

Nick at Sea

Nick tossed the soccer ball at his friend Foti (pronounced Foe-tea) but it landed a couple meters from his friend, in close to the western Greek shore of the Aegean Sea. He laughed and retrieved the ball. Last thing he wanted to do was lose a brand-new ball. But he also didn't feel like playing soccer. It was a Saturday and he wanted to be out on the Aegean Sea. Why did his father have to go to Thessaloniki? It was April and the only day of the week they could go out on his father's fishing boat just for fun.

He kicked the ball toward Foti. "Want to go out on my dad's boat?"

"Are you crazy? Your dad will want to throw you into a volcano if you take the boat out."

"He's too far away today. Besides, how will he find out about it?"

"If you mess up." Foti kicked the ball far inland and laughed.

"The weather is perfect for going out. I've been out on the boat a million times. My dad lets me do everything." He planted his hands on his hips. "Now go kick the ball toward me or I'll toss you into a volcano."

Foti crossed his arms over his chest. "No, I think I have to keep you away from the water, Nick. I'm saving your life."

Nick tackled his friend then ran for the ball and kicked it to Foti. "You've been on my dad's boat with me. You know I can manage around the whole sea. I could get us to the Mediterranean, and then the Atlantic, all the way to America and back."

A breeze came in off the water and Foti kicked the ball away from his friend. "I remember very well the last time you were on your dad's boat with me and my dad." He ran to the ball, tossed it in the air and bumped it with his head.

"Okay, you make a pretty good seal, Foti, but I do better on the waves when I'm in a boat." Nick found a rock and whipped it into the water. "Come on, let's just go for a short ride. We're less than a kilometer from the Paralia Katerinis Port. One short thirty-minute trip out then we'll come back here and do whatever you want. Remember what a good time we had last time?"

Foti threw the ball up and when it came down, bumped it with his knee. "What I remember is you whipping the rope ladder around to make a loud sound then yelling "Help, Help, shark" or "Submarine periscope off the starboard."

"But we didn't have any trouble with sharks or submarines after that."

Foti tossed the ball again and tapped it with an elbow. "If you ever want to help your dad pull in fish again, you'll give up this idea."

Nick pulled off his shirt, dropped it onto the sand and laid down on the beach. "If I go home, I'll have to wash my grandfather's car, vacuum, dust and who knows what else."

"Yeah, me too." Foti dropped the soccer ball next to his friend and sat next to him. "Hey, look at those 2 guys over there. They have one of those meters to find money and stuff. I always wanted to do that."

Foti stood and ran toward the men with the metal detector. A minute later he dashed back to Nick. "There's a place you can rent one of those just across the street. I've got 20 Euros in my wallet. You in?"

"Sure, if you're paying." Nick sat up and pulled on his shirt.

"Come with me."

"No thanks. Got to keep an eye on my soccer ball." Nick grabbed it and set it on a knee.

"Is it too heavy to carry fifty meters? Maybe I'll get it and just go off on my own."

Nick dropped the ball on the sand and jumped up. "Hey, don't get crazy." He picked up his soccer ball and followed.

Half an hour after they had begun passing the metal detector back and forth over small patches of land, the metal detector beeped. Nick stopped using the shovel as a cane and dug up the sand in the area. He didn't have to go down very far. A few minutes later, he had uncovered something shiny.

"Yes, hello money!"

Foti grabbed the coin, brushed off the wet sand and studied it. "It's only a 100 drachma piece. Not enough to buy a stick of gum. Let's go by the port. Better chance

we'll find more there, all those ships docking there over the centuries. Probably mostly Greeks have been in this place dropping almost-worthless coins for years."

"Sure, let's go." He grabbed the drachma coin and dropped it into a pocket.

The boys talked and teased each other the entire walk to the port. Nick tossed his soccer back and forth a couple times. Foti swept the metal detector along the walkway but didn't get any beeping until they were close to the port.

Nick dug into the dirt under the area. A few centimeters down, he found a coin so dark he almost missed it.

Foti lifted it from his friend's palm. "Wow, I think it's from the Roman era. Look, here's the imprint of an emperor."

"Think it's worth a lot of money?"

"Even if it isn't, it's really cool. This coin could have been used by someone here when there were Roman colonies. We talked about it in Bible class. There were a couple cities in Macedonia that St. Paul visited."

"Who is St. Paul and why do I care?"

Foti dropped his shoulders. "He traveled all around Macedonia, Asia Minor, uhm, what's now Turkey, Italy. He told the people about Jesus and what He did for them."

"Give me that coin. It's really old. You can have the next one."

Foti caught part of his lower lip between his teeth and shook his head. "You don't know, do you? About God and stuff."

"No, and I don't want to know. My dad said it's all made up stories to sort of scare people into not breaking laws."

"No, Jesus is real. Don't you celebrate Christmas? It's about when He came down to earth to live."

"Oh, so that's what Christmas is about. I never knew. I didn't think it was just about special foods."

"So, you probably don't know about Easter either."

"No idea. What is it?"

"Jesus died for our sins and then rose from the dead Easter morning. There's a lot of things most Greeks do for Easter."

