

Ocean Friends

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Deep beneath the ocean, there was a little eel named Wolfie. He was a lonely eel, because the other fish were afraid of how he looked. While other fish had beautiful, shiny scales that glimmered and flashed, Wolfie had sharp teeth and beady eyes. Wolfie lived with his mom and dad, who loved him very much, but he was lonely. He wanted friends. One day, he woke up and left his cozy eel nest to see if he could find other fish to play with.

At first, he didn't have much luck. Every fish he approached bubbled with fear and swam quickly away. Little Wolfie was feeling discouraged, but still he continued.

After swimming for what seemed like hours, Wolfie took a rest in some seagrass. Suddenly, there was a flurry of activity and the seagrass that Wolfie was in smacked him on the nose! "Stay away, eel!" the seagrass shouted.

But it wasn't seagrass at all. Before Wolfie's eyes, the seagrass seemed to transform into a creature.

"What are you?" Wolfie asked in surprise.

"I'm a pipefish, of course," the creature said, sounding annoyed.

"Oh, I thought you were seagrass. Sorry! I'm Wolfie," said the eel. He smiled, showing all his teeth.

The pipefish shrank back in fear but didn't swim away. She looked at him for a moment and then said. "My name is Piper."

Wolfie smiled even wider. She didn't swim away! "Will you be my friend?" he asked her shyly. "I'm on an adventure to find some friends who aren't scared of me."

Piper looked at Wolfie and then smiled back. "I would love to play with you," she said. And then looked at him seriously, "Just don't mistake me for seagrass again!"

"Promise," said Wolfie and the two of them swam off together to look for more fish friends.

Wolfie and Piper swam together happily for quite a while before they realized that they had headed into much deeper waters.

"Is it just me, or is it much darker now", said Piper looking around nervously. Wolfie was about to reply when suddenly it became even darker still as the two of them were surrounded by swirls of ink.

"Piper? Where are you? I can't see," shouted Wolfie.

"Me neither!" shrieked Piper.

"Me neither!" said a third voice from the shadows.

"Who is that?" asked Wolfie, looking around nervously.

"Oh, it's just me," said the voice. "My name is Reacher and I didn't see you there. I was just practicing my hiding technique with my ink and you must have been caught up in it!" The ink started to disappear, and Piper and Wolfie quickly found each other again and huddled close. In front of them, they saw a giant eye blinking at them. The two friends were about to swim away in panic when Reacher spoke again.

"Please don't leave," he said sadly. "I didn't mean to scare you. I was just playing around with my ink."

Reacher slowly swam forward, revealing himself to Wolfie and Piper. He was much bigger than the others with shiny skin and many exploring arms in front.

"What are you?" asked Wolfie, swimming forward curiously.

“I’m a squid!” said Reacher, and he waved his many arms. “Nice to meet you!” Once Wolfie and Piper were sure that Reacher wasn’t out to eat them, the three of them started talking. They quickly determined that they were all a little bit lonely.

“So the other fish are afraid of you too, huh?” asked Reacher sadly. “I can’t even get close enough to talk to anyone before they swim away.” His arms drooped.

Wolfie and Piper looked at each other and then back to Reacher. “Same here,” said Wolfie, and Piper nodded.

The three fish floated for a moment in friendly silence before Wolfie spoke up. “Want to be our friend? We’re not afraid of you!”

Reacher was delighted. He waved his arms so fast that he made a curtain of bubbles. “I would love that!” he said and grabbed his new friends close in a hug.

Piper squirmed away before getting squished. “Do you mind?!” she squeaked.

“Sorry,” said Reacher, “I was just excited!”

The three friends swam together, deeper into the ocean. They were talking and laughing and they didn’t notice that it had become very cold and very, very dark.

“Guys? Is it really dark all of a sudden?” asked Piper, who stopped swimming suddenly. The other fish stopped beside her and noticed their surroundings. The water was colder, much deeper and darker than any of them had ever seen. Before they could react further, Reacher’s big eyes caught a shadow moving silently in front of them.

“Did you see that?”, asked Reacher - trying to track the shadow without moving. “Who’s there?” he said, trying to sound braver than he felt.

And then, a light where there was just darkness before. The three fish stared at it—they had never seen something so beautiful in the ocean. Without even thinking about it, they all began to swim closer to it.

Piper was the first to approach the light. She reached a fin towards it when the light spoke! “Hello!” a small voice exclaimed, holding back a laugh.

Piper yelped in fear and swam back to be with Wolfie and Reacher. The light spoke again.

“What?” it said, “you’ve never seen an anglerfish before?” The light tilted itself back to show the fish underneath. It grinned at them, showing off sharp teeth. “More specifically, I’m a dreamer anglerfish, which is why I look like a shadow!”

“Woah,” said Reacher, sounding excited, “I’ve heard about you, but I’ve never met an anglerfish before.” He swam around the light to get a better look, then turned back to his friends. “We must be in the Midnight Zone,” he said.

“Well that explains why it feels so cold,” said Wolfie, wrapping himself up tight. “Who are you?” asked the dreamer anglerfish curiously. “I don’t get many visitors this deep.”

“I’m Wolfie and this is Piper and Reacher”, said the eel. The pipefish lifted her fin in greeting and the squid waved a few of his many arms. They stayed back—still a bit afraid.

The dreamer anglerfish swam closer to the three friends to get a better look. “My name is Flicker,” she said. She shone her light on each fish one by one. “What are you doing down here? I don’t think you belong in the Midnight Zone,” she said.

Wolfie said, “We are on a journey and looking for friends.” He looked back at the other fish before he continued “...do you want to join us?”

Reacher spoke up “All the other fish are scared of us, because we’re different, and they don’t want to play.”

Flicker took in their comments and tipped her head to the side, shining light into the shadows of the deep water.

“Please,” said Piper. “We’d love more friends!”

“Well, ok,” said Flicker with a shrug. “It has been pretty lonely down here.”

They all started to swim back up to where the sunlight reached the water, but Flicker stopped them. “Wait!” she cried out. “I can’t go up that far - I need to stay closer to the Midnight Zone! It’s dangerous for me to go close to the surface—it makes my tummy hurt!”

“Well, we’ve made it to the Twilight Zone, which is in between the surface and the Midnight Zone,” said Piper. “Why don’t we play here? We can see a bit better, and Flicker can stay and play with us.”

“Plus, there’s lots of good hiding spots around here”, said Wolfie as he eyed a crack in a nearby rock.

“Speaking of hiding,” said Reacher, “let’s play hide and seek! You all go hide, and I’ll find you.” He covered his enormous eyes with his arms and started to count.

The friends scattered! Wolfie quickly swam into a hole in the rock, Piper disguised herself like a bit of seagrass and Flicker slowed her swimming to become as shadow-like as possible.

“...six, seven, eight, nine...TEN!” Reacher uncovered his eyes and darted around, searching for his friends.

After a long while, and some intense searching, Reacher found Flicker and Piper, but not Wolfie. The three fish worked together to find their fourth friend, and it wasn’t until Flicker’s

light reflected off the eel's eye that he was found. He came out of his rock hole laughing at how well he was disguised!

The four fish were delighted by their game and spent the afternoon taking turns hiding and seeking. Each fish got the chance to show off their special hiding skills—using shadows or ink or small spaces.

Eventually, they grew tired of hide and seek and took a rest.

“I’m glad we’re friends,” Wolfie said, smiling at the other fish. “What shall we play next?”

Before anyone else could answer, Reacher grinned and spread out all of his arms.

“Tag, and I’m it!” he said and darted after his friends.