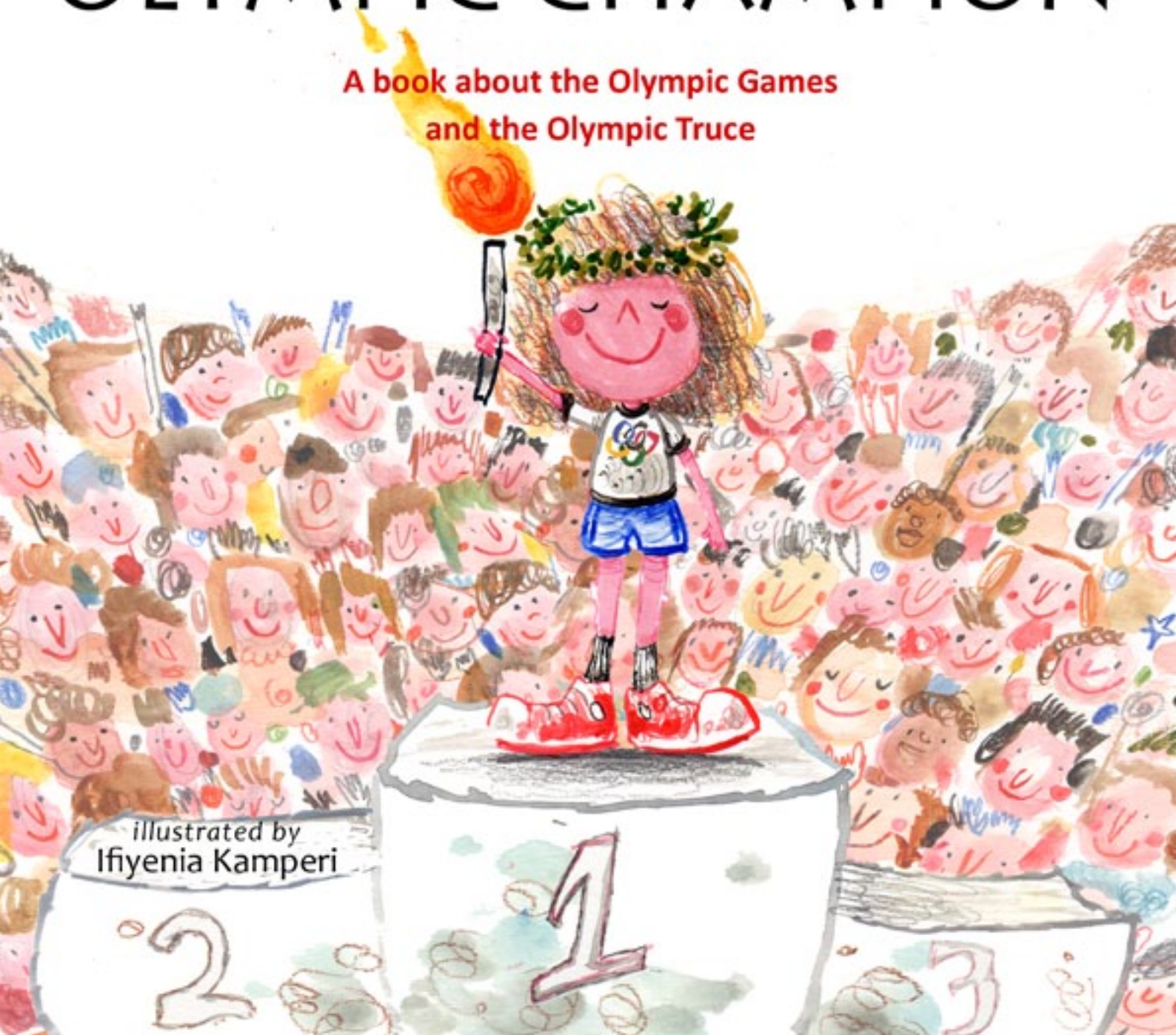


Sgouri V. Georgiadis

A GREAT TINY OLYMPIC CHAMPION

A book about the Olympic Games
and the Olympic Truce



illustrated by
Ifiyenia Kamperi



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INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC TRUCE CENTRE
International Olympic Truce Center
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A Great Tiny Olympic Champion
A book about the Olympic Games and the Olympic Truce

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Olympia Lausanne Athens

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Introduction

Resourceful, cunning, stubborn and well-travelled are just a few of the traits attributed to the legendary king of Ithaca, Odysseus. In the story that follows, you will have the opportunity to learn that our hero shares most of these traits. He is also governed by the values of Olympism and the Olympic Truce, as most athletes who take part in the Olympic Games are, while also possessing some of the psychological reserves of an athlete of the Paralympic Games.

Through a story with many messages aimed at readers of all ages, we can better understand all the different aspects of the Olympic Truce and by extension, Peace, which we hope will be adopted as values in our daily lives. In this way, we can all contribute to creating a better world and a more hopeful future for the generations to come.

We harbour no illusions that sport could impose peace everywhere, but its inherent ideals could in practice inspire peace and, where required, to solidify it, just as young Odysseus seeks to do in this narrative.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this book and especially the author, both for her achievement and for her selflessness.

I am sure that both young and old will become messengers for the meaning of the Olympic Truce, once they realise its importance and the role it plays in world events.

Enjoy reading it!

Dr Constantinos Filis



Director

International Olympic Truce Centre



Let me introduce myself...

No way! I'm not little! I am Odysseus and, yes, I admit I may be a little short, like a mushroom, and from what I've seen in the mirror, I'm thin as a rail. I admit that I sometimes go unnoticed. Usually, when people look at me, they don't really notice me and to be honest, this used to bother me quite a bit.

Let me explain what I mean. It's like this. You might be walking along the pavement and I would appear before you with my bright red patent leather shoes shining like strange shells in the sun, but you would not see me. You would step on me without even realising it, so that at least you could beg my pardon. Or, I might be standing in front of you in line, waiting to order a delicious chocolate and strawberry ice cream cone, and suddenly, though I had already opened my mouth to bravely ask for my ice cream, I would hear you saying: "A cup of mango-raspberry for my little girl and quickly please - my baby can't wait!" You had just taken my place in line!

Or, I might have been walking for hours with my little legs to get to the fun park and just as I waited to get on the train, or the merry-go-round or the bumper cars, a huge hand would appear in front of my face and I would hear a voice that I could hardly tell where it was coming from say: "Stooooop! Where do you think you're going, kid? You're not tall enough! Go away and come back in ten years when you're older and tall enough!"

"But I am big enough," I would yell with all my might, but my voice would never reach your ears.

All this made me very sad and I felt so very different. It's not that easy to go unnoticed. Un-noticed: someone who is not noticed by anyone!



One morning, as I was feeling out of sorts, I found myself outside a sports stadium. Some of the athletes were running, others were doing the long-jump, leaping into the sand, while others were throwing a huge iron ball, and still others were sprinting and jumping over hurdles ten times my height! "They must be getting ready for the Olympic Games," I thought. A little further, some athletes wearing shirts with "Paralympic Team" printed on the back were working very hard in a different way, with sheer will and using their talents and strengths. As they patiently went through their training, as I felt I was watching the most exciting race in the world. Some of them looked a little like me. I was impressed!

The very next morning, I started drinking orange juice, eating meat and fruit, lots of carrots, spinach juice and lots and lots of milk, and I threw away all my candy. This is it! I'm going to get bigger, too! And I made up my mind: I was going to be an athlete!

And so I began to drink fresh juices, milk and a lot of water and doing lots of exercises - running, lifting weights, and playing tennis, even if my racket was half a metre bigger than me. I made a huge effort, but the result was not quite what I had imagined. Still. With my skinny legs and all the things I ate and drunk, I got myself a nice big stomachache! Never mind that I did not much resemble the strongly built athlete I had imagined. I felt disappointed.

One afternoon, while watching my favourite children's show on TV, many thoughts ran through my head: "Hmm... That's what I should have looked like - my favourite hero," who was tall, sturdily built, with glimmering green eyes and shiny black hair. "That's what I should have looked like," I said to my Grandmother Sofoula, who always listened to me attentively. "Why are you trying to be something you're not, my boy?"

