

Deep Sea Baby

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Deep in the ocean, residing amongst hundreds of thousands of undiscovered sea creatures, lived a small, humanoid shark girl named Ally. She never really had a care in the world, just swimming around and being free. However, such a mundane life led her further and further out from the rest of her colony, driven by a sense of exploration.

Swimming along the coral reefs that made up the ocean floor, Ally waved hello to all of her fish friends that she'd made during her travels. They were afraid of her at first, but after discovering that she was a soft, gentle soul underneath her frightening shark exterior, they knew that she was no threat to them. She didn't stop to chat, though, having a predetermined destination in mind.

A large storm had recently sunk a freighter traveling through her waters. She'd heard from her clownfish friend, Marley. She couldn't understand why but even though the ship gave her very menacing vibes, she kept swimming towards it. Something in her gut told her to swim away, but her sense of adventure forced her to disregard those doubts.

Venturing through the various shipping crates that were scattered about, Ally's findings were mostly a bust. There were dozens of crates filled with water-logged electronics and lumber material, none of which held any value to her. She was on the lookout for clothes, trinkets, and knick-knacks. Things that made her feel more in touch with her humanoid side. She'd never dare to tell anyone else, but she often dreamed of going ashore and living a life amongst the human world, which she considered far more interesting than the boring ocean she was stuck in.

After hours of digging around, Ally was about to give up when she suddenly noticed a large container with its corner busted open. She didn't know why, but it was as if the red, rusting rectangle was calling out to her. Swimming over to it, she peered inside and was in complete shock by what she found.

Pink. That was the only word that came to Ally's mind as she examined the room. From floor to ceiling, the entire container was well with the pink decor in various complementary shades. And it wasn't just any decor either. Salt water-soaked diapers, toys, and various baby items were scattered haphazardly about the shipping crate. It even had larger furniture pieces, such as a changing table, a high chair, and even a large, comfortable-looking crib, all of which were foreign to her.

Confused, Ally looked around the crate, awestruck by these new, mysterious treasures. She noticed a poster slightly faded from the saltwater. On it was this adorable cartoon baby, so silly and happy. She couldn't help but feel elated seeing it. Humans were always photographed looking so cheerful and she wanted to be just like it.

Swimming over to the pile of diapers that had fallen out of a nearby shelf, she looked back at the cartoon baby's wardrobe. Making her decision quick, she grabbed one of the cute-looking garments and poorly attempted to strap on the extremely soaked padding. If being dressed in one of these white, wearable sponges made this human so happy, maybe it would do the same for her.

After spending nearly half an hour, Ally finally completed her shoddy diaper job. Inspecting herself, she suddenly felt an indescribable warmth in her chest. It was like a hole had been filled like this bulky hug around her waist belonged there. "Wow, this is suuuper cute!" She giggled to herself as she rocked back and forth on the over-saturated sack of pulp, molding herself into its squishy form.

Ally was far from finished, though, as she turned her attention back to the poster. Not only was the little human wearing a diaper, but it also had on a pink, poofy party dress. Searching around the nursery, she happened upon a wardrobe that was lying face down. When she lifted it up and looked inside, she saw dozens of outfits that looked nearly identical to the cartoon.

Overwhelmed like a kid in a candy store, Ally thumbed through all of the dresses, onesies, and other infantile outfits, delighted that humans would enjoy wearing something so adorable. Pulling out her favorite, which was a short, pink babydoll dress with a wide crinoline built-in, she slipped it over her head, only to end up caught in the middle of it thanks to the fin on her back. Bending forward, she forced her fin to rip through the back of the dress, giving her the room to fully slide it on.

Twirling around in the dress, Ally couldn't contain her excitement. She was having so much fun and she never wanted it to end. Wanting to take her playtime to the next level, she went back to the cartoon, looking for anything she could be missing. That's when she noticed what looked to be some sort of brown mass under its butt contained within the puffy, white cloud.

Determined to get it right, Ally thought hard about what the brown stuff could be. Nothing in the container even resembled it. That's when she looked over at the crack in the bottom of the crate, putting two and two together in her mind, "Oh! You're supposed to put mud in these?" she asked rhetorically to herself. Not wanting to be doing it wrong, she quickly grabbed a handful from the seafloor and stuffed it down the back of her diaper. "Is this how humans live? It's so cute and fun!" she giggled to herself, grabbing her toes and rolling on her back just like the baby on the poster did. This was the most fun she'd had in her entire life!

In the background of the poster, Ally noticed something that looked like a bed of sorts. It had bars all around it that reminded her of the rails that lined many of the ships she'd ventured into before. Looking around, she saw something that appeared to be very similar to this bed-like structure. Though it looked a bit off compared to the comfy sleeping spot in the image, it was still a mattress contained within a series of bars, only this one also had a set of bars that enclosed the top as well.

