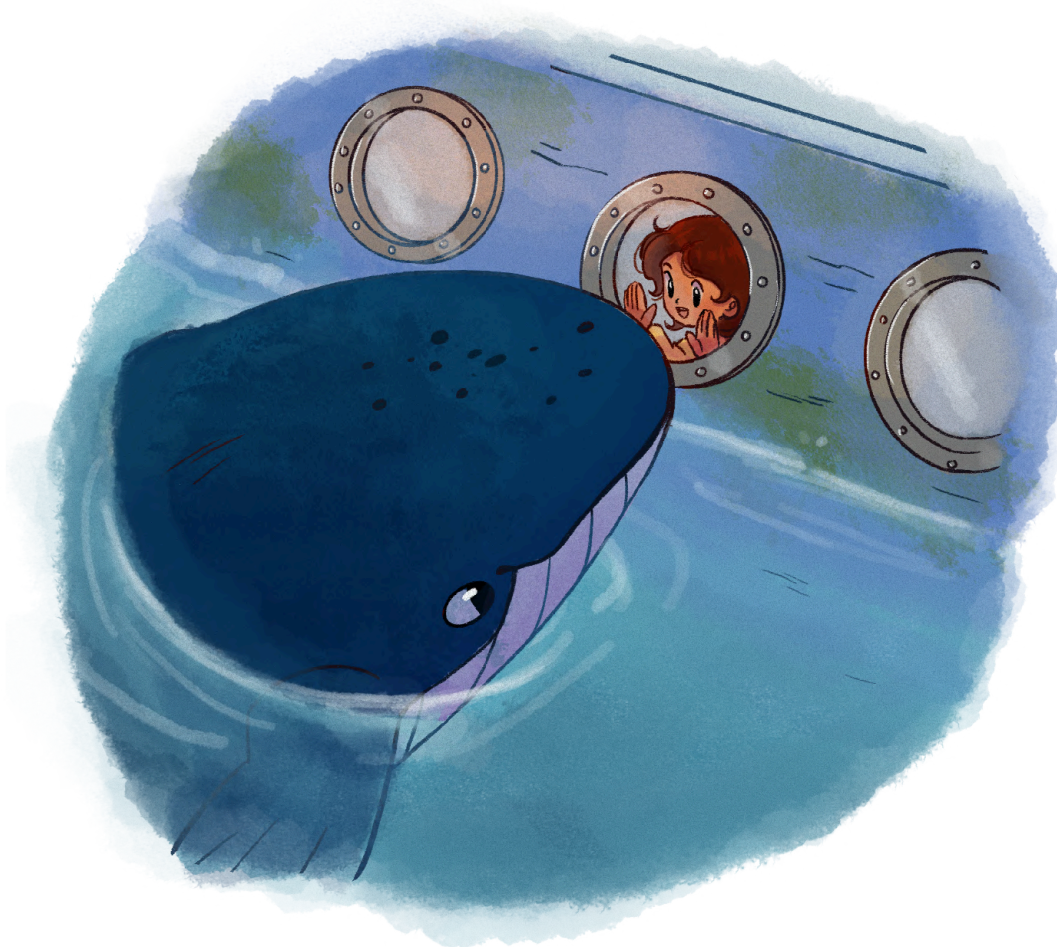
Sofia's eyes widened in wonder as the majestic fin whale breached out of the ocean, its graceful movements resembling a choreographed ballet. She was overcome with a mix of serenity and thrill, realizing that this encounter with such a magnificent creature would be an unforgettable experience.

As the ship sailed through the night, Sofia and her mother retired to their cabin on the lower level of the ship. From the porthole window, they could see the dark depths of the sea passing by, illuminated by the occasional flash of bioluminescent creatures.

Sofia was too excited to sleep, so she lay awake, listening to the sound of the waves against the hull of the ship. She couldn't wait to see what the next day would bring.

Suddenly, she heard a low hum and tried to figure out where it came from. As she looked out the porthole, there it was. The fin whale was standing before her, humming and knocking on the window glass with its nose. Sofia, filled with excitement, reached out her hand and touched the nose of the whale through the window.

The fin whale's deep, melodic hum seemed to resonate within Sofia's chest, echoing the mysteries of the ocean. As she gazed into the whale's soulful eyes, she felt a connection beyond words, a silent understanding passing between them. The whale's presence felt ancient and wise, as if it held the secrets of the sea within its very being.



Suddenly, the fin whale's hum shifted into a series of intricate clicks and whistles, almost like a song. Sofia listened intently, feeling a sense of urgency in the creature's communication. It was as if the whale had a message to impart, something vital that needed to be heard.

And then, the fin whale started talking.

"Hi, Sofia, how are you doing?"

"I am great!" Sofia replied, her eyes sparkling, "How are you?"

"I'm good, although things are getting harder and harder each year for us who live here."

"Why is that?" Sofia wondered. "I think you live in the most beautiful habitat on earth, the Mediterranean Sea."

"That's true," the whale replied in a sad tone. "That's why it's even sadder to watch it getting destroyed."

"What do you mean?" Sofia asked with a hint of fear in her voice.

"Global warming is a big threat and has dire effects on marine life."

"What is global warming?" Sofia asked curiously.

"Global warming is the phenomenon where the temperature of our planet

rises every year." "And why does this happen? Why does the temperature rise?" Sofia wondered.

"When you burn coal, oil, or gas to make electricity, drive cars, or run factories, it creates special gases. These gases go up into the sky and cover the earth like a blanket. This blanket traps more heat from the sun, making Earth warmer than it should be. So, global warming is like Earth's blanket getting too thick and making our planet too hot.

Just like you get too hot if you wear too many blankets, Earth gets too hot if it has too many of these gases. This extra heat can change the weather, melt ice, and make it hard for plants, animals, and people to live comfortably."

"Wow, that's scary," Sofia mumbled as she listened to the fin whale go on about global warming and its effects on the planet. It spoke of melting ice caps, disrupted migration patterns, and bleached coral reefs.

"Is there anything we humans can do to stop global warming?"

"Of course there is! You can help by using less coal, oil, and gas, and using more wind and sun to make energy instead. This way, you will keep Earth comfy for everyone! Otherwise, if the temperature keeps on rising, my species and many others will not be able to survive on this earth for long."

With a mighty flick of its tail, the fin whale dove into the depths of the Mediterranean's dark waters.

Sofia stayed there, looking out the porthole window and contemplating the words of the whale, until her eyes grew heavy and she drifted off into a deep sleep.

The next day, Sofia woke up excited and ran off looking for her mother on board. She recounted the story of the fin whale and everything she learned from that encounter. She told her mother all about climate change and global warming and kept asking her what could be done.

Her mother happily listened to all that Sofia had to say and felt really proud that her little girl was so responsible and sensitive about our natural habitat.

She explained to Sofia that that's exactly what she and her coworkers' work is all about. They examine marine life and the problems of climate change and try to find solutions.

Sofia's eyes widened with newfound determination as her mother spoke about their work. She felt a surge of inspiration within her, a burning desire to make a difference, to take action against the looming threat of global warming.

After her conversation with her mother, Sofia spent hours poring over books, articles, and documentaries on climate change. She became absorbed in understanding the causes and effects of global warming, learning about renewable energy sources and sustainable practices that could help combat it.



Armed with knowledge and a fierce passion for environmental conservation, Sofia set out to make a change in her own life. She began by reducing her carbon footprint in simple ways. For example, she walked or rode her bike instead of asking for rides in the car, she turned off lights and appliances when not in use, and she started a small vegetable garden in their backyard to reduce food waste and support local produce.

But Sofia didn't stop there. She rallied her friends and classmates at school, organizing clean-up campaigns at the beach, and educating them about how protecting our planet is a responsibility we all share.

Sofia had started making a difference and she and her mother felt prouder than ever.

4

The Little Girl and the Moon

Marie-Sarah Cabrillac



One December morning, as she watches the snow fall, her mind at ease and her heart happy, Manon warmly nestled in her arms, the bad news drops like a bombshell. "Madam, your daughter suffers from sickle cell anaemia, a rare disease that affects Mediterranean populations in particular." The doctor's voice seems to come from far away, her ears ringing. "A blood disease, passed on by the parents..." "Detected by sickle-shaped red blood cells..." "In terms of possible treatments...". But she has stopped listening and turns her head back to the window, where the snow is still falling.

Manon has grown up. She leads a normal life for the most part: she goes to school and plays with her friends. She loves puzzles, licking the bottom of the pie dish and building tree houses in the big cedar tree in the garden. Often, in the evening, Mum and she lie on the grass and watch the stars. "Mummy, will I ever be able to get to the Moon?" she asked. "Maybe, darling, if you can find a very, very tall ladder".

Yet, when an attack strikes, the shadow of the sickle looms. Fortunately, Mum is there to take care of her. Mum is a great scientist, she works a lot but never forgets to tell her a bedtime story. One evening, Manon asks her about her work. So Mum tells her:

"Imagine the billions of cells in your body. Each one contains DNA. DNA is like a long thread made up of four letters, A, T, C and G, repeated millions and millions of times. It forms a long story that each cell reads to find out what it has to do. In our cells, the DNA is all curled up, resembling a bowl of noodles. But they say that if we stretched out all the DNA inside ourselves, we could travel to the Moon and back thousands of times over."