You may not have the most well-built body in the world, but you have a brilliant mind with so much room to fill with knowledge - and knowledge is happiness."

"But Grandma Sofoula, I want to be big, tall and athletic - like the champions I see on TV. Grandma, nobody knows I exist, I'm so small. I want to be bigger."



"Just in the size of your body? You know the saying a healthy mind means a healthy body? Well, I would add something else: Happiness and knowledge, happiness and knowledge, my boy," grandmother would say with calm certainty.



“Happiness and knowledge.” My Grandma Sofoula’s words rang in my ears, but I felt something else, something heavy and difficult to bear on my little back. Disappointment. That was the right word.

So I gathered up my things and one morning, I went out among you, looking for a way to get to the North Pole, where the sky reaches down and touches the edge of the earth. I would sled, learn to ski; I would dress in a white cape, unnoticeable in an infinite white frozen carpet of snow. I had thought about it. There was no one there to notice me, so I would not be unnoticed any more! So I got ready for my journey.

“Excuse me! Can you tell me which way the airport is?” I called out to a gentleman with nice beige shoes. I adore men’s shoes because I am at their level and they are at mine, so I always get a chance to look at them. I pay no attention to women’s shoes. They remind me of my major problem in the worst way, so I don’t even dare look at them. “Sir, I’m asking you... the airport?” I cried out desperately, as my voice dissipated into the air.

“Oh! There’s a nice pair of green sports shoes. Brand-new, coming my way. Here’s my chance... Excuse me! I want to go to the airport...”, but naturally no luck there either.

So I sneaked into a black, well-shined strange-looking shoe, triangular in shape like the roof of a house with shoelaces. The man’s foot seemed a little bothered, but it moved over and we all fit without anyone being the wiser.

It was in this strange mode of transport that I arrived at the square with the coffee shops and when the gentleman stopped, I saw my chance to get out of his shoe.

I dived into a cup of sweet chocolate that a lady sitting at a table had ordered. I drank deeply and thoroughly enjoyed it. With one leap, I landed on the round saucer and ran all the way around joyfully without anyone seeing me. I made a lot of circles until I felt too dizzy, I lay down on a matchbox to rest. Unfortunately for me, the young owner of the matchbox kept opening and closing it, sometimes to have a smoke (what a terrible habit!), or just to keep his hands busy, so I lost my balance and fell back down onto the table.



Since I had not managed to rest, I decided to walk and get some exercise while also passing the time. Without much thought, I climbed up on a thin but huge pair of eyeglasses for nearsightedness that a serious gentleman was wearing. I started running back and forth so I could read the sports news on the back page of the newspapers the man's eyes were perusing. Each sentence had so many lines of words! I ran back and forth because from the beginning of each line to the full stop at the end of each sentence, there were so many words to read! And there were also many photos of sports events to see.

"Oh, look! Photos from a basketball game. If I had a ball right now, that's how I would shoot... hop!" And as I tried to shoot with a non-existent ball weighing heavily in my hands, I slipped again and just managed to grab onto the edge of the newspaper belonging to the unknown sports-loving gentleman. Oh, boy. Just look at what can happen out of nowhere. Could it get any worse?

In fact, it could. In one fell swoop, the unknown gentleman folded up his newspaper along with me in it. He put the newspaper in his pocket and in short order, I had got all mixed up with a bunch of round coins hidden inside.

I'll admit, it was warm and pleasant, with no noise or smog inside that pocket. "The perfect place for a nap," I thought, and as drowsiness overcame me and my eyes began to close, I found myself upside down along with the coins in the palm of a kiosk owner. He, in turn, flung us hastily into a box with other coins. I wonder, is this what everyone who wants to be a traveller has to go through? How on earth was I going to get out of there?

But, as you probably know, because you are people too, a person's life can be agonisingly fast sometimes. With the phrase, "Your change, Mr Sofoklis," and an abrupt movement, the coins and I found ourselves in another palm and from there in another pocket, which belonged to Mr Sofoklis. In this peculiar way, I got to know him, and later, my whole life changed because of him.





Mr Sofoklis carried me around in his pocket without realising it, but I could hardly breathe, squeezed in there with his keys and glasses.

A short while later, the glasses, keys, coins and I were on a dark brown table among paper, pens, other coins and many, many books. Next to the books was a card: Sofoklis Prolificous, Writer. So my journey to the North Pole had ended up in the home of a writer. Interesting! Instead of becoming desperately lost in the North Pole, I could lose myself in books.

“You, my boy, came into this world to gather knowledge,” I remembered my Grandma Sofoula saying.

I stayed there for a long time, I’m not sure how long, but it was my chance to learn as much as I could. Sure, it’s nice to travel, but I could stay here as long as I wanted, forgotten, amongst the bookshelves, until I had read all the books, page by page, word by word.

And I was so happy! I was swimming in information, new images and ideas, and my brain was eating the food of knowledge. I could feel it: I was getting bigger! Not the way you think. My body was the same, and I was wearing the same clothes, but my brain was getting bigger and I was changing along with it. There was just one thing that made me sad sometimes. You see, I could see Mr Sofoklis with a pencil and paper in his hand. It was always the same image, like a photograph. But the pencil never touched the paper. I could see a few scattered words on other, smaller pieces of paper, but in the end all of the notes ended up torn in pieces in the recycling bin. The point of the pencil, however, always well sharpened, was ready for battle, but it never got the signal to charge. In the end, the pencil always returned to the pencil case, having accomplished nothing. Every day was the same.



One morning, a ray of sun sneaked in uninvited through the half-open window and brazenly aimed for my eye. I woke up suddenly, right where I had fallen asleep on a white book with five coloured circles on the cover. And as I drank my milk, both my eyes started running around beautiful words as if bewitched. Oh, how fast they ran! It was as if I was afraid some unwanted hand might take those words off my paper and I would not be able to stop it:

“Oh, ancient immortal spirit, pure father,
of beauty, of greatness and of truth,
Descend, reveal yourself and flash like lightning
with the glory of your own earth and sky.

At running and at wrestling and at throwing,
Shine in the momentum of noble contests.
And crown with the unfading branch
And make the body worthy and iron-like”.

Those were the letters that had carved out the Olympic Hymn on the paper. My mind travelled far. “Anyway, don’t they say that one can go on the most incredible journeys in a book?” I thought.

First I found myself in Olympia, and then my thoughts leaped to the old Panathenaic Stadium, and then to the Olympic Stadium. With my little hand in the air, I recited the Olympic Athlete’s Oath. Yes, I was an athlete! “Citius, Altius, Fortius - faster, higher, stronger.” I was no longer unnoticed. I was an athlete, I tell you.

That day passed by very quickly. I was so happy to be leafing through the pages of the book, one by one, losing myself between each one. One minute I was at the Stadium watching the ancient Olympics and then, with the turn of a page, there I was, next to Pierre de Coubertin and the Olympic Games in Athens. I travelled to Moscow, to Munich, to Los Angeles, Seoul, Barcelona... I imagined that I was already a special athlete. I was an Olympic champion.

I turned the pages tirelessly and took part in every race, in every triumph, for hours on end, until at the end of a page, I grew drowsy and my eyes became blurred. But it was a sweet tiredness, like the one that envelopes you when you have fought very hard for something. It brought sleep and dreams with it, and my mind became a masterpiece created by the most famous of painters.

Thousands of dreams were unfurled before me, waiting to be discovered. Not to follow such dreams would be like refusing to discover the great secrets of life. Enveloped in their infinite embrace, I began to run in a singular, joyful frenzy.

