

The Octopus and the Puffed-Up Friend

Inspired by Dalai Lama
Written by Sundeep Parmar



LITTLE KEYS
to the Universe



LITTLE KEYS TO THE UNIVERSE

The Octopus and the Puffed-Up Friend



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DEDICATED TO

Ria & Mia



Big Lessons. Little Stories.



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He reminds us that when we take the time to understand how someone else feels, we bring more happiness, not just to them but to ourselves as well. So take a deep breath, feel the ocean's gentle rhythm, and let the waves guide you into a story about seeing beyond what we think we know and finding connection in the most unexpected places. Otto the Octopus loved playing in the coral reef. He zipped between rocks, twisted his arms into silly shapes, and changed his colors with his moods. Yellow when happy, purple when nervous, blue when sad.



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Today he was bright yellow, which meant he was extra happy. He wanted to find someone to play with. As he swam past a cluster of sea fans, he spotted Poldy the Pufferfish near the sandy ocean floor. But something was wrong. Poldy was puffed up, round like a spiky balloon. Otto stopped. His yellow faded to purple. Uh-oh, Otto thought. Poldy must be really mad. He quickly turned away and swam off.



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But as the day went on, Otto kept noticing Poldy, still alone, still puffed up. Something about it bothered Otto. That afternoon, as Otto floated by the reef, he saw Lenny the Monterey gliding gracefully through the water. Otto, why do you look so blue? Lenny asked. Otto looked down. His skin had turned soft blue, his sad color. I saw Poldy earlier, Otto said, but he was all puffed up.



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I think he's really mad, so I stayed away. Lenny tilted her wide head. Are you sure he's mad? Otto blinked. Well, he looked mad. Lenny gave a gentle swirl of offense. Hmm, but did you ask him? Otto hesitated. No. Lenny smiled. Sometimes things aren't what they seem. Just because someone looks a certain way doesn't mean we know how they feel. The best way to understand someone is to ask and listen.



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Otto's skin swirled pink, his thinking color. Maybe Poldy wasn't mad. Maybe he was something else. There was only one way to find out. Otto swam carefully toward Poldy. The pufferfish saw him coming and puffed up even bigger. Otto almost turned purple again and swam away, but this time he didn't. Instead, he stayed. He took a deep breath and asked, Poldy, are you mad at me? Poldy blinked. What?



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I thought you were mad, Otto said, because you were puffed up. Poldy let out a soft sigh and a tiny bit of mad. He said, I just get nervous. Nervous? Otto asked. Poldy nodded. Whenever I feel scared, I puff up. I can't help it, but then everyone thinks I'm angry and they stay away. Otto's colors shifted, not purple, not blue, but a mix of colors, a new feeling, understanding.



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I thought you were mad, but really you were just scared, Otto said. Poldy sighed again. Yeah, I thought no one wanted to play with me. Otto thought about how he would feel if everyone stayed away from him. His skin turned soft orange, his kindness color. I get scared too sometimes, Otto admitted. Maybe we could be scared together. Poldy's spikes flattened as he let out a long breath. He wasn't puffy anymore.



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Yeah, Poldy said with a small smile. I'd like that. From that day on, Otto never guessed how someone felt, he always asked. And Poldy, he didn't puff up as much anymore, because now he had a friend who understood. As they played, Lenny watched from a distance and smiled. Empathy was like an ocean current. It could change everything. And so, Otto learned that understanding someone starts with a question, not an assumption.



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Instead of guessing how Poldy felt, he listened. And in that moment, something magical happened. A new friendship was born, built on kindness and empathy. The Dalai Lama teaches us that when we take time to truly see and listen to others, we bring more peace, not just to them, but to ourselves too. Every day we have the chance to make the world a little softer, a little warmer, just by caring about how others feel. So next time you see someone who looks sad or scared or even angry, remember Otto's lesson.



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Ask, listen, and maybe, just maybe, you'll find a new friend waiting for you.



THE LITTLE KEY
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Sometimes big, loud friends feel scared
inside. Being gentle helps them feel safe.



LISTEN WITH CARE

Otto the octopus meets a big, puffed-up friend who seems grumpy — until he learns that loud friends sometimes feel scared inside, and gentleness helps them feel safe. A warm bedtime story about empathy.

For kids with a prickly or bossy friend — a reminder that listening helps most.

Big Lessons. Little Stories.

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