Mum kisses her on the forehead. "Good night, my darling". Manon falls asleep. She dreams. She is walking on a long strand of DNA, and every step takes her further away from home. In the distance, she can see the Earth getting smaller and smaller. In front of her, the Moon shines, white and mysterious. Beneath her, the steps unfold: A, T, C, G, A, T, C, G, the building blocks of DNA. Suddenly, she feels the ground crumble beneath her feet; the A has become a T, the thread has broken, she is falling into the void, into a sea of red sickle-shaped cells...

She wakes up in a cold sweat, with a sharp pain in her chest, symptomatic of a seizure. She calls out for Mum, who comes running with a glass of water in her hand. "Drink up, my darling". Manon obeys and Mum goes back to get her another glass of water, this time accompanied by her medication, meant to ease the pain. She swallows obediently. After a few hours, which seems like an eternity to both of them, the pain gradually subsides and Manon drifts back to sleep.



Months go by, and the attacks become more frequent. Mum talks about transfusions and stem cell transplants, the cells that make up our red blood cells. Every day, Manon sees her become more worried, wrinkles deepen at the corners of her eyes, and she no longer hears her clear laughter like before. Sometimes, when Mum looks at her, a shadow passes over her eyes.

It is a summer evening. The heat is overwhelming and Manon has spent the day in the garden, in the shade of a large olive tree, listening to the sound of the cicadas. Big black clouds are gathering above her, heralding a thunderstorm. The atmosphere is electric and she feels the tension in the air in every cell of her body. She startles at the sound of the door slamming, but it is just Mum coming home from work. The bay window door slides open, and Mum enters the garden in tears. She comes towards Manon and holds her in her arms. After a long moment, she pulls away and exclaims triumphantly, "At last! They've finally approved the treatment!" She bursts out laughing, a laugh Manon hasn't heard in a long time, and starts dancing in the garden as the first drops start to fall. Manon still doesn't understand and looks at her quizzically. So they sit down on the grass and Mum tells her:

"As you know, it's a tiny defect in your DNA that makes your red blood cells sick. It is as if your cells were reading the wrong version of the story, a story with a spelling mistake. A 'T' instead of an 'A', and everything is turned upside down. Now, imagine a pair of tiny scissors, magical scissors that could cut DNA. Imagine being able to direct these scissors precisely where we want it. Thanks to these scissors, we can now change the story, and return your red blood cells to their beautiful round shape... The first treatment has just been approved, there's still a long way to go, but there's hope..." She smiles, and Manon smiles back at her.

That night, she dreams. Once again, the long strand of DNA stretches out before her, all the way to the Moon. She walks forward, and the four letters flashes beneath her feet like so many stars. But this time, she does not fall. No, this time she will touch the Moon with her finger.



5

A Researcher is Born

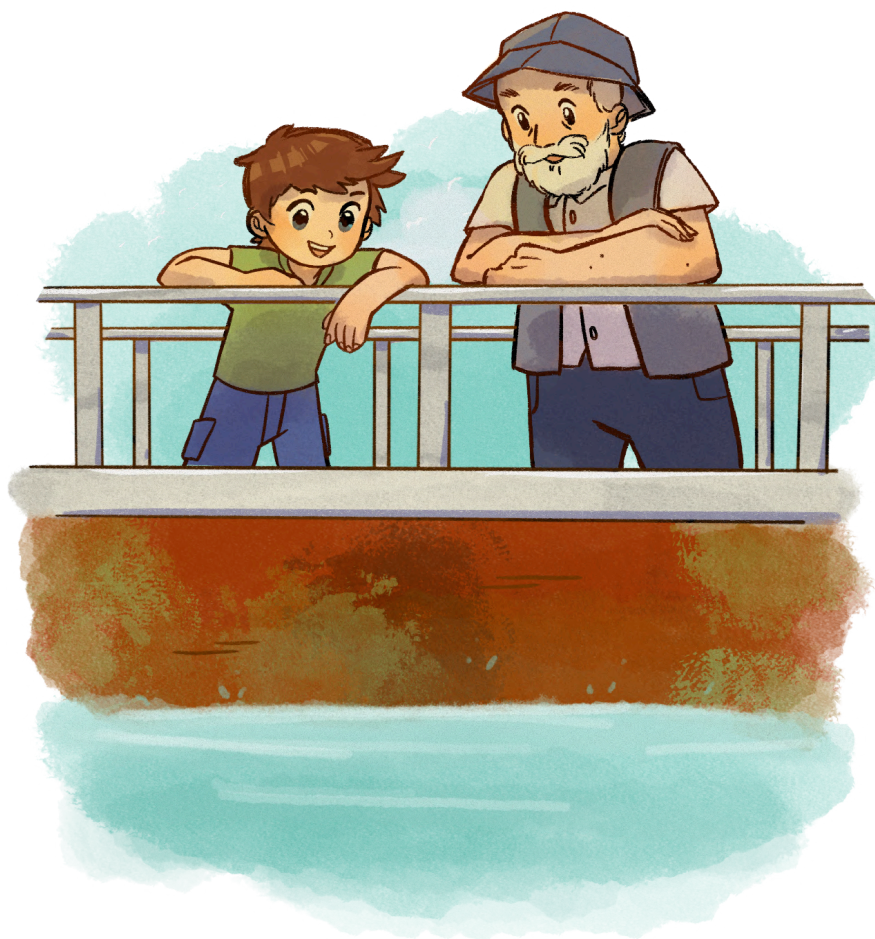
Marina Thalassini



Giorgis, a ten-year-old boy, was growing up on a small island in the Aegean. During the summer, the island was flooded with tourists. The ruins of the Temple of Apollo, the white chapels, the sandy beaches, the crystal-clear waters, and the tasty, affordable food drew visitors from all corners of the world. Giorgis helped out at the family taverna, since, thanks to the internet, he could communicate perfectly with the tourists.

At the end of the summer, the sea was becoming calm. The meltemia (strong northern) winds had passed, and an endless blue stretched across the horizon, where the sky and sea met. In the evenings, Giorgis would go to the pier, where his grandfather's boat was docked, and salute it like a sailor, as if he were paying tribute to Captain Gerasimos, renowned throughout the island. Giorgis' grandfather had spent nearly his entire life at sea. Giorgis was still young when Captain Gerasimos took his final voyage, never to return. He remembers his grandfather gazing peacefully at the sea and often sighing.

"Grandpa, I love the sea! I want to become a captain like you! I want to sail all the seas of the world!" he once told him with great conviction, hoping his grandfather would become an ally in his disagreement with his parents, who wanted him to stay on land rather than become a sailor.



"Giorgis, in your blue eyes, I see an entire ocean! I hope you discover the depths of the sea! Only then will you be able to help it when it needs you," his grandfather said, gently stroking his hair.

"What do you mean, Grandpa? What help could the entire sea need from one person?" asked Giorgis, puzzled by his grandfather's strange words.

"The time will come for you to understand, Giorgis," his grandfather replied, offering no further explanation.

One day, while Giorgis was swimming, he noticed a lot of foam floating on the water, white and brown, but deeper down, the sea remained crystal clear. As time passed, the foam increased, and people hesitated to swim, thinking the water wasn't clean. Giorgis returned to his parents' taverna and described what had happened at the beach.

"Don't worry, Giorgis, it won't take long for it to disappear," his mother reassured him, not interrupting her cooking.

"This isn't the first time, Giorgis. I don't know the how and why, but I'm sure by tomorrow the sea will be clear as glass again," added his father, unconcerned, even advising him to forget about it. But Giorgis wanted to know, no matter what.

Since school was still closed, he looked up information online but didn't understand many of the scientific terms. He soon gave up, feeling frustrated, and his question remained unanswered. He went to the village square where he met his friends, and playing football made him forget both the sea and the foam.

Several days later, Giorgis noticed a ship docked at the pier, different from the usual ones. He approached it and read the sign: "Research Vessel."

"What does that mean?" he wondered, continuing to inspect the ship for a while. It wasn't large, and it had strange tools on its deck.

"Hello! I'm Gerasimos, and this is the research team of the vessel. Would you like to take a closer look at a research ship?" a man from the ship asked him kindly.

"Hello. I'm Giorgis. I'd love to! Would it be alright if I asked questions too?" Giorgis replied hesitantly, as it was the first time he had been invited to tour a ship.

"Not at all! I'd be happy to answer all your questions," the researcher responded kindly. Giorgis climbed aboard, full of curiosity, and Gerasimos began the tour, starting at the ship's bridge. A small wheel dominated the centre, and beside it there were various screens, buttons, lights, and compasses.

"How cool!" exclaimed Giorgis, impressed.

"From here, the captain steers the ship. He gives orders for the ship's course, monitors the radar and the compass, and uses binoculars to see far out

to sea," Gerasimos explained, as they moved from the bridge to another room filled with various machines and several computers. Nautical charts of the areas the ship was sailing, along with the sea depths, were spread across a central table, along with measuring instruments.

"What are these machines?" asked Giorgis.

"They're instruments for monitoring the sea floor and ocean currents," the researcher quickly replied, as if expecting the question.

