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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Story of Arion

Long ago, in the great city of Corinth, lived a man named Arion. He made beautiful music on a golden harp, and people flocked to listen to him play and sing. Men and women, boys and girls, all came to hear Arion play, and when his songs were finished, they gave him money, and Arion became a rich man. After living for a long time in the house of Periander, who was known as the tyrant of Corinth, he decided that he wanted to see new places that he had never seen before. So he boarded a ship and asked the sailors to take him to Sicily and Italy. They sailed for many days and weeks over the blue sea, stopping in many cities where Arion played and sang, and received more money, until he eventually arrived in Tarentum. He stayed there for a long time, for it was a rich and beautiful city, and all the people who came to listen to him gave him a lot of money.

Gradually, when Arion had had enough, he decided to visit his friend Periander again. He went to the beach and said that he needed a ship to take him back to Corinth, and that he would only go with Corinthians, because he liked the men of Corinth better than the men of any other place. At that moment, a ship arrived on the beach that had come from Corinth, and the sailors told him that they were Corinthians and that they would take him home. So Arion promised to go

with them, and he sent his harp and all his boxes full of beautiful clothes and gold and silver down to be put on board the ship. When the sailors saw the boxes and felt how heavy they were, they said to each other, "What a rich man he must be! Wouldn't it be nice to have just a little bit of all this money that has been given to Arion for playing on a harp?"

The next day, Arion came to the shore and went on board the ship. It was a beautiful day; there was hardly a cloud in the sky and there was a fresh breeze that was just strong enough to fill the sails and move the ship gently through the water. The waves danced and glistened like gold in the bright sunshine, while the ship pushed through the white foam and sailed happily towards Corinth. So they went on for many days, with Arion sitting at the head of the ship to watch it cut through the water, and as they passed one place after another, he thought they would soon reach Corinth. But the sailors on the ship were bad men. They had seen the large boxes full of money that Arion had brought with him on the ship, and now they decided to kill him and take his gold and silver. So one day, as he sat in front of the ship looking down at the dark blue sea, three or four of the sailors came to him and said they were going to kill him.



Now Arion knew that they said this because they wanted his money; so he promised to give them everything he had if they spared his life. But they would not do that. Then he asked them to let him play his harp one more time and sing one of the songs he loved the most. He said that when the song was finished, he would jump into the sea. When they had given him permission to do this, Arion put on a beautiful dress, took his harp in his hand, and stood up to sing. And as he sang, the sailors began to feel sorry for him that they were going to kill him, because they would no longer hear his sweet music. But when they thought of all the gold and silver that Arion took to Corinth, they decided not to let him live. Arion took one last look at the bright and sunny sky, and then jumped into the sea, and the sailors never saw him again.

The ship sailed merrily on over the dark water, as if it was not carrying so many bad men to Corinth. But Arion did not drown. A big fish, a dolphin, was swimming by the ship just as Arion jumped overboard. The dolphin grabbed him, put him on his back, and swam with him to Corinth, much faster than the ship could sail. The big fish swam farther and cut through the foam of the sea that was thrown up over Arion. And gradually he saw in the distance the high cliffs and peaks which he knew were the cliffs and peaks above Corinth. So soon the fish came close to the shore and left Arion on the beach and swam away again into the deep sea.

Arion was cold and tired from being in the water so long, and he could hardly crawl into the city to the house where Periander, the tyrant, lived. Finally he

reached the house and was brought to the great hall where Periander sat. And when he saw Arion, Periander got up, came to meet him, and said, "Why are you here, Arion, what is all this? Your clothes are dripping with water? I thought you would come to Corinth from Sicily on a ship, but you look more like you have been in the sea than on a ship. Did you swim here?" Then Arion told him the whole story; how he had left a ship in Taras with Corinthian men he had hired to take him home, how they had tried to kill him to be able to steal his money, and how the dolphin had brought him to the shore when they let him jump from the ship into the sea. But Periander did not believe the story and said to Arion, "You cannot make me think that this strange story is true: who has ever swum on the back of a dolphin?" So he told his servants to give Arion everything he wanted, but not to let him go until the ship on which he had left Taras came to Corinth. Two days later, Arion stood next to Periander and looked out over the sea. Soon he saw the white sails of a ship, which sailed into the harbor with a gentle breeze from the west. As it came closer, Arion thought it looked very much like his own ship, until he could finally see from the colors on the bow that it was the same ship in which he had sailed. Then he said to Periander, "Look, they have finally come, so now go and get those sailors and see if I have not told you the truth." So Periander sent fifty soldiers with swords and spears and shields to take all the sailors from the ship. The ship sailed happily towards the shore, and the soft western wind filled its white sails as it cut through the

water. As they looked towards the beautiful land they were heading to, they thought of all the things they could buy with Arion's gold and silver, and how they would do nothing but eat, drink, and be merry once they got off the ship. So when they reached the beach, they lowered the sails, lowered the masts, and threw ropes out of the stern to moor the ship to the shore. They had never thought that the fifty soldiers, whose spears and shields shone brightly in the sun, had been sent to capture them on purpose. They couldn't understand why, as soon as they got off the ship on dry land, the soldiers told them to go as fast as they could to Periandros' house. Ten of the soldiers stayed behind to guard the ship, while the rest led the sailors to the palace.

When they were brought before him, Periandros spoke kindly to them and asked them where they were from. The sailors said they were from Italy, from the great city of Taras. Then Periandros said, "If you're from Italy, maybe you can tell me something about my friend Arion. A long time ago, he left Corinth and said he was going to Sicily and Italy; and I can't imagine why he would be gone so long, because if the people there gave him as much money for his music as they do here, he must be a very rich man by now."

Then the sailors said, "Yes, we can tell you everything about Arion. We left him very safely in Taras, where everyone wanted to hear him sing but he said he couldn't come to Corinth until they gave him more gold and silver and made him a richer man." Just as they were telling this lie, the door of the room opened and

Arion himself came in. Periandros turned to the sailors and said, "Look, here is the man you left safe and sound in Taras."

"How dare you tell me such a big lie? Now I know that Arion told me the truth and that you wanted to kill him and threw him into the sea but the dolphin caught him when he fell and brought him here on its back. And listen to me now. Of all Arion's gold and silver, you will have nothing; everything that was his must be returned to him. And I will take your ship and everything on it away from you, because you wanted to rob and kill Arion."

Then the soldiers came and drove these bad sailors out into the street and chased them, while calling on people to come and look at the men who wanted to kill Arion. And they all came out of their homes and jeered at the sailors as they passed by, until they were about to sink with fear and shame.

So Periandros took their ship and gave Arion back all his gold and silver, and what he loved more than his wealth: his golden harp. And everyone came to hear the miraculous story of Arion and the dolphin. Arion made a large stone statue that looked like a man on the back of a dolphin, and placed it on Cape Tainaron, so that people would never forget how the dolphin saved Arion when he jumped into the sea.