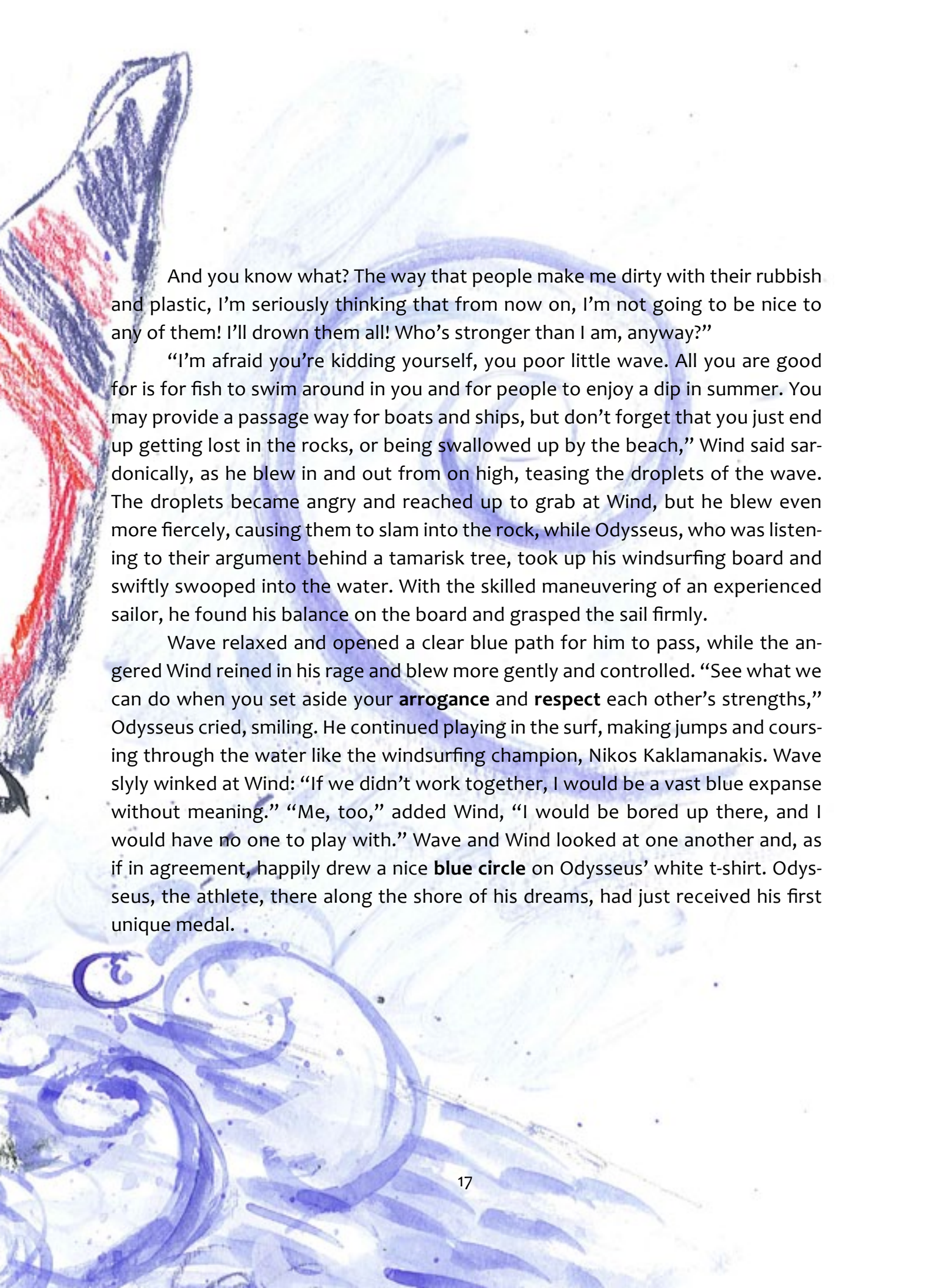


Wind and Wave

Arrogance and respect

“If I put all my strength into it and stand up really tall, I can sink anything from a little stick to an ocean liner,” Wind boasted pompously. Wave responded arrogantly: “But I can upset the light blue of the sea and turn it into a wild, unwelcoming gray colour...”





And you know what? The way that people make me dirty with their rubbish and plastic, I'm seriously thinking that from now on, I'm not going to be nice to any of them! I'll drown them all! Who's stronger than I am, anyway?"

"I'm afraid you're kidding yourself, you poor little wave. All you are good for is for fish to swim around in you and for people to enjoy a dip in summer. You may provide a passage way for boats and ships, but don't forget that you just end up getting lost in the rocks, or being swallowed up by the beach," Wind said sardonically, as he blew in and out from on high, teasing the droplets of the wave. The droplets became angry and reached up to grab at Wind, but he blew even more fiercely, causing them to slam into the rock, while Odysseus, who was listening to their argument behind a tamarisk tree, took up his windsurfing board and swiftly swooped into the water. With the skilled maneuvering of an experienced sailor, he found his balance on the board and grasped the sail firmly.

Wave relaxed and opened a clear blue path for him to pass, while the angered Wind reined in his rage and blew more gently and controlled. "See what we can do when you set aside your **arrogance** and **respect** each other's strengths," Odysseus cried, smiling. He continued playing in the surf, making jumps and coursing through the water like the windsurfing champion, Nikos Kaklamanakis. Wave slyly winked at Wind: "If we didn't work together, I would be a vast blue expanse without meaning." "Me, too," added Wind, "I would be bored up there, and I would have no one to play with." Wave and Wind looked at one another and, as if in agreement, happily drew a nice **blue circle** on Odysseus' white t-shirt. Odysseus, the athlete, there along the shore of his dreams, had just received his first unique medal.



Sky and Thunderbolt

Anger and acceptance

As you know, time gets lost in dreams. One can dream as much as he wants. That afternoon, when the sun usually grows weary of wandering around the sky, Odysseus started throwing his javelin as far as he could. He wanted to be like the Czech athlete, Jan Zelezny, who, as he had read, had won three Olympic gold medals.

“Higher... put more strength into it! Wow, I have to drink more milk and orange juice, work out more.” Although the thought disturbed his sleep a little, he continued to sleep and dream that he was making lots of throws. So what if his javelin could barely find a way to tear through Sky. Odysseus persevered and dreamed. After all, an athlete never gives up the fight. After so many throws, Sky, who at that moment was getting ready to supervise the growing dusk, was surprised to see Odysseus taking aim at him with his javelin.

“Hey! Isn’t it enough that we have the smoke from the factories and pollution coming up here, now we have a funny-looking kid who thinks he’s an athlete aiming at us with a javelin? That’s going too far,” he yelled angrily. With a sharp movement of his hand, he signalled Thunderbolt, who always waited for a sign to unleash his power and demonstrate Sky’s wrath. He made a very impressive show of strength, ripping through the heavens with two thin, zig-zag streaks of light. This was indeed a very special way for Odysseus to meet up with **anger** but he was not at all afraid.

“I may be little, but listen to me,” Odysseus uttered as he looked up. “I’m just training. I’m an athlete. I dream of being like Jan Zelezny and Michalis Dorizas. Please calm down and don’t spoil my dream with your anger. Besides, Sky belongs to all those who dream. If you can **accept** that, then you’ll allow me to finish my exercise and I tell you: one day you’ll be proud that you welcomed my javelin.”

His voice was sweetly stubborn, and Sky understood. He rushed to restrain the impetuous Thunderbolt, who had meanwhile made his presence known everywhere, and put him back in his place. He keeps him there now only for special occasions. Before scattering the stars here and there to decorate the scene, he drew a **yellow circle** with starry-sun dust on Odysseus’ white shirt. Our little friend had just earned his second medal.



Earth and Water

Obsession and respect for diversity

With two medals that were all his and the certainty that there was nothing one could not experience in dreams, Odysseus continued his imaginary wanderings. There were sure to be many more surprises hiding there.

“Hey, wait a minute!!” he heard an irritated voice saying. “Great things only happen on my surface. People step and dance on me. They dig me up. I accommodate the plants they sow on me. I hold up the trees and the mountains. It’s on me that they build their houses and their cities. Plus I have all those volcanoes and earthquakes, and when I get mad, they get mad too. Do I have to say any more so you can appreciate my power? I could go on about myself for hours, because I’m the best,” Earth said with a look that left no doubt.

“Allow me to tell you that with one simple gesture, I can carve my mark on you. I can become rain, a river, snow, a lake, or ice and cover up your most beautiful spots. Then, you won’t be visible, but I will,” Water answered aggressively. But Earth paid no attention to him because everyone knew she was “Mother Earth”. So, how dare Water stand up to her? The power struggle would surely be great.