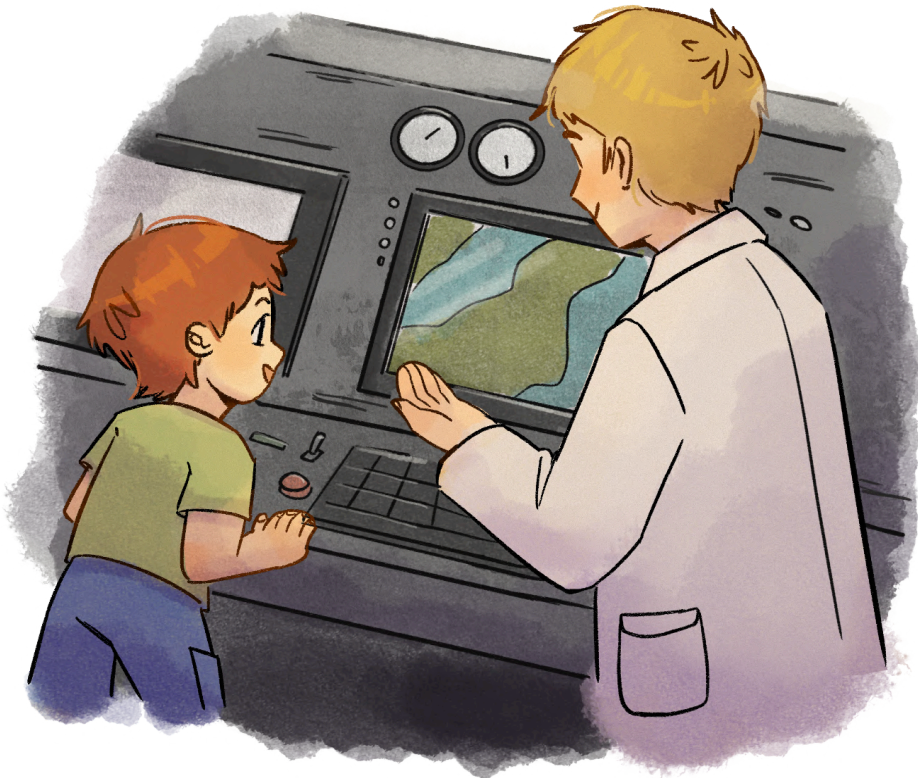
"So, you can see the sea floor?"

"Not only can we see it, but we record all its features. That means we map the seabed's terrain in every sea we explore and also measure the currents at different depths. Look at these images on this screen. All these lines represent underwater mountains and trenches."

"And these complex lines are the sea currents?" asked Giorgis.

"Exactly, Giorgis! Then we send all the research data via satellites directly to our research centre!" replied the researcher, satisfied with how the tour was going.

Gerasimos and the boy then descended a staircase that led to the ship's lower deck. Opening a red, metal door, they entered the researchers' laboratories, where they studied the marine environment. Benches, tubes large and small, countless bottles of various sizes, flasks, vials, and shelves filled with instruments and equipment were everywhere.



"This is what we call a wet lab. We examine all the samples from the sea here. We separate marine organisms from sand and other materials, then classify them. Once we sort the animal organisms from the rest, we categorise each one, whether it's a fish, shell, starfish, crab, shrimp, and so on. The very small organisms that we can't see with the naked eye are taken to another area, where we observe them under a stereoscope. Come, let me show you," and he led him to an adjoining room with stereoscopes.

"They are alive, Mr Gerasimos! They look like tiny monsters!" exclaimed Giorgis as he peered through a special lens at microscopic creatures in a drop of seawater.

"We call them plankton! These microscopic organisms drift in the sea in billions and provide valuable food for whales and fish," the researcher emphasised to the young boy.

"Come with me! I'll show you something that will excite you even more!" said the researcher, and after walking down a narrow corridor, they stepped out onto the rear deck. Giorgis was speechless at the sight of a submarine robot with many antennas, spotlights, and a long metal arm.

"An underwater robot! How deep does it go? Do you operate it, Mr Gerasimos?" asked Giorgis without taking a breath.

"This robot-submarine is controlled from the ship. It dives up to 1,000 metres deep without any researchers on board. Its metal arm picks up small rocks and organisms from the seabed and brings them to the ship for study. With its cameras, researchers monitor the marine environment on the ship's screens as the robot moves along the seabed, recording marine life in the deep waters where light cannot reach," the scientist explained.

"Mr Gerasimos, when I grow up, I'm going to be a scientist! I'll become just like you and explore the depths of the sea with a robot like this!" Giorgis declared with determination.

"I sincerely wish that for you, Giorgis! There's still so much to discover! Humanity knows much more about the universe than the depths of the oceans!" said the researcher with emphasis, as they made their way to the exit of the ship.

Then Giorgis remembered the foam in the sea and described to Gerasimos what he had seen.

"The foam that forms on beaches, Giorgis, is caused by various factors. Most of the time, it's due to those microscopic creatures you saw earlier under the stereoscope, in the...." Gerasimos stopped on purpose.

"In the plankton!" Giorgis answered promptly.

"Well done, Giorgis! At certain times of the year, their population increases

so much that when these microorganisms die, they combine with other particles in the sea, appearing as foam, which is then carried by the sea currents and waves to beaches, both near and far."

"So it's nothing bad. We can swim without worry!"

"Not always! Sometimes, this foam can be due to polluting material that people throw into the sea. These substances eventually turn into foam that is carried by the currents to the shore."

"Thank you so much, Mr Gerasimos! Today has been the most important day of my life!" said Giorgis, hugging Gerasimos with joy.

"Never stop observing the sea, Giorgis!" Gerasimos said emotionally. "Take this small book with beautiful pictures of marine organisms so you can recognise them. It's a gift to remember your visit to the ship. Here's also my card with my email address, so you can ask me anything that amazes you in the future."

Giorgis hurried off the ship, which would be departing for its base in a few hours. As he walked away from the pier, he remembered his grandfather's words and clutched the book tightly. He would become a marine scientist, and with that thought, he ran like the wind, whistling happily, eager to tell his parents and friends everything he had seen, heard, and learned.



6

Like two butterflies

Gaspare Benenati



Like every day, Leila got off the school bus and hugged me. Immediately afterwards Nadia came down.

Nadia and Leila had been classmates since they met in kindergarten many years before and since then they had become inseparable friends.

I asked about their day at school.

Leila replied: "Good." But now I understood when it was the truth and when a thought bothered her.

To go home, we took the route through the park. We walked close together, and with various questions I tried to understand what was troubling Leila.

Given my insistence, Leila looked at me at first undecided whether to share her secret, then she snorted and began to say: "The teacher explained to us that inside each of our cells there is DNA. DNA is read as an instruction manual, explaining how to build the cell, the tissue, and the organs. Shortly: how each person's body must be built."

The teacher added: "The instructions that are read are called genes, and the genes also tell us about our past."

Then, pointing to me, she said: "It is possible that Leila, given her fair complexion, red hair, and blue eyes, may have had Norman ancestors a long time ago. These characteristics, these genes, are more widespread among people coming from Northern Europe."



Nadia, on the other hand, with dark eyes, and curly black hair, probably had Arab ancestors."

I looked at Leila a little strangely. I didn't understand what, in this speech, could annoy her.

Leila looked at me and said: "I always thought that Nadia and I were the same. I don't like the fact that our DNA tells different stories."

Now I understood what was bothering her.

I looked at the two little girls and told them to follow me.

I showed a yellow caterpillar under the leaves of a mulberry tree, and a red one, under a leaf of a cherry tree.

I explained: "See? These two caterpillars are different, their DNA instructions will require both caterpillars to build a cocoon.

The process will be the same, but two very different butterflies will emerge from the cocoons: one orange and the other blue, but this is precisely the beauty: imagine how boring it would be if all the butterflies, flowers, animals, or people were the same colour!

Once the butterflies leave the cocoon, it will not matter what led them to become butterflies: they will fly from flower to flower, and live their life.

What butterflies have inherited from their DNA, will give them their shape and colours, but what they want to be will depend only on them."



Leila looked at Nadia and smiled at her. She understood that even if they looked like opposites of each other, even if their respective ancestors had come from different places, that didn't define who they were.

Nadia looked at Leila, then said defiantly: "Whoever gets to the pavilion first wins!"

The two little girls quickly ran towards the ancient building in the centre of the park. A pavilion consisting of a Norman pointed arch, surmounted by a pink Arab dome, typical of Arab-Norman architecture.

