



It was Sunday, and Tristan had invited his friends—Derek, Troy, and Chantal—over to his house for the afternoon.

"How's it going?" Grandpa Jake asked, as he passed by the room where they were playing.

"Fine," the four kids chorused, busy with their toys.

"Grandpa Jake," asked Chantal, "is it true that Tristan is the smartest boy you know?"

"What would make you say that?" asked Grandpa Jake.

"It's what Tristan told us you said," she answered.



"Remember, Grandpa, that time when I had that schoolwork to do," interrupted Tristan. "It was super hard, but I did it, and you said that I was super smart ... like the smartest boy you knew!"

"Yes, I do recall saying you were smart," said Grandpa Jake, tugging gently on his beard. "But about being the smartest boy I knew ... hmmm. I don't quite remember that."

"Sometimes we want to feel better about ourselves," Grandpa Jake explained, "because we think it will make others like us more. But you know, our friends like us just as we are."

"There once was a starfish who thought he had to be something special in order for his friends to like him."

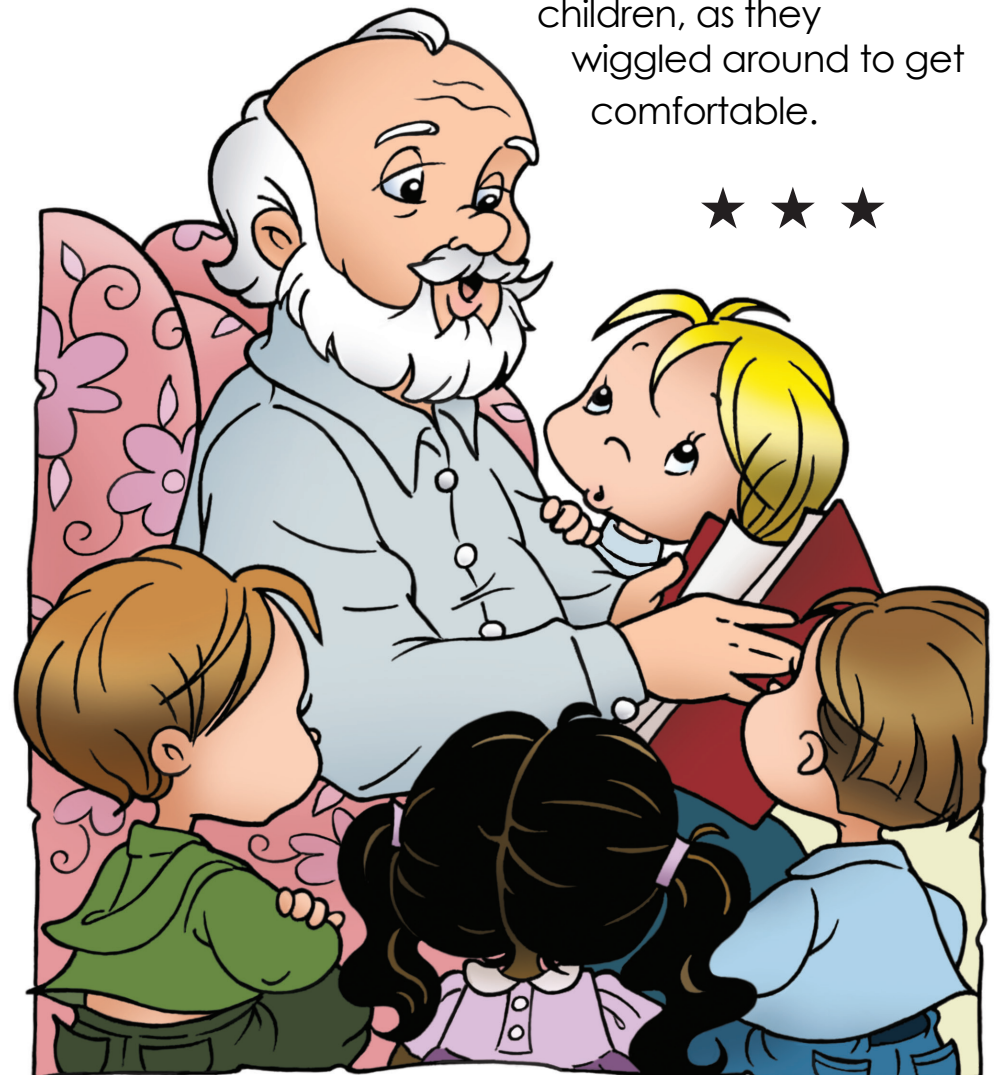
"Tell us, please, Grandpa!" chorused the children.



