

The seagull



and

the stone

by Yannis Haritantis

Artwork created by Thanos Dimoyannopoulos



This is something like how the story began, one summer day, at daybreak, on a beautiful seashore in Greece.

“You look so strange. You don't look like a bird to me!”

“What...do I hear well?”

“I said..., you don't look like a bird to me!”

“Maybe I'm not, who knows... But who's talking to me?”

The wind had died down early the night before, discreetly allowing the sea to fondle the shore, until, seduced, the last had fallen asleep. There wasn't the sound of the faintest ripple. The wave lapped lightly against the sand, as if only to underline its presence.



The morning sun was more than keen to lavishly bathe the shore in golden rays of light.

And as the light skimmed over the earth, it magnified the shadow of every pebble. You should see then how each grain of sand imagined itself turned suddenly into a golden rock and strove to trick nature by returning the light like another tiny sun. That was its own special way of giving thanks. Such images cannot be put to words, nor captured in pictures, so that this mystery may be revealed, always animate, to the eyes alone.

This was the moment the seagull was waiting for, when he decided to take his morning walk along the untrodden, wet sea-strand, as was his habit.



And with the skill he'd inherited from his forefathers, he set about tracing his footprints upon the sand, one after the other. His signature was three little lines, which he inscribed, step by step, across the seashore.

And so he paced, light-hearted, spreading a trail of signatures behind him.

The place was his and he ought to mark it with his presence.

After a while he paused and looked to the East.



Yet another luminous day filled his eyes with pictures. I am, he thought, swelling with joy. He couldn't help but offer his own thanks for such a divine gift!! He might not know whom he was thanking, but he felt compelled to express his gratitude regardless.

“I am! Thank you... thank you!!”

But before he was done thanking, there came that unexpected voice again.

“Looks like you're talking to yourself; and on top of that, you're careless.

The seagull looked around in surprise.

“But who are you, who's talking to me, and I can't see you?”

he wondered.

“Pity I must seem so insignificant to you. You've been standing on me all this time and you never even noticed my presence”,

the voice came calmly again from somewhere near, very near him.



Startled, and not expecting such a thing could happen, he stepped aside.

“Oh... forgive me, little stone. I was so enchanted by the sun, I hardly looked around me. Forgive me”, he apologized.

Promptly the stone expressed her sympathy.

“I fully understand. You're not the only one to be enchanted by the sun. But move aside a bit, so I too can enjoy the sunlight”.

The seagull was baffled.

How could he have been so careless? But then again, he'd never come across a stone talking and complaining.

*He moved aside a little, and bent mindfully
over the stone.*



*A sigh of relief came from below, and then
the same voice added.*

“Much better this way, wouldn’t you say?”

*“Yes... but this is the first time a stone has
spoken to me. I'm truly baffled!”*

“First time I've spoken to a bird myself. You said you might not be a bird, though”.

“I'm glad you're talking to me, little stone. But it came so unexpected, I admit I was startled”.

The seagull was genuinely glad the stone spoke to him and made no effort to conceal it. He stood a while studying her enjoy the sun. But the stone too was happy the seagull deigned to talk to her. She had been talking solely to the wave lately, and found it exceedingly monotonous for her taste. The seagull seemed more interesting.

“So, this the first time a stone spoke to you, then?”

“Yes, first time ever, and I don't want to miss this unique opportunity”.

It was quite obvious both were eager to talk and learn as much as possible from one another.

“You know, little stone, I thought lifeless things don't speak”.

“Goodness me! What do you mean ‘lifeless’? Nothing is lifeless! Everything under the sun is alive and has a voice, as long as you've got ears to hear it”.

The seagull, who took pride in his hearing since he could hear even the silent fish under the wave, boasted with glee:

“As for ears, Mrs. Rock...., not only am I all ears, but I'm also very eager to hear you”.

“Well, then... in that case, what would you like to know?”

Now, under different circumstances, a stone in the middle of a vast beach and a seagull next to it might be considered a rather unremarkable sight. But a rock that talks and a bird that's eager to listen was something unprecedented for that particular shore.