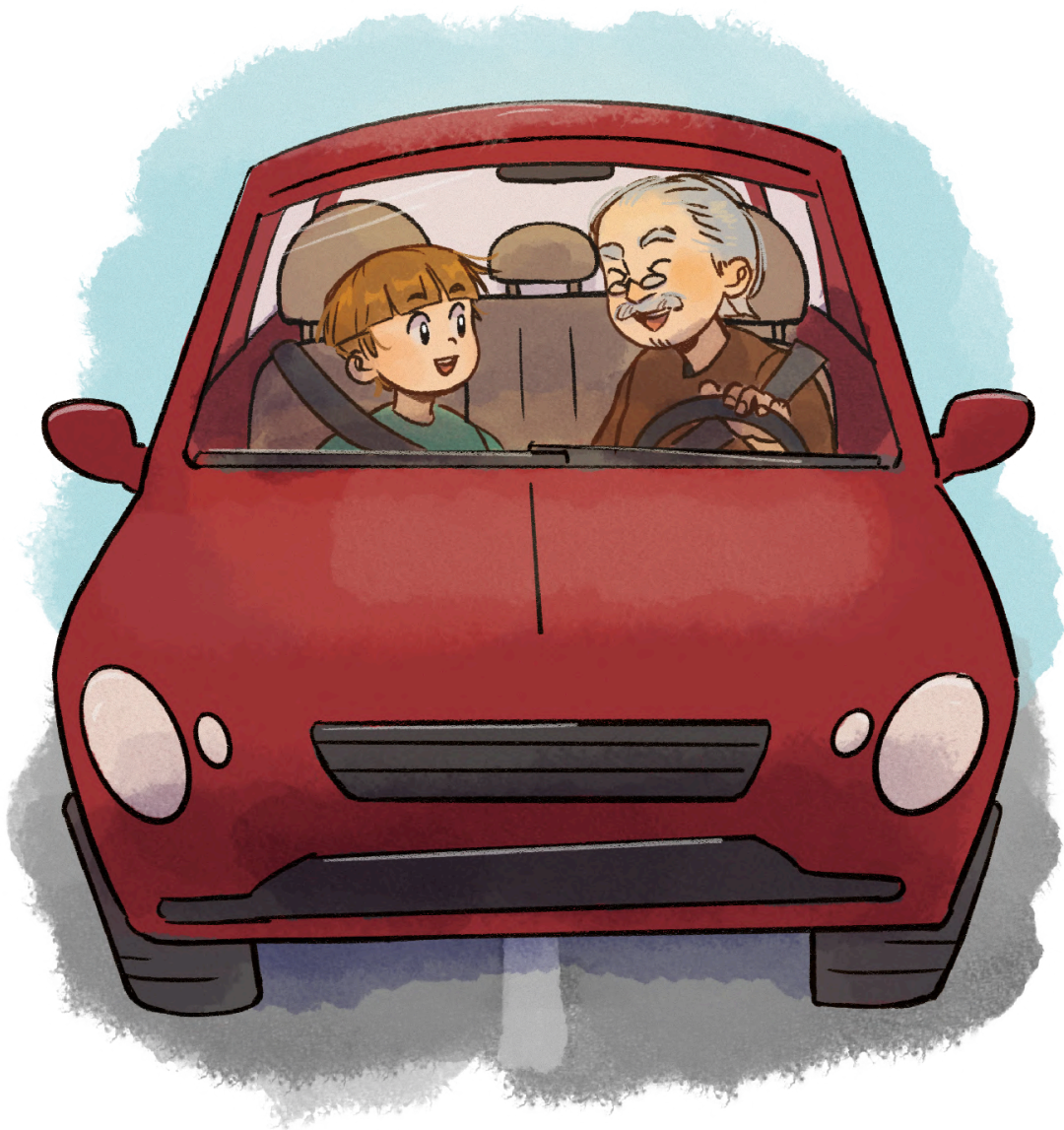
Sitting on a bench I couldn't avoid thinking about how many people had passed from this island in the centre of the Mediterranean, leaving traces and mixing the signs of their passage in our monuments, in our culture and in our genes.

How much wealth...

7

He who seeks, finds

Marco Zaccari



"Come on, come on, play that parking game for me!" Gigi exclaims, staring at his grandfather as he drives and approaches the historic centre with his small car.

"Okay, okay, I'll do the magic again... just watch... one more moment... here it is a parking lot for me!"

"But Grandpa! You are truly a magician! You can always find it right away, but how do you do it? I want to learn too!"

"Eheheh" the grandfather chuckles at his grandson's amazement "It's a very ancient secret that only a select few people know. Now you'd be old enough to learn it, you know?"

Gigi's eyes are filled with naive enthusiasm "I want to do your magic too!"

"Okay, but on one condition." The grandfather turns off the car and stares at his grandson, raising his eyebrow with a serious and slightly amused expression "It takes a commitment. So, let's see... in exchange you will have to give me one of the toys you love most."

Gigi seems a little sorry and his grandfather explains that it is an important secret and if Gigi wants to know it, it is a good idea to reciprocate with something equally important.

So, that same evening, Gigi carefully looks in a large box and chooses an old toy, rather battered and worn but which he cares about a lot, which he will give to his grandfather the following day.

"Well, now I want to know your secret for doing magic."

The grandfather smiles, picks up the toy and exclaims in an almost joking tone "Very good. Now that you too are part of the circle of the few who know the secret, you must know that... anything you think about very, very, very intensely, will become reality!"

Little Gigi frowns, he seems rather confused, his grandfather notices and remarks: "Really, I do exactly that with parking: I think about it hard and boom, I've found it! Don't you believe it? Try it yourself: tomorrow for example, think about friendship all day and I am convinced you will find many heart-shaped things. But you have to think about it intensely, and, above all, you must never reveal this ancient secret to anyone, please."

His grandfather seemed to know too much: the next day Gigi finds lots of heart-shaped stones and leaves, he can't believe it, the more he thinks about it, the more he finds: pieces of paper, a couple of heart-shaped confetti, even a candy wrapper. Gigi is so excited about this amazing discovery that he stuffs as many items as possible into the pockets of his little shorts, to take home.

That same evening Gigi is intent on arranging and admiring the special collection on his bed, his mother comes in, observes him for a few moments,

and asks "What do you need all these pebbles, leaves and paper for?"

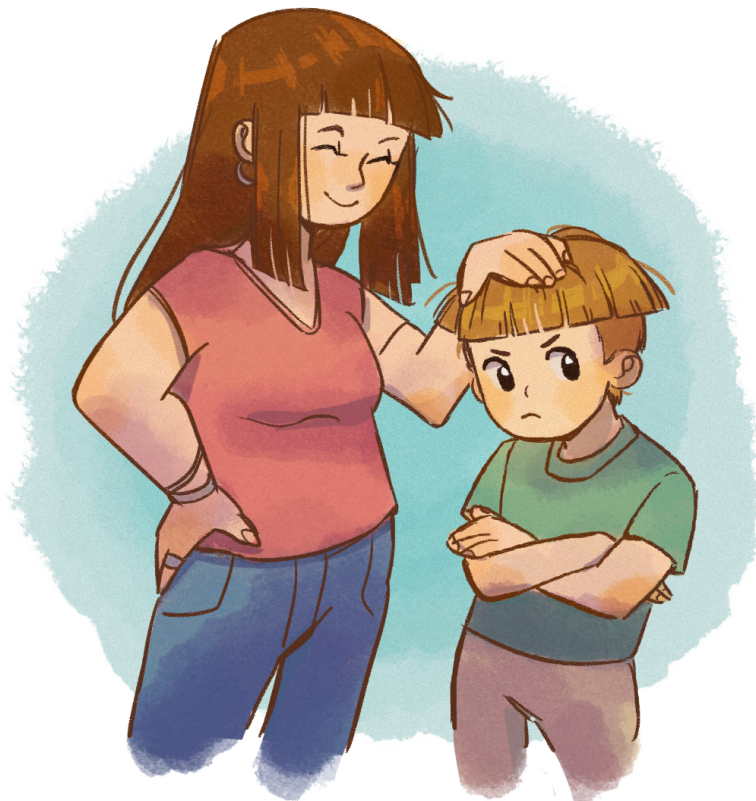
Gigi can't contain his enthusiasm and lets the news slip: "Mom, you don't have to tell anyone, promise me. Grandpa taught me that if I think about something a lot, I'll find it, as he does with parking lots. Do you see how many heart-shaped pebbles I found today? It means I thought about it well!"

The mother bursts into a thunderous laugh that is both amused and tender. "Your grandfather is a great joker, but can't you see that he is making fun of you?"

Gigi is dazed, he doesn't understand why his mother says this in the face of such overwhelming evidence carefully laid out on the bed.

"You see, my dear" explains the mother as she caresses Gigi's head, hinting at a smile of understanding "Our mind, which is inside this little box, cannot count all the stones but only shows you the ones that interest you. Some say that "the brain is not statistical", but that's something you'll learn when you're older, for now know that we're made that way. Look, give it a try, tomorrow think intensely about a colour, but also try to count all the objects that don't have that colour. Try it and then tell me."

And so the following day, with his mother's advice, Gigi tries to think about yellow as much as possible, collecting little flowers, paper, and other small yellow objects, but trying to carefully count all the other objects that catch his eye.



Once he gets home he immediately runs to tell it "Mom, you were right! I collected 47 yellow things, but I saw at least 200 other colours and then I stopped! When I see Grandfather, he will hear me!"

And so, Gigi, meeting his grandfather on the following occasion, feeling mocked, scolds him and also asks him for his toy back. The grandfather nods, smiling and staring at the little one with a look of tenderness without saying a word, then goes into the other room and returns with a package in his hand.

"Here, this is for you."

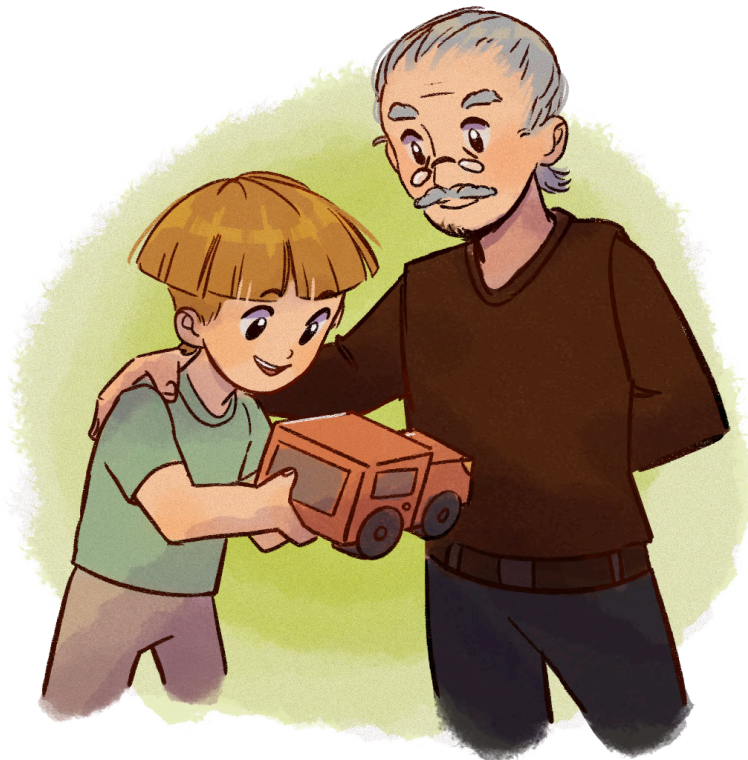
Gigi unwraps the package and realizes that it contains a new toy car, identical to the original. The grandfather had noticed that it was broken and could not be fixed, so he found another one in a small shop in the village.