Tristan, Derek, Troy, and Chantal packed up their toys and tidied up the living room while Grandpa Jake went to get his storybook.

"Have you all found your spot?" asked Grandpa Jake.

"Almost," said the four children, as they wiggled around to get comfortable.







"My mother taught me that poem," Shallo said. "She would recite it for me as I went to sleep."

"It's very nice," said Littleton, Shallo's starfish friend.

The two friends sat on a rock, listening to the waves crash against the cliff, and watching the twinkling stars.



"Did you know that I was once a star?" Littleton boasted.

"You mean you would have *liked* to be a star?" Shallo asked.

"No, I once was a star!" exclaimed Littleton.

"What happened? You have to tell me!"

"Um ... w-w-well..." stuttered Littleton. He had only hoped to impress Shallo, but now he wondered what to do next. Should he make up a story, or tell Shallo the truth?



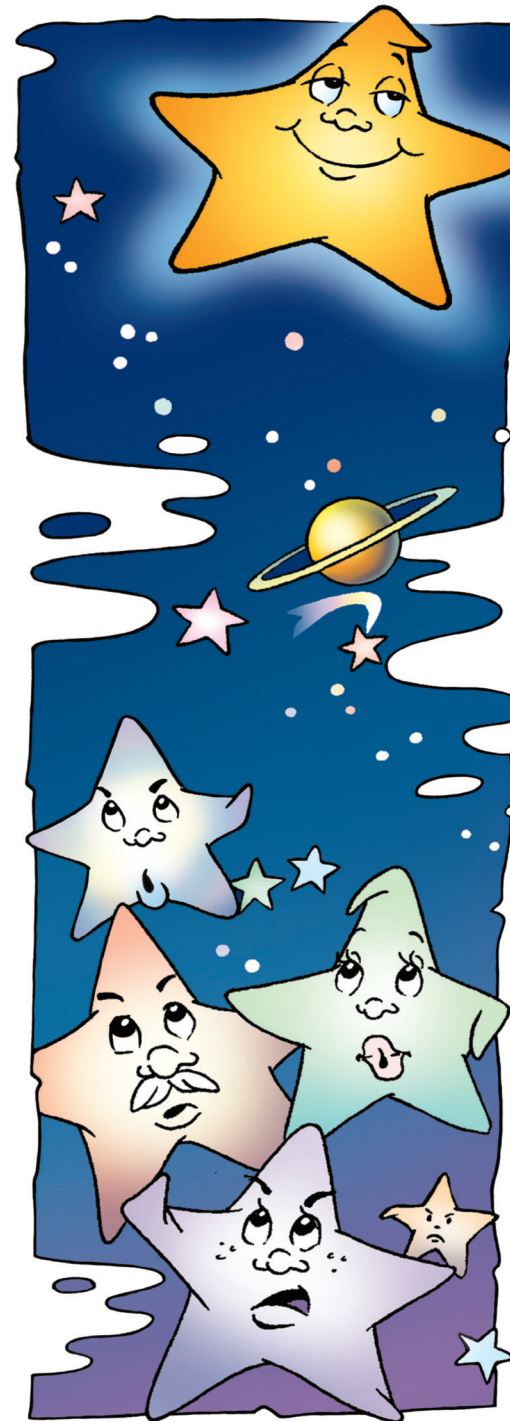
*If I tell Shallo the truth now, thought Littleton, he won't like me anymore. He'll look at me and think that I'm just a plain, ugly starfish without anything special. Then maybe he won't want to be my friend anymore.*

"Are you going to tell me?" Shallo asked.

"Before I met you," Littleton began, "I used to be a star, far, far away in the sky. I wasn't a normal star, either. I was colorful. Sometimes I would shine white, but I could also change colors to blue, red, yellow, and green."



"Wow! That's so cool!" exclaimed Shallo. "What happened?"



"Some of the other stars were jealous of me because they couldn't change colors like I could. So, they got together to think of what they could do to get rid of me."

"Oh no, that's terrible," Shallo said.

"One day I was shining brightly as usual, when those stars finally decided that they were going to hit me out of the sky. Suddenly, *bang*, they smashed into me! I lost my balance, and I started to fall. I went tumbling out of the sky. It was so scary! Finally, after falling for a long, long time, I hit the water with a splash and sank to the bottom of the ocean."



"When I realized what had happened and I looked at myself, I was no longer a star, bright and shiny and colorful, like I had been. Instead, I was a dull, plain starfish. And that's what I've been ever since."

"That's so sad," said Shallo. "But even though you're not a star like you were, I didn't ever think you were dull or ugly. I've always liked you just how you are. I'm sorry for what happened, though."