Meanwhile, Odysseus had come to a wonderful point in his dream: That morning, he had cooled off in the clean sea, enjoying his swim. Right after his swim, he took his bicycle and wound his way around the trees, enjoying the fresh air. At one point, he dropped his bike to the ground and ran around freely and joyfully, enjoying the smell of the fresh soil. He was struggling to trap the energy and smells of Earth and Water in his mind.

Wanting desperately to prove that she was the most important in nature, Earth saw Odysseus' joy that day and was touched. This tiny, ambitious athlete drank in every minute he was outdoors and she had to admit: Water had contributed to the boy's happiness.

"I could be a triathlete, if only you would put aside your **obsession** with who is the better of the two," Odysseus grumbled.

"**We should respect our diversity.** We should each do our best. That's what we will remember for ever and we will be very gracious hosts when you become a distinguished athlete, because you started here with us," Earth said and gave him a magnificent and perfectly round **black circle**, just like a pebble from the river bed, to decorate his shirt. He had already won three unique medals? He could hardly believe it!





Sun and Clouds


Greed and moderation

Meanwhile, a little further on, the alarm clock had just gone off, calling on King Sun to come at once and take up his throne, as he did every morning. Or could it be Mr Sofoklis' alarm clock, disturbing Odysseus' sleep? No, no!! Look, the stars were gathering up their things to leave the sky. They had to hurry before the cantankerous King Sun arrived and spread himself **greedily** everywhere, from one end of the scene to the other. But suddenly a very insistent voice was heard:

"Sun is not the only one who can appear on stage in the sky. To be the only one who lies there every day while pushing us further and further away until we dissolve. Besides, we are weaving a protective covering over the earth and he and his rays make holes in it. And then we have to mend it all over again. Unacceptable!" The Clouds were clearly annoyed and were determined to confront Sun.

"The sky is mine to take over as I want, to warm him and enjoy him," Sun said greedily as he spread himself even further across the sky. That's when the Clouds lost their cool blue and turned gray. They gathered in a corner and prepared their counterattack. They had to push him aside no matter what; they had to restrain him, and if nothing stopped them, the people on Earth were sure to witness a very fierce battle in the heavens.

Meanwhile, down below, some marathon runners were preparing to set off from the Tomb of Marathon and run to the Panathenaic Stadium, along the same route that Olympian Spyros Louis had run in the 1896 Olympics. Just before starting, they looked anxiously at the sky. Way up there, a battle between Sun and the Clouds was about to start along with the Marathon.



Odysseus, who was dreaming that he was standing in a crowd of people lining the route and waiting for the runners to pass, lifted his eyes toward the sky.

“Yes, but if there were some **moderation** to their greed and Sun would cooperate with the Clouds, it would certainly help the athletes run the best race of their lives,” he thought.

Sun may have realised something because he seemed to gather up his rudely extended rays a bit. At the same time, the Clouds regained their light blue colour and white puffiness and moved a little in front of him. “Could it be they heard my thoughts?” Odysseus smiled and slyly winked at them.

He then turned his attention to the race. He seemed to become a marathon runner, running behind the athletes, not to pass them, but just to feel the joy of taking part in the race. From time to time, he would try to catch up. His short little legs may have grown tired, but his great mind had already taken him to the winner’s podium. Smiling and deliriously happy, he bent to admire the medal on his chest, which was a perfectly round **red circle** next to the other three circles that were already decorating his t-shirt. How colourful and glorious his dreams were tonight!



Storm and River

Envy and cooperation

Odysseus smiled happily in his sleep. No one would want to wake up from such a dream.

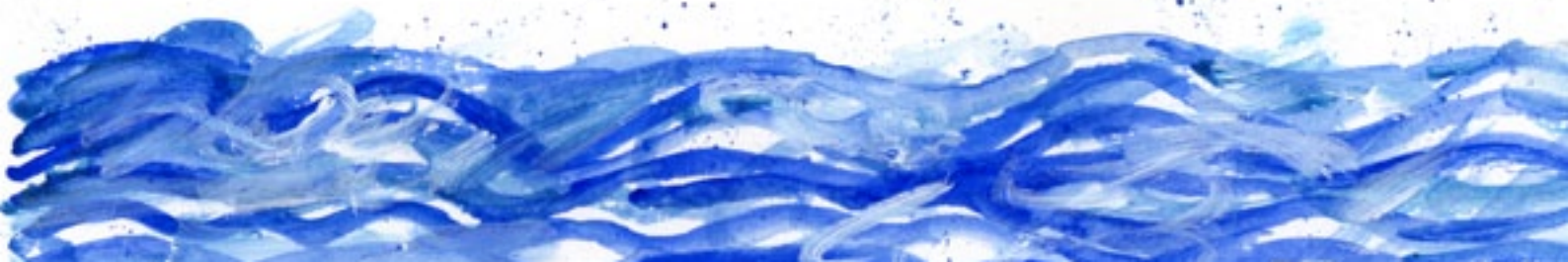
“Above all, sports are about participation and joy. There is a place for all of us in sports, with our gifts and talents - we are all useful. That’s how we learn to conquer, to win and to live. But mainly we learn how to compete,” he thought with pleasure.

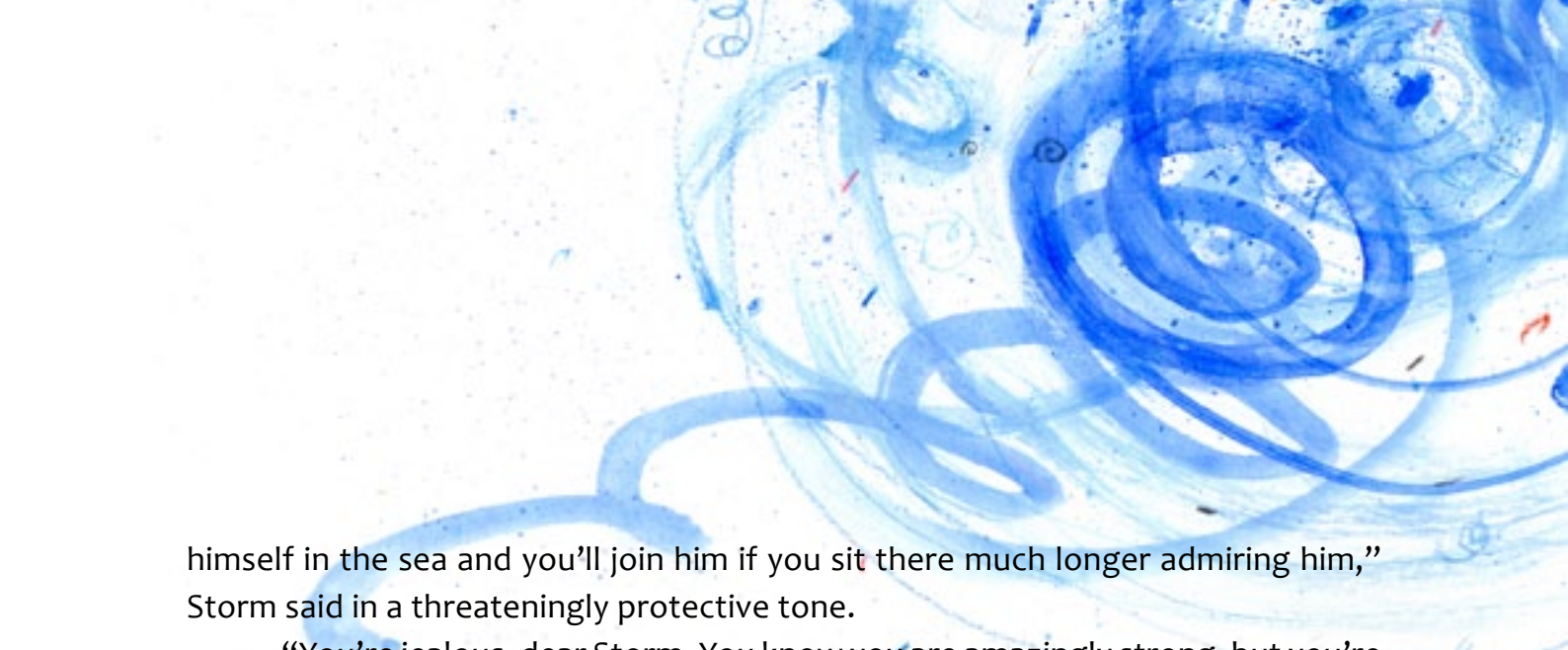
In this part of the dream, a small river flowed gently beside him. Odysseus splashed around in the water and photographed the flow of the river with his flashing eyes.