"Mother is right" explains Grandfather "Everything she told you is true. In reality, we don't invent anything but we limit ourselves to finding only what we're looking for."

"So, magic doesn't exist, grandfather?" asks Gigi, happy with the new toy but also disappointed by the bitter discovery.

"Magic exists. And you have to believe it because the magic lies precisely in choosing what we want to find. Learn to only look for good things, Gigi."

Thirty years have passed, and today Gigi is an adult, has a beautiful family, and in his free time is an excellent mushroom grower. Every time he fills the basket he thinks back with sweetness and gratitude to his prankster grandfather.



8

The Guardians of the Sea

Sonia Revelo Prieto



In a small coastal village of Spain, there lived a young girl named Ivet. She had long brown hair that she always wore loose, and brown eyes that reflected her endless curiosity. Ivet was very adventurous and loved nature and animals. Every day, she went to the beach to explore and play among the rocks, where she felt happy and free.

One summer, the beach was full of tourists. Although it was exciting to see so many people, Ivet noticed that the beach was dirty. There were food wrappers, plastic bottles, and other waste scattered across the sand. The beach, which was once beautiful, now looked dirty and sad. Ivet became worried about the health of the sea and its inhabitants.

One day, while collecting shells on the shore, Ivet found a shiny conch shell, different from the rest. When she touched it, she felt a gentle vibration and, suddenly, the conch shell began to glow softly. Intrigued, Ivet brought it closer to her ear and heard a soft voice say:

"Hello, Ivet. I am Nereida, an ancient sea spirit and protector of all marine creatures. My mission is to care for the ocean, but with all the pollution, my job has become very difficult. I need the help of people like you, who love the sea and want to protect it. This magical conch shell will allow you to communicate with marine animals."

Ivet, feeling excited and a little scared, replied:

"Hello, Nereida! Can I really talk to the sea animals?"

Nereida confirmed:

"Yes, Ivet. And they need your help. Pollution is damaging their home. I've seen how plastics and waste are invading their spaces. Would you like to help us save the sea?"

Without hesitation, Ivet accepted and began her incredible adventure. She hung the conch shell around her neck and went into the sea. Soon, she found herself surrounded by marine creatures: an octopus named Triton, a turtle named Galatea, and a sea lion named Nautilus. Each one told Ivet how waste and plastics were destroying their homes.

Triton was a wise and playful octopus. He explained to Ivet how the plastic bags floating in the water looked like jellyfish, which was food for him and other octopuses.

"The bags get tangled in my tentacles, and my friends and I can't tell the difference between real food and trash. In addition, when we eat them, they make us sick," said Triton with a worried expression.

Galatea, a golden-shelled turtle with bright eyes, told her that the abandoned fishing nets can trap turtles and cause severe injuries.

"I remember one summer when a net completely trapped me. It was



terrifying," said Galatea. "Many turtles aren't lucky enough to be rescued. These nets, along with other plastics, can cut our flippers or make swimming hard for us."

Nautilus, a sea lion with a big heart, told Ivet how plastics trapped small fish and damaged coral reefs.

"The first time I saw a piece of plastic caught in coral, I thought it was a new species. But I soon realized it was causing harm. Plastics suffocate corals, preventing them from growing and providing shelter to many marine animals," said Nautilus.

After hearing the animals' stories, Ivet decided she had to act immediately. Thus, she gathered her friends and family to help. Together, they planned a beach clean-up and a public awareness campaign in the village.

Before starting the clean-up, Ivet and her grandmother Isabel organized a small workshop for the children in the village. They showed simple experiments, like putting a piece of plastic in water to show how it floats and why it's dangerous for marine animals. They also carried out an experiment to show how plastic breaks down into microplastics, using a grater to make small pieces from an old bottle. The children were amazed at how something so small could cause so much harm.

During the clean-up campaign, Ivet and her friends put up signs in several languages so all tourists could understand. The signs read: "Be a guardian of the sea! Pick up your waste and let the water shine." Ivet and her friends also spoke with tourists, explaining how their actions could affect the sea and its creatures.

They worked as a team to create colourful banners and hung them all over the village, inviting everyone to join their mission in cleaning the beach. The banners read: "Do it for the sea, come and help! With gloves and bags, the beach we will clean!"

Before starting the clean-up, Ivet invented a song that everyone sang while they worked:

*A clean beach and nothing more,
Where just water hits the shore.
Without residues of plastic,
We will make the sea fantastic.
To keep alive the fish and turtles
We will overcome the hurdles.
Helping with these hands of mine,
I will get the sea to shine.*

On the day of the clean-up, Ivet, her friends, and lots of volunteers collected piles of trash from the beach. The marine animals, grateful, watched from the water. Triton helped find plastics among the rocks, Galatea pointed out the most affected areas, and Nautilus cheered up the children with his joyful presence.

As Ivet and her friends collected trash, Triton decided to play a little trick to lighten up the mood. He hid behind a large rock and, when everyone was focused on their task, suddenly emerged, spraying water with his tentacles, soaking Ivet and her friends by surprise.

"Triton!" Ivet shouted, laughing. "You soaked us!"

Everyone started laughing and jumping to dodge the water jets as Triton moved quickly from side to side.

"I just wanted to refresh you and make the clean-up more fun!" Triton replied with a mischievous smile as he continued to spray water.

"Well, you achieved that!" one of the children said, laughing and splashing water back at Triton.

The air was filled with laughter and joy, and everyone felt renewed to continue their important mission.



While Iveta and her friends continued their task, they found a particularly tough to clean area filled with fishing nets and plastics stuck between the rocks. They worked hard to clear it. At one point, Iveta felt overwhelmed by the amount of trash, but then she noticed the conch shell around her neck vibrating.

Nereida spoke softly: "Did you know that the Mediterranean Sea has more than 17,000 different species? This great biodiversity is crucial to keep the sea healthy. Scientists have found that having many different species helps keep the sea in balance. But pollution is putting all of this at risk. Every little action counts to protect the sea. You're doing great, and the sea needs you."

With renewed energy and spirit, Iveta led her team to clear the area.

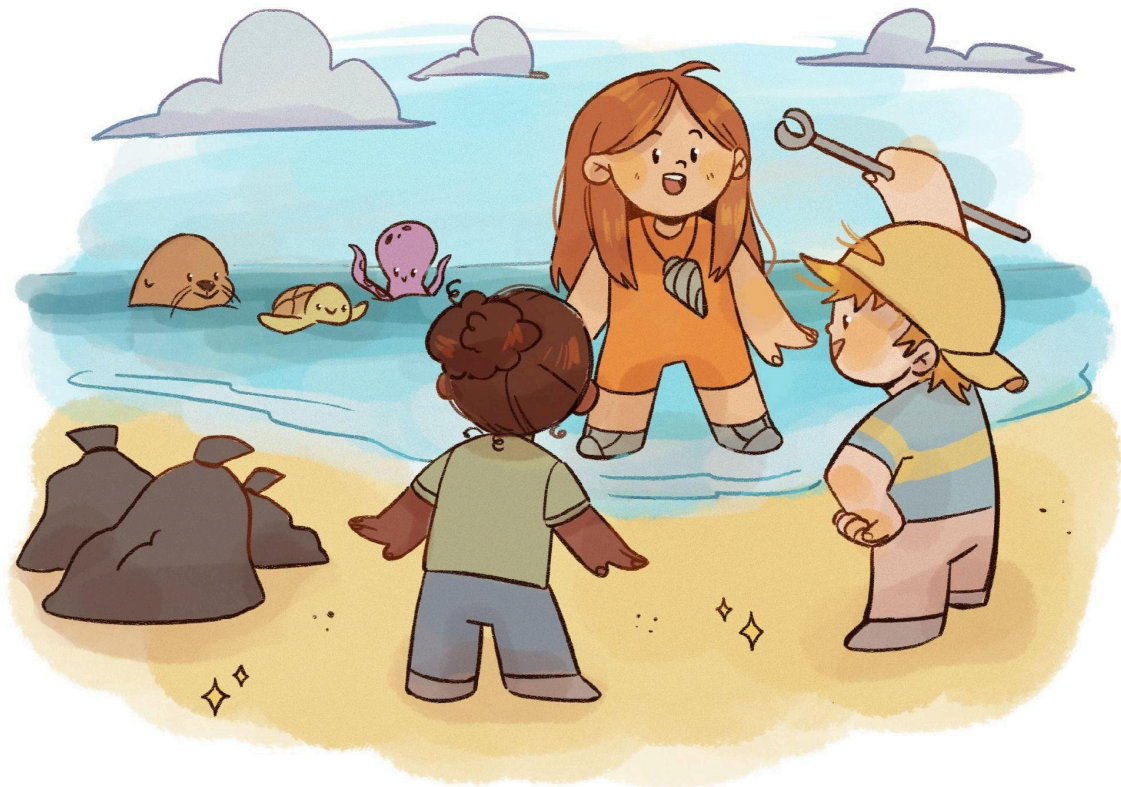
After the clean-up, Iveta and the volunteers talked to the community about how to reduce plastic use and recycle properly. They put up more signs in the village to remind everyone of the importance of keeping the beaches clean and protecting marine life. Iveta also organized educational talks for tourists in hotels and for residents about the impact of litter on the marine environment, teaching how plastics affect animals and what we can do to help.