Ally swam up to the crib and inspected the plush-looking bed. As she reached through the bars and pressed her hand on the soft mattress, she felt another fit of innocent giggles coming on. Nothing on the seafloor was anywhere near as cushiony as the mattress and her diaper were. With one side of the crib already cracked open, she pried it open, which was harder to do than she thought it would be, and swam inside, resting her body down on the mattress. It was so heavenly that she never wanted to lie on a rock or the sand floor ever again.

BEEP BEEP

“User detected! Initiating auto-lock procedure!”

Suddenly, the base beneath the mattress began to speak to her. Seconds later, the panel of faded-white bars that she had lowered rose back up on their own, locking her inside. Panicking, she grabbed onto the bars and attempted to force them back down to no avail. It must’ve been locked onto some mechanical track, explaining why it was so hard to open in the first place.

For the first time since entering this strange space, Ally was terrified. Her small heart beating fast she soon found herself exhausted. She was completely trapped, and not a single other shark person knew where she was. Only a few of her reef friends knew where she was, but none of them would ever even dream of approaching another, less-friendly shark.

With no hope of escaping on her own, Ally settled herself onto the mattress that had once brought her so much joy and softly wept, knowing that unless someone came to let her out, she’d likely be trapped inside forever. In no time, she had passed out into a deep slumber on the comfortable crib bed, with no idea that while she slept, her salvation had arrived.

Standing on the edge of a boat dressed in an all-black wetsuit, Angel smirked as she looked out over the dark ocean with only the moon and stars to illuminate its gently ebbing surface. She breathed in deeply through her nose, inhaling the salty sea air. Having been raised with the ocean as her backyard all of her life, she relished every chance to explore its depths, feeling more at home with the fishes than with people.

“Yo Angel, let’s get going. We’re burning moonlight and I wanna get in the water already,” said Dirk, Angel’s well-meaning, but slightly boneheaded partner in crime. He was your average adventure-seeking adrenaline junkie with an attention span the size of a small child.

Angel wasn’t the biggest fan of Dirk’s brash personality and money-driven ambition, but he always went along with anything, no matter how shady, and he never asked questions, making him the perfect partner. “Did you do the final checks yet?” she said coldly, her gaze never wavering from the horizon.

Unable to sense Angel’s annoyance, Dirk responded with a smirk and two thumbs up, “We’re all set! I just loaded the harpoon thingies.”

Rolling her eyes, Angel turned around to face Dirk. "Harpoon thingies?" she said with withering sarcasm.

"Yeah, the small ones that go in the harpoon gun. Those thingies" said Dirk before turning towards the rear of the ship and waving for Angel to follow, "C'mon, I know you wanna get down there as much as I do."

Chuckling softly, Angel joined Dirk in the dive deck, the two helped each other place their scuba gear on before mounting the edge of the stern. "Should we do a count down or something?" joked Dirk, nudging Angel with his shoulder.

Without responding, Angel made a perfect back roll entry as she splashed into the water. Once Dirk was safely in the water behind her, she swam forward into the abyss. Unfortunately, this wasn't a particularly deep dive. Their target was a sunken freighter ship that had been in the news for several days. Certainly a risky job, but with this weekend falling on Memorial Day, security was a skeleton crew especially at night, making for a golden opportunity. "You sure your info's good?" she said, her voice audible through the mic in her breather mask, "Last time Stevie tipped us off, it was wild goose."

"It's a sure thing!" Dirk shouted, nearly deafening Angel in the process, "Don't forget about the Panama job two years ago that Stevie hooked us up with. One bad dive does not a failure make. Plus, the client only wants one thing. The rest is for us to plunder so long as we don't get caught...or run into any sharks!"

Ignoring both Dirk's joke and blind optimism, Angel swam forward into the maze of shipping containers. She never enjoyed scavenger hunt missions like this. There had to be well over a hundred freighters down here, and they had to find one. No doubt, they'd need to be up and down for air several times to find it. However, despite her reservations about the job, there weren't a lot of opportunities flying around at the moment. In this instance, beggars couldn't be choosers.

The pair searched for well over an hour, coming up empty-handed on the client's desired crate, but finding several valuables of their own. Even if worse came to worst and they had to bail on the client, they'd still get a mighty decent haul, perhaps the biggest they'd ever done. With only 30% of their oxygen left, Angel was about to call it to head back up so they could refresh and regear, but Dirk's obnoxiously loud voice entered her ear, his voice in high spirits, "I found it! Serial number 024601!"