So overwhelmed with happiness was he that he wanted just to rest for a moment, and so he sat on some dry stones.

“Hey, kid! You, the one who was running the marathon just now. You, who’s now looking all around trying to find me,” he could hear someone whispering conspiratorially, afraid he might be heard. Just as Odysseus turned his head in wonder from side to side, trying to see where the voice was coming from, the water in River moved a little nervously. As if he knew what was coming. A secret made him even more turbulent, sweeping along some rocks and a few branches. Two frogs playing at River’s edge ran frightened to hide behind the reeds. River was jealous because his admirer, Odysseus, who had been playing with him all this time, had now abandoned him.

“Here I am, behind the plane tree. Come closer so I can tell you something. A frightening force, like a magnet, drew him directly there. “Since I see that you are so small, I must tell you to go hide somewhere, my friend. Oh, I am forgetting myself. How about some introductions: I am Storm, cousin of Wind and sister of Hurricane and I live freely in nature. No one can catch me and it’s very difficult for someone to be like me,” Storm said, blowing toward the forest to show off her manic strength. “I saw you admiring River earlier, my boy, but you should know: nobody runs faster than I do, so you’d better look out. When I blow, River will find





himself in the sea and you'll join him if you sit there much longer admiring him," Storm said in a threateningly protective tone.

"You're jealous, dear Storm. You know you are amazingly strong, but you're still jealous," Odysseus bravely replied. Storm almost turned red with anger. Odysseus just prayed she wasn't too angry because then she would turn into an uncontrollable fiery Storm. Then the dream would become a nightmare.

"Will you do me a favour?" Odysseus asked. "Allow me to show you what a terrible thing **envy** is. Don't be angry with me, I'm sure I can help you. I will make you feel that your power is unique and useful, because you are special. But if you are envious and you compare yourself with others, you miss out on all the great things that only you can do, my good Storm." Odysseus looked calmly and fearlessly into her eyes, and after agreeing to meet the next day at the plane tree, he quickly left. Storm stood there looking at him in wonder as River flowed playfully along once again, pretending he hadn't been listening to them all this time. The next morning, Storm arrived at the plane tree on time and found Odysseus polishing his canoe.

"Promise me that you will do what I tell you as soon as you hear the signal, like they do in a race," he told her and hurriedly placed his canoe in the river.

"And you, River, listen: We have an unusual dance here today. In order to enjoy it, we are all going to **cooperate**, Storm, you and I. Storm will play the tune and we two will dance," he said and took up the paddle. He started paddling in this enviable water course, where **cooperation** made the boat float as if it were dancing gently on the water. Odysseus would not have traded that moment for all the gold in the world. No one was jealous, no one wanted to be the strongest. Instead, under the glorious idea of the sport, they all contributed their talents and Odysseus skillfully paddled. He thought he greatly resembled the French slalom canoeing Olympic champion, Tony Estanguet, whom he had seen in an album of Olympic champions one day while looking through Mr Sofoklis' library.





As he proceeded, exhausted but happy, to pull the feather-light canoe out onto the river bank, he felt the friendly touch of Storm at his bank.

“When there is envy, it’s there, stuck in the corner of the eyes of the person who holds on to it,” he thought. “But I don’t see it now. It has disappeared from Storm’s eyes.” He had dissipated it with his paddles. As she hugged him with admiration, a **green circle**, the same colour as the plane tree leaves, was imprinted on his shirt, which had become multi-coloured by now. It resembled the drawing of a small child who picks up colouring pens for the first time. That’s how brilliant and glorious the dreams of a child could be!



“Sport is the most peaceful and effective ‘weapon’ for those who try to carry it in their arsenal,” he thought, happily. “Sport can beat arrogance, soften anger and diminish greed. It teaches everyone restraint and transforms envy into cooperation and mutual respect. That is probably why so many people in the world are stubbornly devoted to sport,” he said to himself, and as he recalled his passage through nature, only one thought was going through his tiny head. This idea had sneaked into the back of his mind but was now asking for more room; it wanted to leap out and take action. You know how it is with ideas, right? When they want to get out of where they’re hiding, they don’t care whether you are eating, dancing or sleeping. They run fast like a sprinter and no one can catch them!



The journey

“I’ll travel,” he said out loud. He was talking in his sleep so loudly that anyone would swear he was awake.

“You’re young, you don’t have any money,” his other inner voice was saying, that annoying voice that, whenever you want to do something important, is determined to put a stop to it and does not leave you alone, even if you are dreaming.

“I’ll travel,” he said again stubbornly.

“You’re little, and don’t have the right qualifications. Your legs are short and make it hard for you to get around. Plus you have no money.”

“I will, I tell you!”

“But you’ve never travelled before. You may come up against major obstacles; you may come upon misfortunes and wars. Where will you go?” the voice asked sternly.

“I’ll travel. And even though I’m young and short, I’ll remind you that I have a very special virtue. I have the soul, the vision and the persistence of an athlete, and I will go - I will travel. I have already been through so much and learned a great deal. Do you know what Pierre de Coubertin said? The important thing in life is not victory, but combat. I will go and I will wage my own battle,” he replied sharply and put the voice in its place.

With his vision the only thing in his bags, and with the force of a thousand Olympic champions, he dreamed that he was swept out at the edge of the rock where Wind had given him the first circle on his shirt. With a voice so loud, one would wonder how it had come from such a little mouth, he called on Wave and it swam like an unbeaten champion toward him. Then he beckoned to Storm and she rushed to him like a runner. Then he called on the Clouds and they gathered like towering basketball players, ready to lift him high upon their shoulders so he could pursue the ultimate medal of his life. He whistled for the untamed Wind and although he was supposed to be blowing for a sailing race in the Aegean Sea, he dropped everything and came at Odysseus' call. Anything is possible in our dreams, right?

"Get on our backs! We'll take you anywhere you want. It'll be our pleasure," a little cloud with lacy edges said eagerly.

"I want to travel, but when I tell you, I want you to bring me back to Greece. I definitely want to go to Olympia. Let's not get lost and go somewhere else, because I heard that there, a flame is lit with the help of Sun..."

"The **Olympic flame**", Sun, who was trying to come to an understanding with his rays, interrupted. Some of his rays wanted to warm up the scene, while others wanted to go with Odysseus.

"My dream is to go to Olympia, I tell you! I want to find the place where the Olympic flame is born and once it's lit, I will give it back to Sun so he can hold it high and the whole world can see it as a symbol of **love, peace and unity**. So we can see it every day and never forget its universal message - that is my dream. Will you help me?" he asked with his pure, childlike passion, leaving no room for anyone to refuse.

All that was needed was a strong blow from Wind so the Clouds could embark on their playful journey. Besides, their passenger was so light and their mission was much more fun than gathering above London and raining, or spreading a make-shift gray cloud tent above Shanghai and then rushing to drop some snow in the South Pole.



Earth, Wave and Storm watched from a distance, but they had also promised him: If he needed them, they would all be there, with just a wave of his hand. He was so thrilled about the trip he was about to take.