Besides the clean-up, Iveta and her friends decided to create more lasting

solutions. With the help of neighbours from the village, they set up recycling points at the beach with bins where tourists could deposit their plastics, bottles, and other waste. They also began using biodegradable nets for local fishermen because these nets break down in the water without harming marine animals, unlike plastic nets that can trap and injure them.

Over time, the village beach became a clean and safe place for both animals and humans. Ivet continued visiting her marine friends, always carrying the magical conch shell with her. She learned a lot about the sea's biodiversity and the importance of environmental conservation.

Seeing the beach clean and the animals happy, Ivet felt satisfied and proud of what they had achieved. She realized that the real magic wasn't in the conch shell but in the power of people to do good deeds. Ivet proposed to her council to establish an annual "Sea Day," where every summer they would organise a clean-up of the beach and educational activities to remind everyone of the importance of caring for the sea. Over time, other coastal villages joined this initiative, creating a network of sea guardians all along the Mediterranean coast.



9

The Earth that was sad

María Elena Carra Artero



A long time ago, on an ancient continent full of mysteries, there was a magical place where the wonders of science exercised their power in the secrets of nature. In that special corner, lived a group of small, brilliant researchers, known to everyone as the Little Knight Scientists. This group of inseparable friends had made their home of the school's laboratory, a space where test tubes and microscopes shared the spotlight with experiment books and potted plants. However, what most distinguished these little scientists was not only their knowledge, but also their unwavering love for their dearest and oldest friend, the Earth.

The Earth had been their friend forever, even before any of them could remember. She was a generous friend, always smiling, who offered them her clean air that everyone called Atmosphere, her fertile soil where plants could grow and play, and her crystalline seas, especially the beautiful Mediterranean Sea, where the Little Knight Scientists used to swim and explore. Life in the laboratory and beyond its walls had always been joyful and full of adventure thanks to the Earth, its protector and confidant.

However, one day everything changed. The Little Knight Scientists began to notice something strange. The Earth, which had always been so smiling and vibrant, was no longer smiling like before. There was something in her eyes, a dull shine, and a sadness that they couldn't understand. Worried, the scientists decided to take a closer look. They put on their little white coats, sharpened their pencils, and sat in a circle to discuss what they saw. The Earth was sad, and that filled the hearts of the Little Knight Scientists with concern.

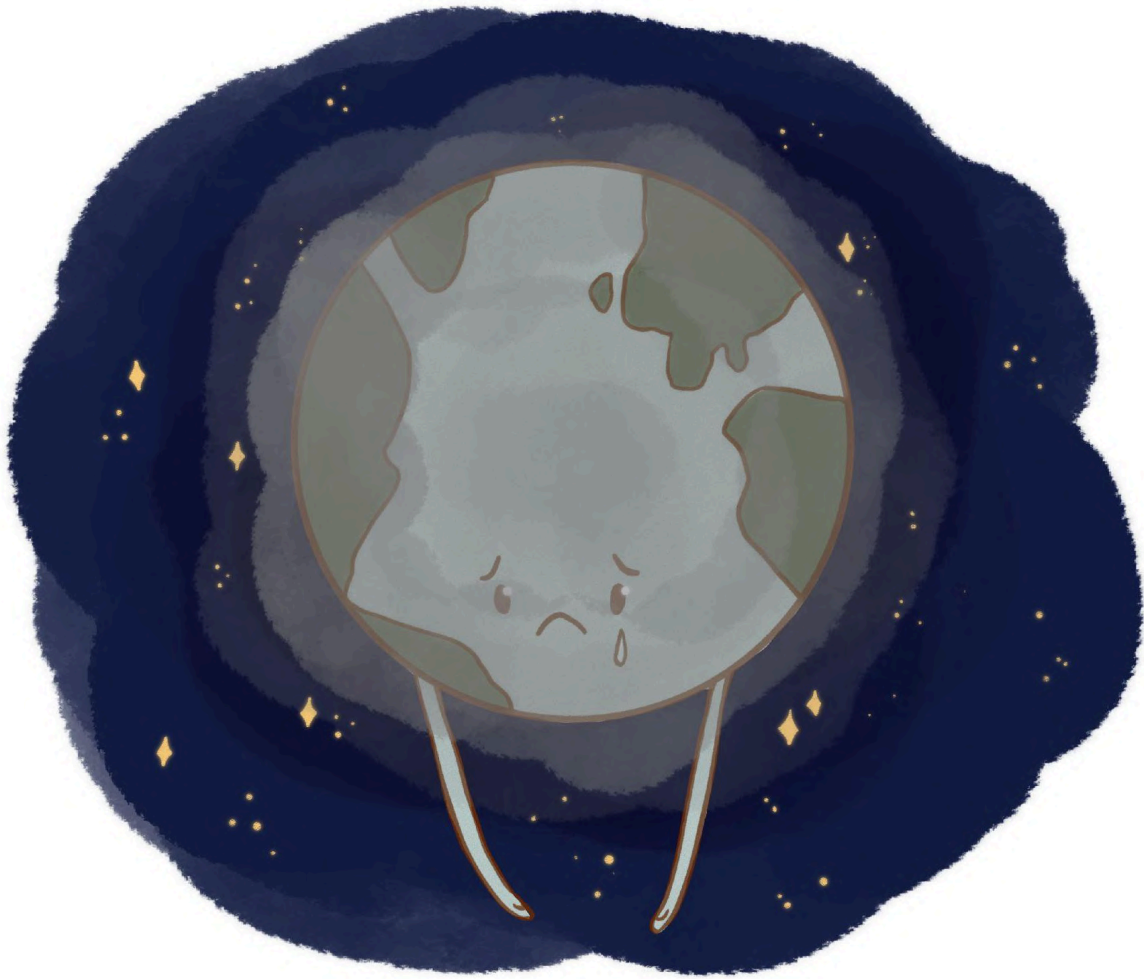
Determined to help their friend, the little scientists decided that the best way to understand what was happening to the Earth was to ask her directly. Very delicately, they approached her and, with the warmth that only true friends can offer, they said:

"Friend Earth, do you want to tell us what's happening to you?"

The Earth, which until then had kept its pain silent, let out a deep sigh. She seemed relieved that her friends had noticed her sadness, but also dejected by the magnitude of her discomfort.

"I am very sad because I am sick," the Earth confessed, with a voice that seemed to come from the depths of her being. "There is too much smoke everywhere and it's hard for me to breathe."

The Earth's words left the Little Knight Scientists completely stunned. For a few moments, everything was silent, a heavy silence that could only be broken by the rustle of a leaf or the rustle of the wind. The little scientists looked around with new eyes, trying to understand the seriousness of the situation.



It was then that they realized that the air that had once been so blue and clear had turned grey and opaque, that the sea had lost its characteristic brilliance and that the sun, always shining, could now barely be seen through a layer of thick smoke. Even the rainbow, which had illuminated the sky so many times after the rain, seemed to have faded, as if its colours had been stolen by that cursed smoke.

Now they understood why their friend the Earth was so sad. But knowing it was not enough. The little knight scientists knew they had to do something about it. They couldn't stand by while their friend suffered. They had to find the source of that smoke and find a solution. Therefore, determined to act, they took their magnifying glasses, their microscopes, their binoculars and all the laboratory instruments they could need. They divided into groups, each with a specific mission, and set out for different regions: bustling cities, small towns, and quiet coasts.

Elena, one of the most insightful of the group, began her research in the cities. With her binoculars in hand, she watched as grey smoke emerged from

the cars and motorcycles that circulated tirelessly through the streets. This smoke, she thought, was like a poison that spread through the air, dirtying everything in its path. She carefully noted her observations and decided that she should continue her research elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Mía, another of the scientists, turned her attention to the large factories that stood on the outskirts of the cities. These factories, which produced everything from food to clothing to toys, were also sources of that grey smoke. Mía watched as enormous columns of smoke emerged from the chimneys, darkening the sky and contaminating the air that everyone breathed. She knew that these factories were essential to daily life, but she also understood that their operation was contributing to the suffering of her friend, the Earth.

Sofía, for her part, decided to investigate power plants, those places where the energy that made lights, appliances and many other things work was produced. With her magnifying glass in hand, she observed how these plants emitted large amounts of smoke while generating electricity. It was evident that this smoke was also making the Earth sick, and Sofia felt more determined than ever to find a solution.

Finally, Alicia, the most curious of the group, decided to focus on the Mediterranean Sea, that sea that they loved so much. When analysing the water with her microscope, she discovered something alarming: the grey smoke that covered the Atmosphere was causing the air temperature to increase, which in turn warmed the sea. This caused a vital substance, oxygen, to escape from the water, leaving the fish without enough air to breathe. The fish, which used to swim happily and were full of life, now seemed sick and weak. Sofia knew that if something was not done soon, not only the Earth, but also its inhabitants, would be in great danger.

With all this information collected, the Little Knight Scientists returned to their laboratory. There, they reunited with Earth to share their discoveries. The situation was serious, but now that they knew the source of the problem, they knew they had to find a solution. But they couldn't do it alone. They needed the wisdom of those who had been present since the beginning of time: the mystical Moon and the almighty Sun.

"What's wrong with you, Earth?" asked the Moon and the Sun in unison, when the Little Knight Scientists told them what had happened.