“I'd like to know who you are and how you came to be here all alone. Could a stone have anything significant to tell me, I wonder”.

“Oh, so apart from careless, now you're insulting too, and that I find even more annoying”.

The seagull felt deeply embarrassed. This was the second time he found himself being talked down during his brief encounter with the stone.

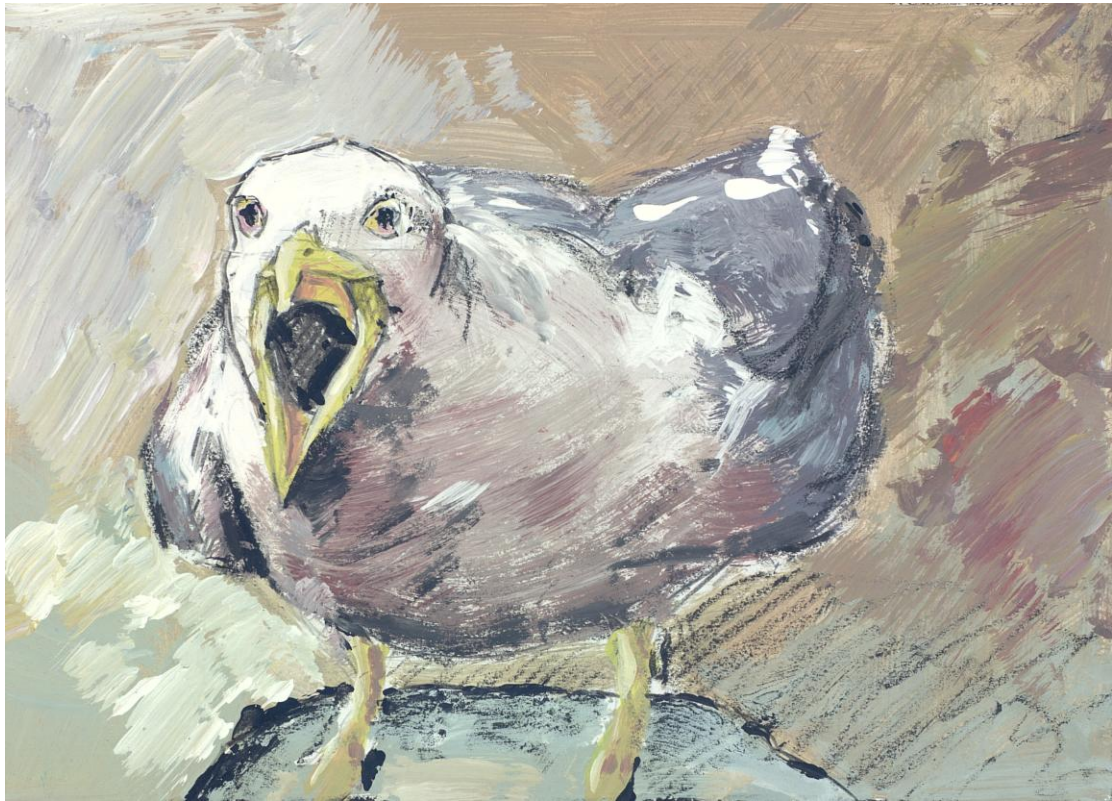
“But I fully understand, neighbour. It's not the first time I've been ignored. All passers-by think that way. That's why I didn't see you as a bird to begin with but as a passer-by”.

“And what does it mean to be a passer-by?”

“A passer-by can't see very far into time, neither backwards nor forwards. He can't even grasp the work of time. But then, he doesn't much care, either. In other words, he's something of a tourist here, on this shore, whose tracks fade the instant he walks on a little further”.

What was that the stone just said! He turned around and looked at his route to where he stood. There wasn't a trace of his prints upon the sand. Was the stone referring to him, then? In no time at all, and since they'd only just met, the stone had him wondering over things he'd never taken into consideration before.

*“You don't mean I'm a passer-by, do you?”
replied the seagull; he was angry.*



*But then he looked behind him again and
couldn't see the trail he'd traced on the sand
only a short while ago. Could the stone be
right? Perhaps he'd better take her more
seriously, he thought.*

“It's up to you if you want to be a passer-by or not. But I don't see why you're angry”.