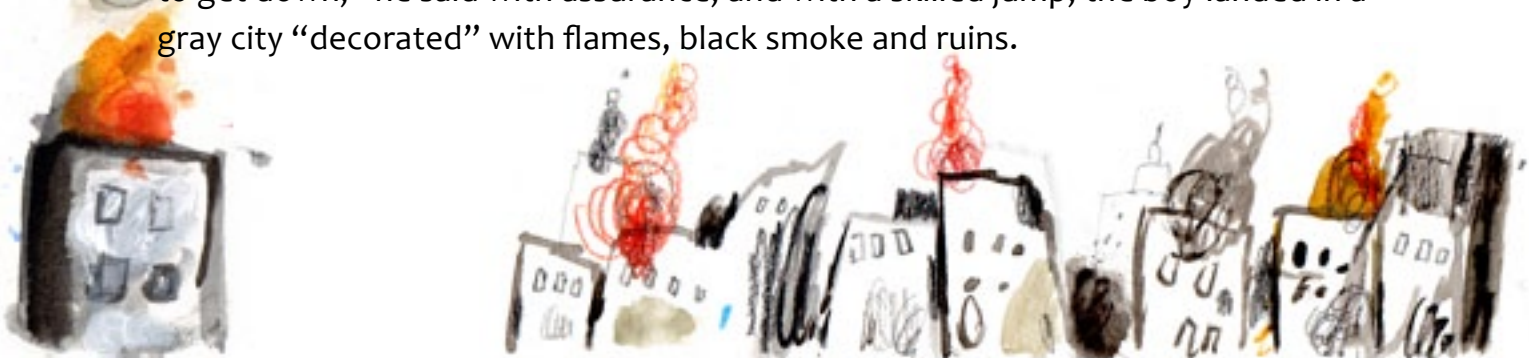
Like an experienced pilot, he gave the order to pass over a continent here, an ocean there, and then again over another continent. That way they would go over all five continents so he could photograph them with his eyes without leaving a single one out. This journey was like being in the most magical train at the fun park, one where he had never been allowed to go on because of his stature. His eyes were wide open; in fact, he almost didn't blink at all. He saw mountains, forests, fields and busy ports. He saw cities and villages, hand-drawn coastlines, waterfalls, lakes and rivers. He saw stadiums and playing fields, some empty and others full of people; he saw people walking, dancing and athletes working up a sweat. He certainly did not have time to store away everything that he saw in his mind. Magical!

"Hey, what's that? There, look, down there," he cried, pointing in surprise with his little hands.

And sure enough, a gray cloud, different from the others, was climbing upward, threatening to block their path. It smelled awful, and its edges were not lacy, like most cloud edges are, but black like roughly torn fabric.

The sight drew Odysseus' attention so much that, out of curiosity, he tried to move on the cloud he sat on, a little to the left, a little to the right, so he could get a better look. It seemed as if it was hiding something purple underneath. And yes! In fact it was hiding a flame. "I want to stop here," he said decisively.

The Clouds, which had passed this way countless times before, nudged each other knowingly and pretended not to hear him. They hurried on. "Here, I said. I want to get down," he said with assurance, and with a skilled jump, the boy landed in a gray city "decorated" with flames, black smoke and ruins.



Where there had once perhaps been a school, there now was only a yard full of ruins, and where there may have been a fun park, there was only a deserted track with abandoned bumper cars. "It's as if a reddish gray veil has got stuck on this city," he thought, as he tried to see through the broken window of a deserted house.

"My boy, every house here does not hide people. Every house here, in every neighbourhood, is inhabited only by fear and isolation," he heard a strange voice telling him. "The war killed our dreams. Now we live with fear as our only companion," the voice added. Odysseus, with a sparkling tear rolling down his cheek, turned toward it. An elderly man standing wearily opposite him called out: "Go, my boy, get out of this place. Nobody comes here anymore. All we have here is what kills life and tarnishes our ideals: Here **we have War.**"



Odysseus' tear would certainly have soaked the page of the book that offered him this deep sleep so full of dreams. What should he do? Should he wake up? How could he leave the dream half-finished?

"And the children? I want you to tell me where the children of this country are?" he asked with determination. The look in his eyes was such that the elderly man bent gently to his ear and whispered his secret.


That afternoon, Odysseus dreamed that he was in the local playing field. It was said that all the families that had escaped the War were safe there.

Odysseus discovered a community that was struggling to survive under that gray covering that the smoke from the fire had spread through the sky. No, the flame he was seeking was most certainly not here, but the flame of life was. He walked among the people, and found children, children and more children. These children did not have pink cheeks, nor did they have a smile on their faces; their mouths were turned downward. They had no bicycles, nor had they ever run free in nature. They had no toys, no dream, and they did not know what life was like without war.

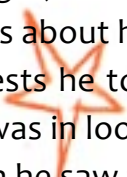




Odysseus stayed there for days, observing, talking and singing to them. He stayed to help them forget about their troubles and to give them a piece of his dream, to get them to fight for an ideal so they could regain some colour and win back their lives. He taught them to draw, to play, to run, to make improvised balls and play football, to throw plastic plates like discus throwers and to jump, laughing, into a sand pit.



At night, he would gather them in a corner and tell them stories, many, many stories about his adventures, his meeting of the elements of nature and the noble contests he took part in with them. He talked to them about his journey. Besides, it was in looking for the Olympic flame that he had come to them.




When he saw their eyes light up as he spoke to them about sport, he struggled to remember everything he had read in Mr Sofoklis' books so he could share it with them. He remembered Ancient Olympia and the Sacred Altis where the Games were held. He spoke to them about the competitions in running, discus, wrestling, pankration and chariot racing. He told them about the revival of the modern games by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, and the great honour of being crowned an Olympic champion, and so, as he saw that in their eyes, in the darkness of fear, he was forging a dream, he continued with even greater passion to talk to them, giving them the opportunity to **dream** of a world that they had never known before. Let War play its violent games outside. The noise from exploding ammunition and rattling machine guns could not be heard inside the stadium. In some magical way, the joyful voices from these sporting games masked War's annoying cries.

Odysseus felt that the time was approaching. The children had been introduced to the virtues of sport in a special way and they could see something shining in their gray lives. There, inside the stadium, their shelter from war, he wanted to breathe the fresh oxygen of hope into their weakened lungs.







Tiny though he was, he thought he would climb to the top of one of the stadium lights so everyone could see him, but before he did that, he asked all the grown-ups to remain silent in the stands.

The children gathered quickly in the middle of the field; there were so many, hundreds of them, and Odysseus spread a white cloth before them that was endless like his dream.

Then the children filled it with bright colours. They filled it in with forests they had never walked in, with seas they had never swum in, storms they had not known, rivers they had not followed, skies they had never seen, and cool water they had never tasted, and in the middle, they drew a sun they had not known, without the grayness of war that had covered it. All around, athletes, runners, equestrians, wrestlers, jumpers, swimmers, sailors, rowers, footballers, javelin throwers, tennis players - all of them in constant motion with an air of exhilaration. Up on the spotlight, he watched from above, anxiously and attentively. At one point, the children heard his voice echoing throughout the stadium:

“Children! Forget about the war for a while! Pretend you are there, inside your drawing. Shall we say you are the athletes you have drawn? Travel with your imagination to the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece, or to the future and pretend you are the competitors, the athletes and - why not - the winners. We learned how to compete right in this stadium, with the war circling outside, but we are not afraid of it anymore. So you see, there is no black on our cloth.” His voice reflected how anxious he was to give these children courage.

“To reach you, I wandered through nature. Besides, I love a good adventure! I met five things that enjoy destroying anything that is wonderful about the world in which you are growing up: **arrogance, anger, greed, envy, obsession**, but I overcame them. Do you know how? By using **sport** as my assistant. And in turn, it brought its own assistants: **mutual respect, acceptance, cooperation, moderation, and respect for the difference of others**, and it stuck them in my head. So, with the help of all of them, I got this far.”

He told them about each of his adventures. How Wave argued with Wind, and how he worked things out for them with his windsurf board. He also told them how he and Thunderbolt became friends one day when he was playing with his javelin in Sky. He told them about the disagreement between Water and Earth and the triathlon, the tension between Sun and the Clouds, and the perfect mara-



thon race that resulted when they worked it out, and about Storm and River who almost fought out of their jealousy.

