



The Lord of All He Surveyed

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Mythology

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by JA Howe

Ian Katapoulis was out in his boat in the Mediterranean. He had a route that he generally followed, going around the islands. The water wasn't as clear as it might have been once, but he still found it lovely. A hazy sun shone down on his face, as greenish-gray waves rippled in the deep blue waters. A school of fish jumped playfully in the waters up ahead, near one of the reefs. He could hear the fishermen calling to one another as they sat in the water, and yelling at motorists and tourists who just wanted to fool around.

Every day, the merchant had left more and more of his work to his children. Ian, when asked what he did out on the Med, used to say he was keeping an eye on it for the gods — actually he was making sure nobody stole any of the treasure that had sunk with boats during the Peloponnesian and Aegean wars, and the countless other battles and skirmishes that had happened in the country's history. At least, they couldn't — Ian, being Greek, was of course entitled to the treasures of his land.

He swore loudly when something banged into the side of the boat. He whirled, fist raised, and stopped cold.

A pair of stingrays had jumped into his boat.

Ian didn't have a large craft. He liked to be close to the water — but not this close!

The small rays — for their kind they were small, anyway — were flopping silently around on the deck of the

twelve-foot boat. Their tails slashed against the mast and one of them hit a sail.

“Thwop.”

Tiny eyes stared at him.

Ian gave it no other thought: he jumped into the water.

No life-vest; he had them but rarely wore them on good days.

He dove very far, into the bottom of the Mediterranean, trying to calm down. To jump from a ship in panic is one thing, to suffocate because of it is another. *Concentrate on the pretty water*, he said to himself. *Look at the fish!*

He was right near one of the prettiest islands, one known well to tourists. He saw a diver some ways off, taking pictures.

Swimming on, his heartbeat slowed a bit now, Ian was startled again when he turned. Something glinted in the water.

Swimming closer, he found a golden anchor. He wasn't sure whether he was hallucinating or not.

He made note of the spot, which was near the edge of a rock face, and a school of brightly-colored fish swam there. The two rays were thankfully not on his boat when he returned to it. He watched the sun set brilliant pink and gold, and headed in as the other fishermen brought in the day's catch.

“It's a sign from Athena, you shouldn't touch it,” said his friends.

“I think it's a sign from Poseidon,” said another, and definitely you shouldn't touch it.”

He went to the temple of Poseidon. Offered the god a bit of dried fish he'd made into a vest, which was his hobby.

The god appeared. “I see you have found an anchor,” he boomed. “You are a fisherman, a sailor by trade, and I do not know where it comes from. You may take it.”

Ian bowed. "Thank you, Great Poseidon," he said.

That night when he went to sleep an owl appeared to him. "I am the Owl of Athena," it said. "She asked me to send her greetings and her wisdom: those who take something from the sea always must give something back. Be careful what you take."

He woke up thinking, and went to the temple of Athena, made an offering. This time, he gave her a bowl of fine olives he'd picked that morning.

She appeared to him.

"You had a dream last night about me, didn't you?" she said. "Think on what that could possibly mean." And with that she disappeared.

He sighed, and left.

That day, he went out again.

One of the stingrays jumped into his boat again.

Ian had to think fast; if the ray came near him he'd die. Even if it didn't intend to do so, the barb on the tail would kill him. On the other hand —

He decided to go down.

The waters were dark this time, few of the pretty fish out. He caught sight of some of the golden ones swimming nearby, but he was on the wrong side. There must be sharks out today, he thought, un-worried; the sharks of this area were small and relatively harmless.

His goal was still there, the anchor. It gleamed as if beckoning to him in the waters nearby. He could almost taste the riches it would bring him. He had brought up things before, but not like this.

Who used a golden anchor, he wondered? Surely it would be too soft a metal — which probably meant it had simply been decorative.

Silently, he thanked Poseidon for this great opportunity. The anchor came out easily, sliding from a place where it had seemed wedged, like a square of butter.

It truly is a gift of the gods, then, he thought.

He began to bring up the anchor when an eel came up behind him. It got his arm and he screamed underwater. Bubbles rose toward the surface — not a good idea.

Ian swam off hurriedly, just a little ways — still holding the chain of the golden anchor. It bit at his hands, but he'd not let this go!

The eel came at him again. He fought with it, and it got him again. The pain in his arm was dreadful.

He realized, as bubbles formed in his mouth and his head felt like it was being squeezed like a grapefruit, that he could have just stayed on the surface in his boat and died fast there, instead of this horror. So he let go the anchor and fought for his life, at least.

The chain had wrapped itself around one of his legs though. It had snapped off something, and the anchor didn't weigh too much, but it was dragging at him.

No, I don't want it — keep your anchor! he cried silently to the gods, to the sea, to anything that might be listening.

The anchor remained attached to his leg, but it seemed to weigh less. He found himself rising, his vision maroon and black.

Just as he realized that was the bottom of his boat he was seeing, it was too late. He slammed right into it and gasping, swallowed water. He choked, the reflexive coughing drowning him.

When he got to the Elysian Fields, the gods said to him, "why did you take the anchor?"

"Because I was a fool," he replied. "I was greedy. I thought my offerings would be enough."

An owl flew down and cocked its head at him. Slowly it became the vision of the Goddess Athena.

She smiled sadly at him. "You did not think, however, on my words," she said. "When taking something from the gods, there is always a price to pay. It is not up to you to name the price."

Ian simply nodded.

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