“I never thought I could be a passer-by in a place I've measured step by step. This is where I was born, and where I raised my chicks. This place is mine”.

The stone noted his words with great sympathy. At least he was honest.

“That's how all passers-by think. But have you ever considered how many have trodden this place before you? I don't remember you being here more than a few new moons”.

“You mean you were here before me?”

asked the seagull, bewildered.

“I’ll answer your question, if you’re not in a hurry. You’re lucky it’s the ebb of the tide so I’m not under the wave and therefore can talk to you”.

“Go on quickly, then. Like I said before, I don’t want to miss this unique opportunity”.

It would be grand, thought the stone, to unravel some of her knowledge, but could the seagull comprehend what she’d tell him? A bird cares only about the present since its dawns on earth are numbered. But the more the stone hesitated to speak, the more impatient the seagull grew and yearned to listen.

“Don’t torment me. Apparently a new day has dawned for me today. You seem to know a lot and I’m eager to hear you”.

“Alright... but where would you like me to start?”

“From the beginning of your journey”, readily came the seagull’s reply.

The stone smiled. She was obviously justified when she said the seagull was a passer-by and couldn’t grasp the depths of time.

“I don’t remember when my journey began, neighbour. But I remember I was once a huge granite boulder at the end of this here shore”.

How could the seagull ever believe this little stone was once a boulder!

“You must be exaggerating. You a boulder? And how were you reduced to such a small size?”



“That’s how time works. Time leaves nothing unchanged but himself”.

“And why is that?”

This time it was the stone who readily replied.

“So that the sun may begin a new journey each day over a different earth”.

“What strange things you say, little stone. And how did you come to realize that is the work of time?”

“By looking at my reflection in the water every day”.

*Of course all this was too much for a seagull
to grasp.*

*Not that he didn't see his reflection in the
water when he flew over the sea,*



*but he never thought things could be the way
the stone said.*

“I beg to differ, little stone. I never saw myself growing smaller, like you. I grow stronger by the day. I feel like I could conquer the entire place eventually”.

“Yes..., you’re not lying. But I guess your father probably felt the same way too”.

Things were getting serious. The insinuation was obvious, but difficult to swallow.

“I kind of understand what you mean, little stone. But if things were like you say, the world wouldn’t be so beautiful”.

“Indeed it is beautiful, and that’s due to the work of the sun”.

“So, apart from the work of time, you also know the sun’s work too?”

“I’ve been here so long, I couldn’t help but learn even if I wished not to”.

“Tell me, then, how the sun works”.

The stone didn’t miss the chance. She knew these things very well.

“Didn’t I tell you the sun wishes to take a new journey every day? But this journey must also be beautiful. And for the journey to be beautiful, he must first send forth light, to enchant nature”.

“Light?”

“You shouldn’t be surprised. Didn’t you tell me yourself a bit earlier you were enchanted by the light? Have you ever heard anyone say he was enchanted by darkness?”

“No, I never heard anyone say such a thing, but the way you put it, it sounds like we’re tricked by the light”.

“Something like that. And from what I gather, that’s as it should be. That’s the only way the sun’s journey, but also our journey too, is made beautiful”.

The seagull was confused. He moved full circle around himself, tossed his head backwards a couple of times, as if wanting to make sure he was awake, but not for a moment did he think to end the conversation. A chance encounter, which started with a misunderstanding, led to reflections he would've never even imagined.

“Well then, Misses-Stone. It feels like you’re leading me to deep waters and I’m finding it difficult to follow. Let’s take things from the top. You’ve jumbled time with the sun and the light. And what’s all that got to do with me, may I ask?”

“But only a minute ago the thought you might be a passer-by made you angry”.

“There you go again. You’re going round in circles. How did you bring the topic of ‘passers-by’ back into our conversation?”

“You’re right. I was wrong to start this conversation. You’re unwilling to understand”.

“No, I’m not unwilling. But I’ve understood things my way. My journey here is different than yours”.

