

Poseidon, Greek God of the Sea

written by Leanne Guenther based on the Greek Mythology texts by Berens and Baldwin

Poseidon ruled the sea and the sea was a lot like him. Some days it lay smooth and blue as glass. Other days it rose in gray walls and swallowed ships.

His palace stood on the ocean floor, gold on the outside and kept bright by the washing of the waves. Behind it, in a stable of pale crystal, lived his horses. They were hippocampi, sea-horses, with the front of a horse and the tail of a silver fish. Their scales and manes were an ever-shifting mix of golds, silvers, blues and deep colors that might have been black or maybe purple or perhaps not a color at all... like the fathomless depths of the sea that the sun never touches.

One morning, Amphitrite stood in the stable fastening the harness while Poseidon waited in his shell-shaped chariot. He was silent, and his dark hair floated around his shoulders like seaweed. Far above, a ship had left harbor that day without pouring out the offering that sailors owed him.

The horses and the sea around them felt his mood before he said a word. The biggest of them reared in the water and its mane darkened ominously.

"Steady," Amphitrite told him, and tugged the last strap tight. She looked up at her husband. "Don't be hard on them for something they forgot... mortals are always forgetting."

Poseidon did not answer. He snapped the reins.

The hippocampi shot upward through the dark water and burst into the light. They ran across the waves so fast that the chariot barely touched them. Sea monsters leapt and tumbled around the wheels, and the water smoothed itself out ahead of the horses to make a road. Behind the chariot, Poseidon stirred the sea with his trident, and wherever he passed, the waves began to climb.

By the time he reached the ship, the sea was a wall of gray water. The ship's mast bent dangerously, sails flapping wildly, and the sailors clung to ropes and rails.

One of them was a young man. Though he was soaked and shaking, he bravely pulled a flask of wine from his belt and held it out over the side of the ship with both hands.

"Lord of the sea," he called into the wind, "we forgot you. Forgive us."

He poured the wine into the water.

Poseidon raised the trident, held it a moment, and then lowered it.

The waves flattened and the gray lifted from the sky. The sailors stared gratefully at a sea suddenly as calm as a pond.

The hippocampi turned for home, with their now golden manes drifting loosely and their hoofs barely brushing the surface.

Poseidon said nothing to the mortals and he almost never did. His moods moved through him the way weather moves across water, and he let them show in the waves instead of in words. This quiet was different from the one he had carried out of the stable. That one had been the held breath before a tidal wave. This one was the sea after a storm... wide and still and slowly settling.

And that is why, before every voyage, the Greeks poured the offering of a little wine into the sea.





