

The salt mill

Some things are so obvious that we never stop to ask ourselves why they are the way they are or how they were before, but everything has a history. For example, have you ever asked yourselves why sea water is salty? Rivers, lakes, streams and ponds are made up of fresh water, so why is the sea salty?

Mr. Frederic, an old sailor, has the answer. One day he was out fishing with his grandson, Adrià, and suddenly the boy said to him,

"Grandpa, I'm thirsty. Can I drink some sea water?"

"No," answered Grandpa Frederic, "it's salty!"

"Why?" asked Adrià.

"I'll tell you the story as we fish," answered his Granddad.

The story of "The Salt Mill".

Then Grandpa Frederic started telling him the story of two brothers. One was a humble fisherman, poor as a church mouse but with a heart of gold. The other was the captain of a ship, who was very rich, selfish and greedy. The fisherman hadn't eaten for days because the fish weren't biting, so one day he went to his brother's house, the great captain, to ask for some help. The miserly captain told him he didn't feed good-for-nothings and threw him out.

The poor fisherman left his brother's house even hungrier and as luck would have it, he ran into an old woman who was walking down the street.

"What's wrong?" asked the old woman in surprise.

"I'm famished and my brother won't help me," answered the fisherman.

Suddenly, the old woman took a salt mill out from under her apron and gave it to the fisherman.

"This will help you solve your problems!" she said.

"What do you want me to do with it? Don't you see I have nothing to grind?" said the fisherman as he looked at the mill.

"Oh, you are a dim-wit!" shouted the old woman in anger. "This is a magic mill. All you have to do is say the magic words, 'Mill, little mill' and whatever you are thinking at that moment will come true, and when you want it to stop, you just have to say 'Little mill, stop milling', and it'll stop."

The fisherman didn't fully believe the woman, but since he was such a good person, he accepted the gift gratefully and went off to his boat.

When he got home he thought,

"I wish I had a big, clean house with a pantry full of food and a vegetable garden with fruit trees. Let's see, 'Mill, little mill'."

And his wishes were granted in a thrice. All sorts of delicious foods started appearing on a beautifully set table and trees laden with fruit sprang up in his vegetable garden.

He could hardly believe his eyes; it was true. The old witch hadn't fooled him! When his stomach was full, he got all dressed up and took his treasure to his brother's house. He had to show him his magnificent gift! When the captain saw that his brother's good fortune had come from a simple salt mill, he convinced him to lend it to him, and the poor fisherman, who was a good person, was happy to oblige. The fisherman tried to teach him the magic words to make the mill work, but the captain paid no attention to him. He grabbed the mill, ran to his ship and set out to sea in a flash.

"Let's go, sailors, we've hit it big!" he shouted laughing from the deck. "We won't have to go looking for salt to sell-we'll make it right here. I want salt," shouted the captain, "Mill little mill!"

And the little mill began churning out salt and more salt and more salt. So much salt that it came pouring out of the hold and onto the deck. And when it was about to cover the mainmast, the ship started to sink. The captain started running along the ship in despair,

"Stop, little mill. Don't grind anymore. Stop, stop, little mill!"

He even tried different languages:

"Stop, halt, arrêt, sutoppu, gelditu, don't make anymore; I don't want anymore..."

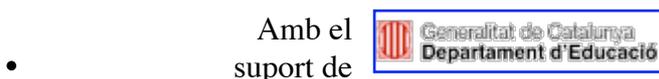
But it was all to no avail. Since he didn't know the magic words, the little mill just kept on grinding and grinding, and finally, the ship sank. And so did the little mill, but it continued to grind more and more salt underwater.

"And that's why sea water is salty-because the little mill is still grinding salt," said Grandpa Frederic. "And as far as I know, no fisherman has ever caught it or said, 'Little mill, stop milling'.

"Grandpa, grandpa," cried out the little boy, "I think I've caught something!"

"Let's see," said Grandpa Frederic, "maybe you've caught the little mill!"

Script: Susana Alcaide



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