Then he spoke to them again about every athlete's dream - the Olympic Games. They travelled with their imagination to Ancient Olympia, they became athletes to honour Zeus, and they entered the Panathenaic Stadium as champions, winning wreaths and medals. And they learned that for the duration of the Games, **weapons and swords were set aside, along with fear, terror, war, arrogance, envy, greed and anger.**

It seemed as if War had taken his melancholy shadow a little further away. As Odysseus spoke to the children, the adults in the stands watched this microscopic visitor and friend of their children as if they were watching the tallest and most important person in the world. That night, when the stadium no longer resembled a shelter, but a field for competition and happiness, Odysseus gave the signal: **"One-two-three... TRUCE!"** shouted the children with all their might, and War got scared and hid. He was less like a bad monster that torments people and more like a frightened, gray, dirty and miserable mouse, running to his furthest hiding place to get away. They wrote on their cloth, from one end to the other, the word: **Truce!**





“**Truce** ensures that weapons are stored away in a trunk, along with hate, fear, envy, greed and anger, and although you may think it’s a temporary thing, it’s done so that those travelling to take part in the Games can do so safely. Come on! Hurry! Besides those colours you have already put there, load up your cloth with dreams and follow me. You are good enough athletes, take my word for it, so let’s go. We will search for the Olympic flame together and together we will speak to the world about **Peace**. You, the young children who were born in war, are the most suitable to speak about Peace.”

“Is that why you told us the story about Wave and Wind?” a little red-haired girl with sparks in her eyes, sitting right at the front, asked. “They made a truce so you could windsurf?”

“The same thing happened with Sky and Thunderbolt, Water and Earth, Sun and the Clouds, Storm and River,” they all shouted as they came to understand the reason for his journey.



Like a flash of lighting, all the children rushed out of the stadium. The idea of Iphitos, Lykurgus and Cleisthenes, who signed the longest peace treaty in the history of humankind, was their guide, along with Odysseus' dream. "You are artists! You are also athletes! You and only you can and must travel with me," Odysseus told them. Soon, the larger and bluest clouds in the sky came lower and loaded them carefully onto their backs to set off in search of the Olympic flame. "Can we come, too?" asked the children who War, in his carelessness, had not only hurt psychologically, but also physically, leaving his permanent black mark on their bodies.

"You will be the first to come! Look at me! Sport doesn't leave anyone out! We are all useful; there is room in the contest for everyone," and they all managed to climb quickly onto the clouds after first hanging their beautifully decorated banner so it would be visible from wherever they passed.

Along the way, he spoke to them about the **Paralympic Games**, the celebration of the great fighters, and the children were filled with valuable energy and a desire to try. War had just learned an important lesson, and on that day, he collapsed listlessly in a corner. He was no longer in the mood to play his awful games.





The real dream

A noise and some voices woke Odysseus up that morning. So was it a dream? He frowned with the dizziness your head feels when it's trying not to forget a single detail of a dream. Seriously, where had he been that night?

He jumped right up to the window. He wanted so much to see the light of day. He tried to turn the handle, but it was locked tight. "No way! I'm an athlete, I can do this," he thought, and hung from the metal handle. He jumped up and down, swung from it again, but nothing happened, as if it had taken an oath to stay locked for ever.

"But what on earth are all those people doing out there," Odysseus wondered, but the handle wouldn't budge to let him go outside. "You can't keep me in here," he thought angrily, and climbed up on the bookshelf, even higher than the shelf with the encyclopaedia, where he had never been until that day. From there, he managed to reach the small, half-open skylight and stuck his nose to the glass. He almost landed badly in the garden, as the little opening gave way. But luckily, the fresh air gave his cheek a friendly pat. With a little hop, he made it to a tall cedar tree and from there to the olive in the yard. By now, he was closer to the ground.

The people who had gathered were clapping loudly. Some were bending over to get a better look while others were trying to take photos or were wiping tears from their eyes.

"I wonder what's going on? My shortness is not helping me at all," he thought in consternation. "My height?" Then he started to see things differently. "Why, that's my greatest advantage!" he thought and moved forward, unnoticed, under bags, next to shoes and in between stones, until he figured out why everyone was looking emotionally in the same direction.

A small, shiny tear suddenly spilled out of his left eye. Oh, and there goes another one from the right. And many, many others, a torrent of tears, like a meteor shower, was rolling down his cheek to his neck and from there finding refuge on his shirt. He quickly wiped his eyes before anyone could see him. But tears are the fastest runners; they run like crazy when somebody opens the door, and there is no getting them back.



With his eyes blurred by tears, he saw the most amazing sight, as if from his great dream: A tall, well-built man was holding a torch with special pride, and on top of the torch, there sat, like a world-famous proud queen, the **Olympic flame**. Odysseus was crying with joy by now. Besides, joy can easily become tears. Tears of joy and liberation of all that it hides within its light: **peace, mutual aid, brotherhood, empathy, teamwork, truce**. Being so small, he clapped with all his might. At other times, his applause could not be heard at all, but this time it sounded to him like the sound of a thousand drums.

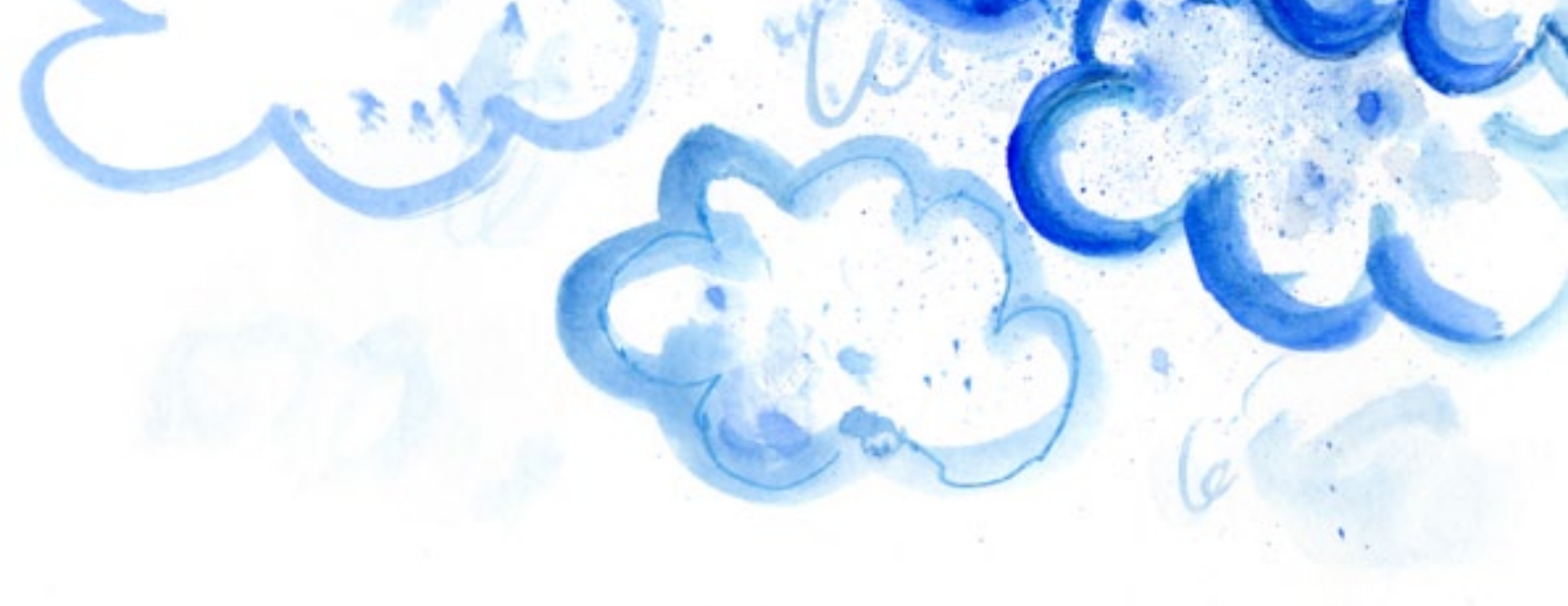
The flame in the athlete's hands was approaching, and Odysseus tried to squeeze closer to the front so he could see and feel the power of its energy. A very rude yellow shoe gave him a push and Odysseus fell off the pavement, but he didn't care. He was getting up when a huge shadow blocked the light above him.