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, like you said yourself, you have a long journey and great patience. My journey, though, is brief. If we look at it that way, I might be a passer-by indeed, in which case I agree with you”.

“At last you came round to my way of thinking. When I spoke of time and the sun earlier you wondered what it’s all got to do with you”.

“True..., but you must also realize that light alone is not enough for me to make my brief journey beautiful”.

The seagull sounded like a blasphemer to the stone. How could he speak that way about light! She’d spent her entire life waiting every day for the light. Even the erosion time caused her was forgotten every morning when she gazed at the sun. That’s why her tone to the seagull was severe when she replied:

“I don’t see anything capable of making the journey more beautiful than light. I find you’re being unmindful again”.

But the seagull was firm in his conviction. He might not be as wise as the stone, but he was aware he sought something more than light. Something which would also give meaning to his journey. Without much thinking about it he knew what could make a journey more beautiful, and boldly remarked:

“Love..., love of beauty. Love... do you understand what I mean?”

he replied with a cry.

The stone, who'd never heard of love before, thought the seagull was out of his mind.

“What are you talking about? I've never heard of such a thing. What's love of beauty?”

She'd spent her entire life badgered by the wind and the wave, who'd allied themselves to time, she'd learned lots and lots of things but no one ever told her about love.

“See, now you're the one who doesn't understand, neighbour”.

“Indeed I don't understand, but I'd very much like to learn”.

The seagull felt proud he could finally tell the stone, who wanted to learn about love, something new. So he gave her his rendering of what love is without mincing his words.

“Love is the quest for beauty. It’s as simple as that”.

“The quest for beauty?”

echoed the stone, bewildered.

“Yes, that’s right!”

“You speak with great conviction, neighbour, therefore I believe you. Now I wonder how I was unable to see that side of the world before. But do tell me more, if you can, so I might share something of your viewpoint”.

The seagull found it unthinkable the stone couldn't comprehend love and needed further explanations. But then it occurred to him that many in his world were unable to grasp such a simple thing as well. He would have to pick the right words in order for the stone to understand what he meant. He would have to speak to her in her own language.

“You told me, little stone, how every day the sun begins a new journey which he wants to be beautiful. More beautiful, that is, than the day before”.

“We’ve covered that already. You don’t need to repeat my words”.

“I’m trying to describe the same things, only my way, the way I learned them”.

“Get started, then. Soon the tide will turn”.

Without wasting any time, the seagull began explaining to the stone.

“I think I ought to tell you that my daily journey is similar to the sun’s. You’ll be able to understand me better that way.



“Every time I fly high I have the joy of taking in immense beauty.

”How beautiful the sea is from high above, even when it’s stormy. One shore is more romantic than the other. Each island is more beautiful than the next. And then I’m enchanted, same as by the light, and want to see the next piece of the world, and the next after that, because I hope it will be more beautiful than the last. And when I return to my nest at night, I reflect upon everything that’s filled my day with beauty and hope my next journey will be more beautiful still”.

“I thought you were going to tell me about love”.

“Oh, but I am talking about love.

”This endless search for beauty is love.

”This quest of beauty is what makes my daily journey beautiful.

”That’s what the sun does, too.

”Just think; if he had found beauty, his journey would come to an end”.

The stone was wrapped in thought. It looked like the seagull was right. She began to realize what a journey in time was and what one should expect from a journey. But she didn't stop fearing time, though.

“And aren't you afraid of time, neighbour?”

“Time is part of our journey. He sets his priorities and we ours”.

“And what are our priorities?”

“To enjoy the journey, constantly seeking for beauty. That's our priority”.

“Now I realize why you thought I was lifeless earlier. It's because I haven't learned how to fall in love”.



“I’d never be so cruel to you. What I just said are your words expressed my way. I don’t think you’re lifeless”.

Who would’ve thought a passing seagull and a stone could have so much to say. And while it looked like they’d found some common ground, the stone still had her doubts.

“I was right when I said from the start you don’t look like a bird to me, neighbour. I see now you’re holding a cane!”

"Translation has been performed by **All Translations Centre**".