"Don't worry about it," Littleton said. "I'm getting used to being a starfish."

That night as Littleton lay on his coral bed, something inside didn't feel right.



*I shouldn't have told Shallo that made-up story, he thought. It wasn't true, but now he thinks that it is. What if he tells someone else? Oh no, what am I going to do?*

"...And the naughty stars banged into poor Littleton, and he started to fall and fall," Shallo repeated to Old Budder and Goby.

"And when he hit the water, he wasn't a star anymore! He was a starfish," Shallo said, ending the story.

Goby looked at Old Budder and shook his head. "From what my mother told me, starfish are just starfish. They weren't ever stars before that."

"That's right," said Old Budder.

"Ask Littleton yourself, then," said Shallo.

The three friends swam off in search of Littleton.



"There you are," Shallo said when they had found Littleton.

"Uh, hi," said Littleton.

"Shallo told us your story," Old Budder explained, "and we were wondering if it was actually true or not. We were always taught that starfish are a type of sea creature, like the rest of us."

"I ... I...", stammered Littleton, looking very nervous.

"It's what you told me," said Shallo. "Tell them it's true."

*What am I going to do? Littleton panicked. Should I tell them that I made it up? Or should I still say it's true?*



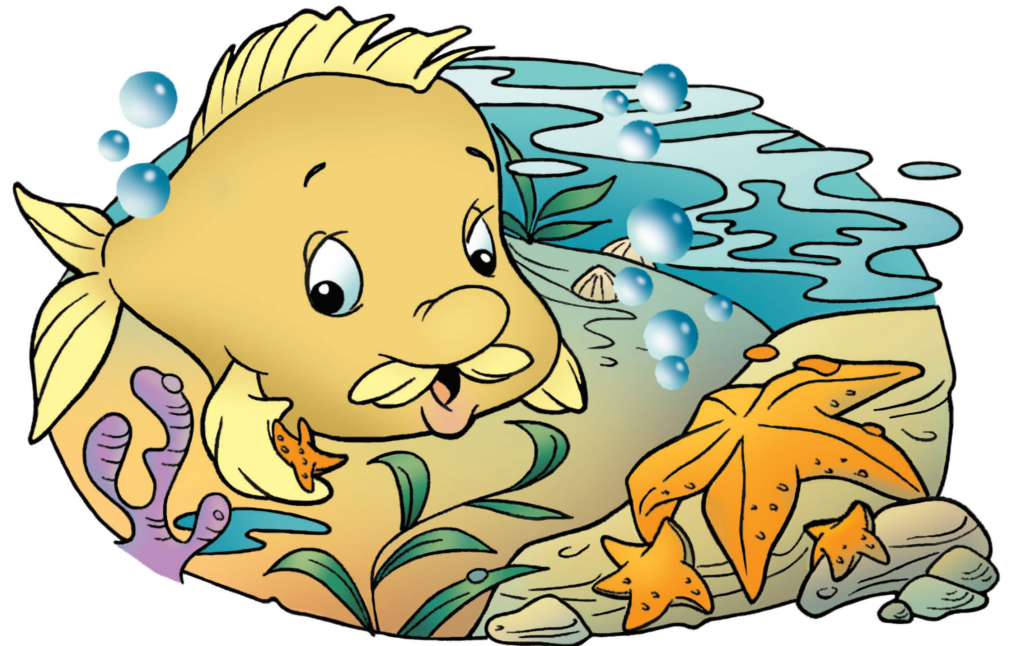
*I really shouldn't have told that lie. Now they might never believe anything I say.*

After thinking about it for a moment, Littleton knew what he had to do.