"I am sick and very sad," answered the Earth, "because the factories and vehicles emit so much smoke that I cannot breathe. The Little Knight Scientists have done everything they can to help me, but we don't know how to stop this smoke without shutting down the factories and stopping the vehicles."



The Moon, always thoughtful, and the Sun, with its inexhaustible energy, meditated deeply on the situation. Shutting down factories and stopping vehicles seemed like an immediate solution, but they also understood the consequences that would bring. Everyday life would be affected: without factories, there would be no production of food, clothing, or electricity. How could people live without these essential elements?

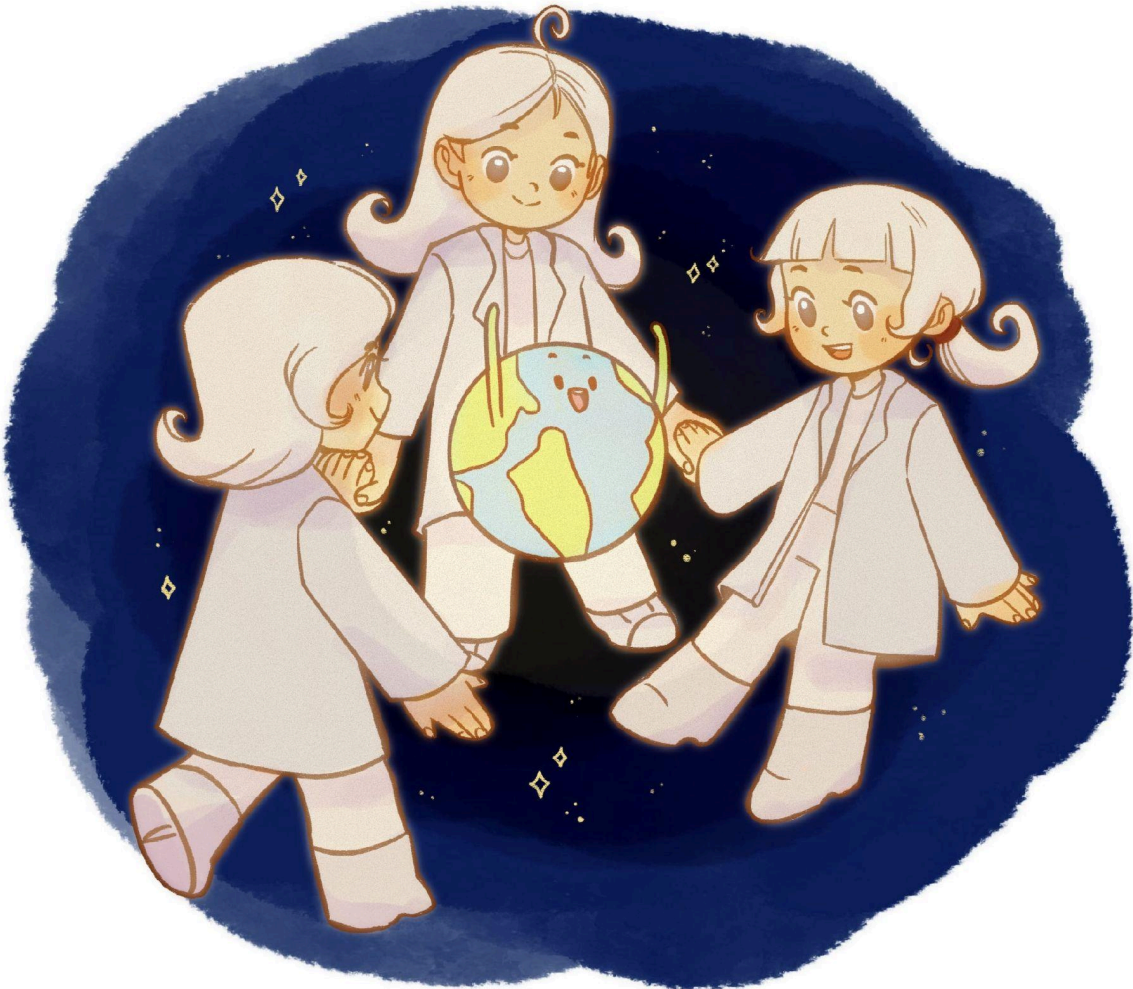
The Moon, with its serene glow, it occurred to it that it was going to try to run the factory with its energy, so there would be no need to burn coal and the factories would not emit smoke. With all its concentration, it sent its energy towards the factories, trying to make them work without emitting smoke. But no matter how hard it tried, its soft light was not enough to generate the necessary energy.

Then, the Little Knight Scientists turned to the Sun, asking it to use its powerful light to try the same. The Sun, always willing to help, focused all its energy on the factories. With its intense light and immense energy, it managed to keep the factories running without producing that grey smoke that did so much damage to the Earth.

It had done it! The Sun's energy, pure and renewable, had replaced the energy sources that previously produced smoke. The factories began to operate cleanly, and little by little, the sky began to clear. The grey air turned blue again, the sea regained its brilliance, and the rainbow, which had previously disappeared, once again showed off its vibrant colours.

Thanks to the Little Knight Scientists and their tireless search for a solution, the Earth smiled again. The world regained its balance, and everyone, from the smallest creatures to humans, was able to live on a clean and healthy planet. The Little Knight Scientists had shown that with curiosity, dedication and love for the Earth, any problem, no matter how big, can be solved.

And this is how, the planet continued to spin under the blue sky, knowing that it was in good hands.



10

Irene's awakening

Sara García de Pablo



Beep ! Beep ! Beep !

The alarm went off next to Irene's ear. "Damn thing! Who invented such an instrument of torture?" She fumbled on the bedside table until she managed to stop it. She always woke up grumpy because of that unpleasant sound, which had torn her mercilessly from the arms of Morpheus.

She jumped out of bed and began to dress. Today was the start of her mother's holiday, and although she was still sulking from the rude awakening, the excitement of the trip to Athens quickly changed her mood. It did not take her long to get ready and she left the house with her backpack over her shoulder, followed by her mother who handed her the alarm clock with an eloquent look on her face. Even on holiday, she could not get rid of it!

"Don't give me that look. We'll have to get up very early if we don't want to die of the heat."

"If I had a mobile phone I wouldn't have to carry it around."

"You'll have one when you're older. Put it in your backpack and don't forget to take it out when we go through the airport security."

Before she knew it, they were enjoying delicious food in a restaurant at the foot of the Acropolis and they were going to watch the changing of the parliamentary guard. After a while, she could not stand the sweltering heat and went to sit in the shade of Syntagma Square. When she approached the fountain, she lost her balance and fell into the water, headfirst.

She instantly snapped out of it and emerged splashing in the stream. "Wait a minute, stream?" As she coughed from the water she had swallowed, she looked around and was stunned. Everything had changed! The tall buildings had disappeared, as had the fountain and the parliament itself. All around her, a natural landscape stretched out, with a river running through it, surrounded by trees. A boy in a short robe was running towards her.

"Are you all right?" he said, helping her out of the water.

"Yes, fine... I think."

"Your clothes are soaked. Where do you live? I'll walk you home."

"I... I don't know where I live." At the young man's puzzled look, she rectified. "It's just that I'm not from here and I got lost."

"I can see that. Your clothes are very strange. Luckily, my uncle's academy is not far away. You can stay the night and tomorrow we will look for your family."

"Won't your uncle get angry?"

"No way! My uncle Aristocles takes in many students at his academy. One more will not even be noticed. By the way, my name is Espeusipo."

"I'm Irene."



Without further ado, he pulled her and led her through the forest to the Academy, which was a collection of buildings dedicated to different things. At the entrance, there was a sign that read: No one enters here who does not know geometry. Her new friend was showing her around proudly. "That's the library and that's the dining room, see the kitchen next to it?" Then he took her to the dormitories and lent her some dry clothes. It took her a while to put on the himation as Espeusipo had called it, but when she came out, Irene looked like one of the students.

They did a lot of little chores around the academy and before going to sleep, they refilled some pots in the corner of the dormitories. Although she was in a strange place, Irene fell asleep almost immediately, wishing that when she woke up it had all been a dream.

A deafening noise startled her into a rude awakening. The alarm was blaring tirelessly as it did every day. "Damn alarm clock! I can never get rid of you!" she shouted angrily. The muffled exclamations she heard around her

made her eyes snap open; she was still at The Academy! Clearly flushed she shrank back and pulled the blankets of the *kline*¹ over her nose. Everyone around her burst into laughter and then went about their business as if nothing had happened.

"Come on Irene! We've got to get up or we won't have any breakfast." Espeusipo, who looked full of energy in the morning, helped her fold the blanket. "By the way, what was it you said earlier? Something about a harm lock?"

"I meant the alarm clock," she said, pointing to the pot in the corner. "Although I've never seen one like that before."

"It's my uncle's invention! What a funny name you have given it! It is natural that you haven't seen it before. Come, I'll show it to you."

Irene approached the tower of pots with curiosity.

"Look, this is a clepsydra up here, it's used to measure time, see the marks? It uses water that flows through this other hole. That way we know how long the classes last and how much free time we have to rest. It's a very practical system."



¹ The *kline* (from the Greek *κλίνη*, and in the plural *klinai*) is an ancient type of furniture, a kind of divan or couch that was used by the ancient Greeks and later by the Etruscans and Romans during their symposia or their equivalents in Roman society, the *convivia*.

"Yes, it sounds useful. It wasn't the falling drops of water that woke me up though, it was that infernal noise. How does it make that sound?"