"Awesome! I'm on my way," said Angel, allowing herself to smile for the first time tonight. Now that they had the container located, they'd have a lot more time to scavenge for themselves. This payday was gonna be epic. In an extra stroke of luck, she was nearby to Dirk's location, so there was a potential that they even could bring the payload up with them when they resupplied.

Arriving at Dirk's location, Angel was happy to see that her compatriot already had the container's side panel unlocked and opened. As she swam closer, though, she noticed the

utterly shocked look on Dirk's face. Assuming he was trying to mess with her as usual, she taunted, "What is it, did you finally have your fateful run-in with Bruce from Jaws?"

However, instead of breaking his composure like Angel expected him to do, Dirk just stood there in complete silence for several seconds. "Y-You could say that," he finally stuttered out, "You know how our client, CrissBaby, wanted us to find some prototype crib thingie?"

"Yeah?" said Angel, getting weirded out by Dirk, at least more than usual.

Pausing for dramatic effect, Dirk stared into Angel's goggle-covered eyes with a look that Angel had only seen once before on the Panama job where they stumbled across actual pirate gold. It was as if his irises had been replaced with dollar signs. "Well...you'll never guess what I found inside..."

Stirring awake from a peaceful slumber, Ally stretched out, expecting to feel the cushy bed of the crib once more. She'd been stuck trapped within the cage-like crib for two days now and no amount of yelling or crying helped her escape when she was stuck so far away from everyone. When she pushed her arms upward, though, she found that her surroundings had grown even more cramped and less comfortable than before.

Opening her eyes, Ally was shocked to find that she was no longer trapped within the auto-locking crib dressed like the cartoon infant, but was instead naked inside of a long, cylindrical glass container. Not only that, but the shipping crate nursery that she previously had so much fun in was nowhere in sight, replaced by the cold, metallic setting of a ship's belly.

"Oh, good, you're awake now," said a female voice that echoed around inside of her glass tube. Ally looked around as the voice continued to speak, finding a small talk box on the metal siding of the glass tube, "Do you understand what I'm saying? If you can speak, press the red button on that box you're looking at."

Beyond confused, Ally may have fully understood everything that the woman was saying, but that didn't solve the vast majority of the mysteries floating around in her head. It was obvious that whoever this was had captured her, and that the secret of her species was no longer a secret. Following the voice's instructions, she pressed the red button and spoke, "W-Where am I? What is all this?"

"Well I'll be damned, she can talk," said a male voice, before the same voice broke into a series of cheers, "Do you know what this means?! This could be the greatest scientific discovery of our generation!"

"Will you can it! We can't exactly take credit for finding a creature in the middle of a restricted area! We need to be smart about this," retorted the female voice, sounding very annoyed.

Ally couldn't care less what they were arguing about. For the first time in her life, she had the chance to meet real-life humans, and they sounded just as exciting as she'd hoped for.

Pressing the button again, she said, “M-My name is Ally. And...I was wondering...if I could meet you?” She cringed, regretting not having prepared what she was going to say before shooting from the hip.

Luckily, it seemed like her captors weren’t paying any attention to her as the male voice returned, “Whatever, so long as I get to name its species. I did find it after all Hmmm...it’s gotta have some sort of play on shark.”

“Oh, for the love of-,” said the female voice, raising in volume before trailing off, “...whatever, call it a fricking shork for all I care. I’m gonna call Stevie and see if he has any connections for this.”

“You know, that’s not that bad,” mumbled the male voice before the radio went silent. Moments later, a person entered the chamber where she was being held, shifting Ally’s attention. It was Dirk, who was looking at Ally with hungry, apathetic eyes. “You said your name was Ally, right?”

Nodding her head shyly, Ally responded, “U-Uh huh. Who are you?”

“Well, I’m Dirk,” he said with a friendly smile, “And my friend you heard on comms is Angel. We found you caught inside of a shipping container and...well...what are you?”

Ally didn’t know exactly how to respond to that question. Before she could say anything, the woman who she assumed was Angel came barging into the room with a phone to her ear. “They’ll pay how much!?! Yeah...walks, talks, the whole shebang! How long to collect?!” she said with a kind of chipperness that Dirk had never seen before, “Stevie, you brilliant bastard! Get your ass on a plane tonight and don’t forget the champagne.” She then hung up her phone and slid it into her pocket before rushing over to the tube Ally was in and pressing her hands on the side as she leaned in closer. “Hello, my little friend, sorry if we gave you a scare. Just sit tight, we’re gonna make you a star.”