"We don't do anything. I'd be fun to have another holiday. What time of year does it fall?"

"In the spring. We have lamb and other stuff."

"What kind of desserts come with Easter?"

"Lots of different desserts. Maybe you could come for Easter dinner this year. Come to church, too. I don't know if you get to have dessert without church."

"I've never been to a church. What do they do there?"

"We don't go to an Orthodox church. We go to a Lutheran church. Most of the time, we study the Bible. There's a Romanian pastor that comes once a month and when he's here, he talks about one subject in particular. We sing sometimes."

Nick looked at his feet and deepened the hole he'd dug with the tip of his shoe. He looked up and asked "Does it last very long?"

"About an hour."

"Okay, then I'll go. I love dessert. But don't expect me to keep going to any Bible study. I get enough studying with school."

Nick took his turn carrying the meter. They walked along the shore all around the port. The metal detector didn't beep any more. Nick finally set the machine against a tree, crossed his arms and shook his head. "I think that one coin is all that's here. Other people probably scanned this area a hundred times, picked it clean."

"Yeah, let's head back."

Nick grabbed the detector then handed it back to his buddy. "You can take it back. My father's boat is right over there." He pointed to a small boat with a blue hull."

"The waves are kicking up. What if you go out and there's a storm? It's kind of dark to the west."

Nick looked up and pulled his eyebrows together. "I can handle it." He walked toward the dock.

"You can't go out by yourself," Foti called out. He set the metal detector against a trash container and ran after his friend.

Five minutes later, Nick had the boat free from the dock. At first it was fun, being tossed about, the soccer ball rolling from one side to the other. Nick tried his best to manage but while he was doing that, they were being carried out farther and farther from the shore. Foti worried about the boat capsizing and called his father on his cell phone.

Just as Foti was telling Nick that his father was coming, it started to rain.

"Nick, I don't know if my dad's gonna get here in time. The wind is carrying us out pretty fast, and now the rain."

Before he answered, Nick turned away from his friend and pounded his fist on the side of the boat. "I was so stupid to think I could manage. Why didn't you stop me?"

"I'm going to get the life preserver jackets. Where does your dad keep them?"

Nick's face turned white. Instead of speaking, he pointed to a large wooden box.

After the boys got the jackets on, Foti tried to call his father again.

"He's just pulled up to the dock, Nick, and he's got others to help. We just got to last another ten, fifteen minutes."

"That's too long," Nick finally spoke. "We could die, Foti, and it's my fault. I'm, I'm, Foti, I'm sorry, and, and I'm afraid. I don't want to die."

Just then, the boat tipped far to the left and both boys were thrown down onto the deck."

"Help me, Foti, I don't want to die. What if I do?"

As both boys were sprawled on the deck, Foti told his friend "The only thing I know to do is pray, Nick. God will help us."

"I don't know how to do that. I could die before I learn how. Help me, Foti."

"I'll pray for both of us. Okay?"

"Yes, hurry up and do it!"

"Okay, okay. Well, here goes. Dear God, we're really in trouble down here, could..." Foti's prayer was interrupted by the boat tipping to the other side. The boys slid down the deck. This time water flowed on board, covering both boys.

"Cut to the chase, man," Nick yelled.

"Please help us God, and help Nick to believe in you." Foti tried to get up but the boat began to tip again, causing him to fall. "Hold onto my arm Nick," Foti called out. "That way we'll anchor each other. My dad will be here soon."

Nick reached out for Foti's arm and held onto his friend. "God don't let us die. I'll do whatever you want me to do."

The boat tipped again and Nick tightened his grip. Then a wave came over the side and covered the boys. "It's getting worse, now," Nick yelled over the roar of the waves.

"I know," Foti yelled back, but help is on the way. They'll be here soon."

"If they can find us."

"We just have to have faith, Nick. That's all we've got."

The boat tipped a few more times but finally the roar of a motor could be heard. Foti's father was soon over the side and calling to the boys.

When he got to them, he tied a rope around each boy.

"Hold on tight, fellows," he told them.

"I will," Nick answered. "I've learned my lesson."

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Nick survived the storm. He also survived his father's reaction to the incident. The boys sold the coin to help pay for boat repairs. Nick had to wash a lot of cars before he paid for the metal detector that someone stole from the trash container where Foti had left it to go with him on the boat.

That Easter, Nick went to church with Foti and his family. A couple times he pulled out his phone and wrote a few text messages. Each time Foti gave him a jab in the ribs.

After the service, he went to Foti's home for dinner. At the end of the meal, Foti brought his friend a piece of each dessert. While Nick ate, Foti reminded him about the storm they'd survived and how close he came to dying that day.

Nick finished the last dessert and set the fork on the plate. He looked down, apparently studying his hands. "I know. I need to keep going to church." He rubbed the back of his neck then looked up at Foti. "Does your mom make dessert every Sunday, like that yellow cake?"

Foti shook his head. "No, but she might make one every now and then. I think she's pretty happy we survived the storm. But really, Nick. You don't have to do anything quite so exciting again to impress my mom. I really want to make it to thirteen."

"Me too, buddy, me too."