"Well, with the two containers it has underneath. When the second one fills up with water, since it's sealed, the air inside can't escape and moves towards the third container below. Then, the air exits through this small clay jar that has a tiny hole at the top, which creates that sound. It's like a whistle." Irene looked at him with her mouth open, staring at the tower of jars in disbelief, "As it makes a lot of noise, we wake up at once. So we don't waste time. By the way, speaking of time, if we don't hurry we'll be late for class and my uncle will scold me, he's the teacher."

After quickly grabbing a piece of bread with dried figs and some watered-down wine, they made their way to a clearing in the forest of the Academy where the teacher was waiting for them, seated on a stone bench surrounded by students. The atmosphere was serene, amidst the olive trees and the murmur of the river Cephysus.

The class began with a dialogue on nature and the good, topics that the teacher considered fundamental to a fulfilled life. The students listened attentively, intervening with questions and comments. He patiently guided them, using his Socratic method to help them think.

After a few hours of relaxed discussion, they got up in high spirits and divided into groups. Some students prepared for a short run, while others stretched and warmed up before participating in a wrestling match. The activities were accompanied by laughter and shouts of encouragement, creating a vibrant and energetic atmosphere. Irene couldn't decide what to participate in so she stayed a little behind.

"Exercise not only strengthens the body, but also teaches the importance of discipline and effort. A strong and healthy body contributes to a clear and capable mind". The teacher had approached her and encouraged her to join the friendly competitions with a smile.

"Plato, stop speculating and join the fight, we are an odd number!"

"I'm coming, Aristotle!" he shouted, raising his hand towards his pupil. "You can be our referee if you like," he said in a quiet voice, addressing Irene who had been staring at them. She was sure she had heard those names before, but she could not remember where.

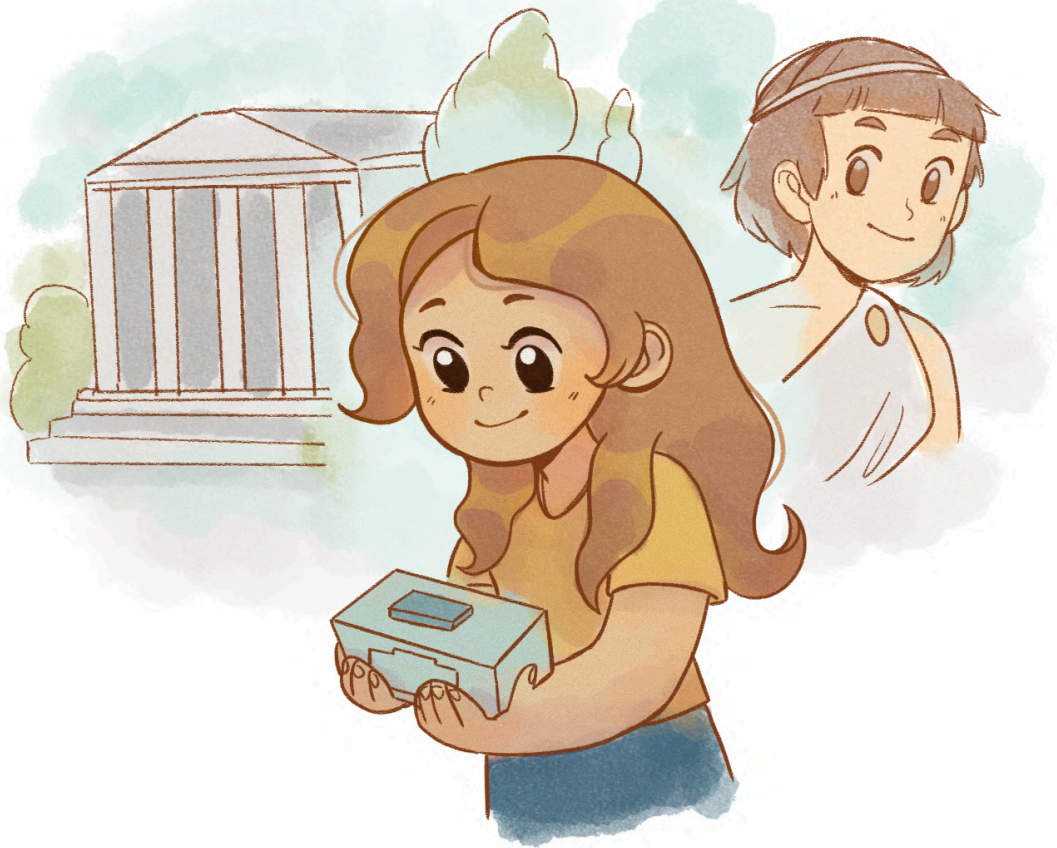
Thank goodness, she wasn't invited to fight them, what muscles, now that was a good shape to be in! She had a fun time mediating in the fights and after a while of exercise, the clepsydra signalled that it was time for a lunch break. Espeusipo sat down next to her and shared some olives with her - how delicious they were! However, as she was not used to eating them with pits, she choked

on them.

She started coughing to try to breathe, but there was no way. She was choking! Desperately, she began to claw at the air until she felt someone grab her hand and pull her back. At last, she managed to dislodge the pit from her throat, which fell between her mother's feet onto the cobblestone floor.

She was soaked from the waist up, having fallen into the fountain, but she was glad to be back in modern Athens.

She would always wonder whether her little adventure had really happened. However, from then on, she no longer woke up in a bad mood, because the sound of the alarm clock reminded her of the adventure she had had with her friend Espeusipo at Plato's Academy.



11

The Secret of the Olive Tree

Dursaliye Şahan



The young sparrow was hopping cheerfully across the thick, leafy branches when suddenly it came face to face with a blackbird.

"Who are you?" asked the sparrow.

The blackbird, feeling both tired and needing some conversation, paused.

"They usually call us Eurasian Blackbirds", it replied.

"Like the chickens on the farm? But they're so big! You're tiny", the sparrow observed.

"That's exactly what I was going to say. They call us common blackbirds, but we go by other names, too. For example, glossy black males are called 'Ousel,' the dark brown females are called 'Merula', and the ones with yellow heads are called 'Merle'. In some regions, we're just called 'Woofell'.

"Is that so? Well, it's nice to meet you, the bird with many names."

"Pleasure's mine", the blackbird said with a smile.

"May I ask, what are you doing here?" the sparrow asked curiously.

"I was looking for a nice tree where I could build a new nest and find some good neighbours."

The young sparrow thought for a moment. "But why would you want to build your nest here? My mother told me that there's a beautiful forest just a little further on. You could find all kinds of neighbours there."

The blackbird nodded and tilted its yellow beak forward. "Becauuuse", it began, drawing out the word, "this place is very close to those olive trees down there. And we blackbirds love olives."

The sparrow puffed up its feathers in shock.

"But that can't be right! What will be left for the farmers who grow them if you eat all the olives? I don't think that's fair at all. It's downright unjust!"

The blackbird chuckled softly.

"I admire your honesty", it said. "But you know, we have a secret."

Feeling a bit sceptical, the sparrow asked, "What kind of secret? And what does that have to do with our conversation?"

"The olive trees love us too", said the blackbird with a grin.

The little sparrow fluttered its wings up and down in disbelief.

"Chirp, chirp, chirp, oh, that's funny! You eat their fruit, and they love you? No one would believe that."

"Well, here's our second secret: The farmers who grow olives love us too."

The sparrow narrowed its eyes, suspicious. "Are you making fun of me?"

"Of course not. Would you like me to explain why?"

The sparrow was about to fly away, but its curiosity got the better of it. "This conversation wasn't going well, but now I'm curious. What's your excuse this time?"



"Do you know how we eat olives?"

"How would I know? I'm just a little sparrow."

"We pluck the olives from the branches and swallow them whole, seed and all."

"Without even spitting out the seed?"

"Yes, yes."

"Oh, how lovely", the sparrow said sarcastically.

"I just love the taste of olives."

"Is that why you're so pitch black?"

"I don't think so. The male blackbirds are black, but the females are greyish. We even have ones with yellow heads."

"Hmmm. Anyway, let's get back to the point. Why do the olive trees love you?"

"If you're patient, I'll explain quickly. When we eat the olives, we digest the fleshy part in our crops and stomachs. But we can't digest the seed, though we thin its outer shell."



"How does that even work? I don't understand."

"Well, like many creatures, our stomachs produce acid. This acid helps break down food."

"Alright, alright. What happens next?"

"Then, the olive seeds, with their shells thinned, come out of us."

"And?"

"They fall to the ground. And as everyone knows, all seeds want to meet the soil".

The little sparrow, now impatient, chirped, "Oh, you tell the story so slowly!"

"When these thinned olive seeds reach the soil, it's like a celebration for them. Once they're in the ground, they sprout quickly. And what happens when

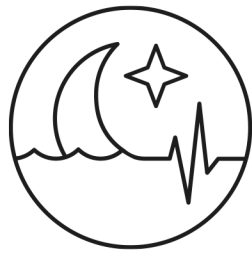
they sprout? They grow into tiny olive tree saplings. And as they grow, they produce hundreds, even thousands of olives yearly."

The little sparrow paused to think. For a moment, it didn't know what to say. Glancing at the blackbird, it had just mocked, it finally spoke, "Hmmm, I think I understand now. Maybe, like the olive trees, I could learn to love all blackbirds too."

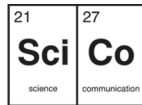
"Thank you", said the blackbird with a smile.

"Our nest is up on that high branch. If you'd like, you can build your nest close to ours. You could even invite your friends to join us.", the sparrow added warmly.





MEDNIGHT



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