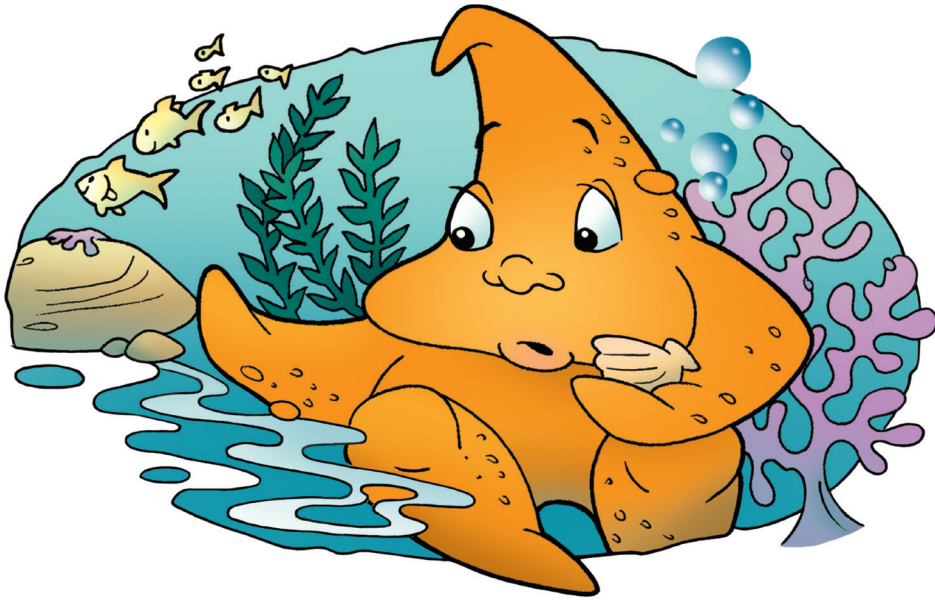
"Shallo, I'm sorry," he began.

"What do you mean?" asked Shallo.

"I never was a star. I've always been a starfish. I never thought I was special. My colors are not that bright, and I don't swim as gracefully as fish do. I wanted you to think that there was something special about me. I thought maybe that would make you like me more."







"But I already like you!" exclaimed Shallo. "You're my friend, and that's all that matters."

"Really?" Littleton asked in surprise.

"Of course. Who cares what color you are or how you swim? I like you as you are."

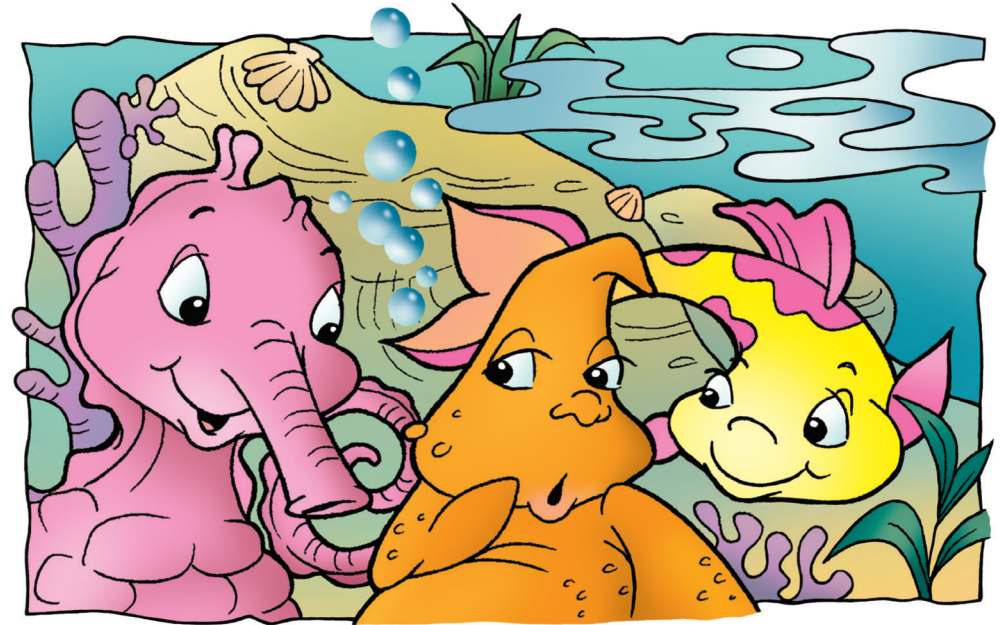
"We do too," added Goby.

"We're all different," explained Old Budder. "We have different things about us that make us who we are, and that makes us special in our own way."

"That's true," said Littleton. "I'm sorry. I promise I won't make up any more stories like that from now on. I'm so happy to have friends like you."

"And we're happy to have you for our friend, too," chorused Goby, Budder, and Shallo.

The four friends swam off together, happy to have one another.



*Ding, dong!*

"That must be your parents here to pick you up," Grandpa Jake said as he closed the book.

"Thank you for the story, Grandpa Jake," Derek said.

"I always learn so much from these stories," added Troy.

"Me too," agreed Chantal.

"Well, I'm glad," said Grandpa Jake. "I love reading stories to you. And yes, there are many things we can learn from them."

"I'll remember this story," said Tristan. "I'm glad I have friends who like me just as I am."

"That's right," said Grandpa Jake, as he tousled Tristan's hair. "We'd better not keep your parents waiting. Come back again soon!"

"Bye!" chorused Derek, Chantal, and Troy as they left.

