

"The Last Catch"

The ocean had always provided.

For generations, the people of Seabourne lived by the rhythm of tides. Boats would head out with the sunrise, nets cast into sparkling waters, and return with the promise of dinner and livelihood. It was more than tradition—it was survival.

But that morning, as twelve-year-old **Lina** followed her grandfather down the creaking jetty, the docks were quiet. Too quiet.

"No boats out today?" she asked, peering at the horizon.

Her grandfather, once a proud fisherman, simply shook his head. "There's no point," he muttered. "Not when the sea's got nothing left to give."

They reached the end of the pier where a small plaque was nailed into the wood. *Zone 9A: Protected Waters*. Below it, someone had scratched a message: "*90% of large fish gone*." Lina traced the words with her fingers.

"Is that true?" she asked.

Her grandfather nodded slowly. "Ninety percent. All gone, because people took more than the sea could spare."

Lina looked out over the water, calm and empty. "Why didn't anyone stop it?"

"Oh, they tried," he sighed. "But demand grew. People wanted more fish. More sushi. More profits. And with better boats and bigger nets, they got it. Fast."

They sat together in silence, listening to the gulls cry over an ocean that had stopped answering.

The next day at school, Lina stood in front of her class, heart thumping. The room buzzed with chatter until Ms. Hara gave a sharp clap.

"Quiet, everyone. Lina has something to share."

Lina took a breath.

"Did you know 90% of the world's large fish are gone?" she began. "Gone, because of overfishing. If we don't change how we treat the ocean, we'll have fish-free seas, dead coral reefs, and empty plates. This isn't a warning—it's happening right now."

She clicked to the next slide of her presentation: a photo of a coral reef, bleached white and lifeless.

“Overfishing happens when we take fish faster than they can reproduce. And it’s not just fish. Dolphins, turtles, even seabirds are caught in nets as *bycatch*. Many are endangered because of it.”

Lina noticed a few kids shifting uncomfortably.

“And it’s not just about the animals,” she continued. “Millions of people rely on fishing to survive. When the fish disappear, so do their jobs. Including people like my grandfather.”

She clicked again. This time the screen showed a pile of seafood at a market.

“But we can fix this. We can start by choosing sustainable seafood. Only take what you need—return the rest. Support local fishers who follow the rules. Learn what’s legal, and why.”

Lina paused, then ended with a quiet conviction: “We must act now. The ocean’s future depends on us.”

Later that week, Lina and her classmates marched into the **Seabourne Council Chambers**, armed with signs, facts, and courage.

“Good morning, councillors,” Lina began, just like she had practiced. “As a harbourside town, we can’t ignore what’s happening. You’ve seen the empty nets. You’ve seen the reef. We need stronger fishing rules. We need education campaigns. We need to protect what’s left.”

The councillors leaned in, surprised by her determination.

“We can’t pretend this isn’t real. Overfishing causes damage to our reefs, destroys jobs, and leaves our ocean in ruins. We must act with *verity*—with truth and honesty—before it’s too late.”

A long silence followed.

Then one councillor nodded.

“Let’s start by reviewing our local fishing guidelines. And maybe... we bring back ocean education to the schools.”

Lina smiled.

Months passed.

The town began to change.

New signs lined the harbour, explaining sustainable fishing. Local fishers received support to switch to better gear. Markets labeled seafood with clear sourcing. The reef zone was expanded and strictly protected.

One afternoon, Lina walked back down the jetty with her grandfather. He looked out across the bay, where the water shimmered with promise. A small boat bobbed in the distance. Birds circled.

“Think they’ll come back?” he asked.

“They will,” Lina said. “If we give them time.”

And in that quiet moment, the sea, too, seemed to breathe again.