Watching Dirk and Angel celebrate together, Ally couldn’t help but feel she had cause to celebrate as well. Soon, however, she felt herself starting to drift off back to sleep, unaware that the tank she was in was slowly filling with a strong tranquilizer to ensure she’d stay asleep throughout the entire process. She lounged back down on the rounded glass bottom of the tube, she smiled, thrilled that humans seemed to be everything she’d been hoping for.

As Ally came to once more, she found that she was back within the confines of a crib, only this one was of the normal, open-topped variety. Her babyish wardrobe had also returned with the exact same dress and everything. Only now, she was wearing a diaper that seemed less spongy and weighty than her last, unaware that she was now inside of a swim diaper. Looking beyond the bars, she was elated to see that she was yet again surrounded by pink! She just couldn’t get over how much she loved the color.

Swimming out through the top of the crib, Ally explored the underwater nursery that she found herself in, drawing her attention to the fact that everything seemed to be weighted to keep it from floating upward, giving it the appearance of a real human nursery. As she kept swimming she soon discovered that one of the four walls surrounding her was made of see-through glass. On the other side was a blue and yellow curtain that blocked off whatever was on the other side.

SPLASH!

Turning back abruptly, Ally realized that she was no longer in the nursery alone, as two divers had joined her in the water. She instantly recognized that whoever they were wasn't Dirk or Angel. They were new humans she'd never met before. Nervous, she swam back over to her crib and hunkered down inside.

"Awww, looks like the little shorkpup is scared," said one of the divers with a soft chuckle, "Don't worry, she'll get used to both us and her routine in no time." The divers approached her crib and lowered the side of the bars, causing Ally to retreat behind a set of aquatic toys designed to look like stuffed animals.

Suddenly, a loud booming voice, yet another that Ally didn't recognize, came out over a loudspeaker, "Hello, Ocean World guests! Are you ready to meet your brand new friend?" A chorus of cheers followed the jubilant announcement.

As was becoming an unfortunate norm by this point, Ally had no idea what was going on or where she was. All she knew was that she was likely surrounded by scores of humans, something that filled her with anticipation and anxiety. When the curtain along the glass wall finally began to part, she was blinded by the bright, California sun, along with dozens of camera flashes aimed directly at her.

When her eyes finally adjusted, Ally was greeted by a plethora of happy human faces. She'd never seen so many jolly expressions before, certainly a far cry from all the grumpy gills back home. Feeling her heart start to flutter, her smile only grew as she continued to look around from person to person, soaking up their unbridled joy.

Distracted by the humans, Ally didn't even notice what the divers were up to. With a weighted stroller at their side, they wrapped their arms around Ally, preventing her from swimming off, and placed her into the padded seat before buckling her in. "Time to say hello," said the other diver as she was pushed up close to the glass.

Ally found this whole charade to be quite odd, knowing that she was fully capable of swimming over on her own, but she thought it'd probably be best to do what the humans ask, for now, not wanting them to send her back out to sea. Little did she know how lucrative her presence actually was.

Rolling up to a mic stand, the divers positioned the underwater microphone at level with Ally's mouth before stepping back. The entire crowd went silent as everyone waited for this miracle of life to say her first words. "Um...hi," was all she could think to say. Thankfully, that seemed to be more than enough, as everyone within her line of sight proceeded to go absolutely crazy with excitement. She clapped her hands together and giggled, thrilled to find

how much everyone already loved her. It was specifically the littlest humans that seemed to get the most excited, running up to the glass and pressing their hands on the glass for a closer look, just like Angel had done.

Speaking of which, outside of the tank, Dirk and Angel were busy fanning questions from dozens of reporters, all wanting to know everything they could about this breakthrough discovery. "Shorks are an intellectually superior species compared to all aquatic life, even rivaling the intelligence of our very species," Dirk said, reciting the lines that Angel had prepared for him, "The Shork, who has been lovingly nicknamed AllySmolShork, appears to be at the same physical maturity as a young adult female in her early to mid-20s despite her affinity towards the infantile."

Angel then butted in, stepping slightly in front of Dirk. "It certainly wasn't easy to tame such a wild beast. In the end, we decided to start back from the beginning was the best option. She may outgrow her love for diapers someday, but I don't think that will be anytime soon," she said, lying to cover up the fact that her largest benefactor, The CrissBaby Diaper Company, had a vested interest in keeping her padded for the foreseeable future.

Back in the tank, the divers were unbuckling Ally from her stroller and letting her out into the play area for some fun time. "Go on, swim around and play. It'll make everyone so happy," said the diver.

Obediently to her new friends, Ally rested herself on her diaper in the middle of the playpen and picked up a few nearby blocks. Before long, she was having the time of her life. The crowd responded accordingly, which only fueled her eccentricities as she played. Smiling gleefully, she took in her surroundings once more, feeling a sense of home that she'd never known before.

THE END.