A hand came down toward him. To him? This short, little unnoticeable guy? Yes, to him! “The shadow,” which was a former Olympic athlete, reached out her hand and warmly touched his own. She firmly handed him the torch and an olive branch, a symbol of eternal peace. As his hands were trembling, he struggled to hold the torch as high as he could.

All of a sudden, the five scattered circles on his white shirt came together as five intersecting rings, just like the rings he had seen in Mr Sofoklis’ books that given him his dream, just like those he had seen in his dreams. With the **Olympic flag** on his shirt, a symbol of athletes coming together in the spirit of fair play, friendship, cooperation and brotherhood, he felt more sure of himself. He no longer trembled. “Run now, boy,” the athlete told him, and with a pat on the back, Odysseus started running like a winged Hermes. He was no longer little, or short, or unnoticed, but even if he were, he didn’t care any more.





The way he was running with the torch in his hands, one of the honoured torchbearers himself, he imagined that the face of every person from five continents fit within those five rings on his shirt and that they were running alongside him.

Though his legs were short, he ran tirelessly and there, in the crowd, he saw the children of war applauding, but this time with tears of joy in their eyes. After all, it's easy to see they are tears of joy because they are accompanied by a sweet, perfect smile. For the children of war, in whose stadium truce was born, these tears were the **passport** that brought them here.

There was Wind, who had made a truce with Wave and was being careful not to put out the flame as he blew gently at his back to help Odysseus' little legs run faster.

And there was Water, who had made a truce with Earth and together they were clearing a straight road for the flame to pass in his hands.

Sun was there with him, too, standing together with the Clouds, holding their breath until they saw he had reached the Olympic altar.

There were just a few moments left before the dream came alive. What a great honour to be a torchbearer, especially the last one. As he entered the stadium, it was as if marathon runners, jumpers, wrestlers, swimmers, fencers, athletes of the Olympic and Paralympic games had all lodged in his little body and changed him into a proud young man. As they all ran together, they came upon Storm waiting to welcome them: But Storm was not her destructive self, but all dressed in her best, decked out in voices, applause and cheers. How could she have missed this?

A human river was admiring tiny Odysseus as he did his best, and before anyone realised, Odysseus had approached the altar, held out his hand, and quickly uttered some special words, an invocation to the god Apollo, that he had read was something the High Priestess recites when lighting the flame every four years in Olympia.

Sacred silence!
Let the sky, the earth, the sea and the winds sound.
Mountains fall silent.
Sounds and bird warbles cease.
For Phoebus, the Light-bearer king, shall keep us company.
Apollo, divine sun, idea of light,
send your rays and light the sacred torch
for the host city (of the host country at the time).
And you, Zeus, bring peace to all the peoples of the world
and crown the champions of the sacred contest.

“Truce, peace, brotherhood, mutual respect and sportsmanship.” Five words came out of his little mouth like a loud cry, and then the flame, the Olympic flame, escaped from the torch and scattered into the sky like a supreme ornament, making the stars move aside to welcome it among them. Like a brilliant firework, the only one that could light up the entire universe, the flame, symbolising the enlightenment of the souls of athletes and others, became enthroned on the altar of the stadium with a flash. The games could now begin and the people united under its glow could embrace one another, forgetting evil to compete with mind and body and to achieve, not just victory, but the ideals embodied in the contest itself. “The Olympic flame is the only flame that burns without destroying anything,” Odysseus thought, smiling, as his eyes focused on the altar photographed each licking flame that burned sweetly and calmly. Out of the corner of his eye, **he saw War hiding** somewhere, beyond the highest row in the stands, having lowered his head in thought, as if **regretting** the poison he spread from time to time. And there was **Truce**, who was so proud of Odysseus for giving her form, sound and substance: the sound of applause inside the stadium; the form of thousands of emotion-filled eyes waiting for their soul to rise higher through the serene beauty of the games; and the substance of thousands of bodies waiting to compete in the gymnasiums and training grounds, those who had turned their backs on the evil of war and come to live again as competitors.



Walking backwards while staring at the flame - he couldn't bring himself to turn his back on it - Odysseus started to leave the stadium with all the world on his shirt. But suddenly, Truce, dressed all in white, stopped him gently and placed an **olive wreath**, on his head, just like that, without spoiling the moment with words. They say that even War clapped the moment that the **wreath** made from an olive branch touched Odysseus' head. In ancient times, Olympic champions wore olive wreaths on their heads. Their names were written under the names of the gods, and even city walls were demolished in their name. For Odysseus, the joy, the honour and the liberation that had come from his adventure and from his touching the Olympic flame caused him to tear down his own walls. He was no longer unnoticed, but the most recognised Odysseus in the world. He had achieved his own huge victory. Plus, he was carrying the entire world on his shirt and felt no weight at all. What an honour!

With the olive wreath on his head, Odysseus skipped away. He left the stadium and lost himself in the crowd. Some shoes were pushing him around again, but he didn't care at all anymore. It was as if the flame was guiding each one of his footsteps. It lit up his way and he felt as if he could stay outside the stadium for ever, for as many days as the Games lasted. Still, a tiny thought that could no longer stay cornered in his brain came assertively forward.



He ran again, ran back to where he had begun, because when we forget where we came from, we never find the way to completing our dream. He sneaked into old Mr Sofoklis' house through the chimney, but - how strange! His t-shirt was still snow-white, with only the colours of the five Olympic rings on it and the brightness of the flame that covered him like a second shadow.

"Citius, Altius, Fortius," he scratched onto a white piece of paper with a huge pencil twice his size. Next to that, he drew five circles - a blue one, a black one, a yellow one, a green one and a red one. Then in a box like a photo frame, he drew himself with a torch in his hand, embracing the Olympic and Paralympic athletes and Truce placing the wreath on his head.

Starting the next morning, he hid behind the pencil holder on Mr Sofoklis' desk every day and became his inspiration. Sometimes he left drawings for him, other times he left notes and still other times, he whispered rare thoughts and ideas into his ears.

"You and your books sent me on a long journey to find my dream, and I will help you with my ideas to write about my dream," he thought. "Well, hey... I'm not small."

"No one should ever believe he is too small to compete," thought Mr Sofoklis all of a sudden. So he took up his pen and began to write what you all have just read: the most moving work in the struggle of his life.





Sgouri V. Georgiadis

I was born in Athens. I graduated from Palaio Psychiko Secondary School and studied Kindergarten Education at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. I attended workshops on puppets and puppetry with Sofia Diniakou, and on constructing improvised musical instruments, among others. I have worked in private education since 1997, and currently work at the St Paul Hellenic-French School of Athens as Kindergarten Headmistress. My great love, other than living and learning from my students, is the study and writing of dramatic plays for student performances, many of which have been performed in Athens theatres in Athens and in the amphitheatre of the French Institute of Athens.

For the last seven years, I have supervised the student newspaper, *Donia Helidonia*, and have received an award from the President of Parliament and two international awards with student teams.

Since 2007, I have been involved in writing books and have so far completed nine: *Discovering letters with Bibi the squirrel*, *Discovering numbers with Bibi the squirrel*, *Bibi the squirrel in Preschool*, *Bibi the squirrel at Day Care*, *Bibi the squirrel gets ready for Primary School*, *Christmas in the forest*, *A beautiful fox*, *Flying to Umbrellaland*, and *Who does everything right anyway?* which are available from Diaplasia publications.



Ifiyenia Kamperi

I was born in Athens. I studied graphic arts at Vakalo School of Art and Design and painting at Edinburgh College of Art and I have also completed post-graduate studies in Visual Communication and New Media Practices at the Kent Institute of Art & Design. Whilst studying painting, I attended printmaking classes and stiched textiles/fabric patterning workshops.

I have presented my work at two solo exhibitions in Greece (*The Longest Path*, 2008, *Stories from before and after*, 2010) and have participated in group shows in Greece and abroad.

I am currently involved in painting and illustration, as well as teaching visual arts to children. I have my own line of jewellery, small illustrated objects and handmade dolls under the name of *Birds on Lemons*. They can be found in www.birdsonlemons.com and the Benaki Museum Shop.





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