



An aquarium. Not exactly the best place to be when your world's falling apart. I was wedged on a too-small chair as schools of little kids rushed past me like sharks. Why did Mum and Dad think a trip to see some fish would cheer me up? I was twelve, not two. And this place was dark and echoey and weird.

I wiped my tears on the back of my hand and tried to sniff myself back together. I'd cried so much my skin was raw and puffed right out of my face.

*Puffer fish.*

I'd just passed one of those. I had not been ready for how deep-down strange they looked all unpuffed. Now, I was stranded at this little colouring-in table while the lights flashed from blue to red to green, making my tummy do flips. I needed to move.

Mum and Dad could see me from the cafe area. They were "giving me space", but not a lot of it.

I snuck a glance at them and tried not to imagine being wrapped in a hug. I wanted to nestle in so deep that everything except my own breath disappeared. I wanted it so much I ached. But this was all their fault! I didn't have them now, I didn't have my wonderful Dadu, I was completely alone.

*Look at the fish, Sashi,* I told myself.

I stood up to read the info-card-thing in front of me.

Juvenile, Male.

But before I got a chance to learn about "habitat" and "feeding habits", I glanced into the tank to see two bright and beady eyes looking right at me.

*Oh.*

*Not a fish.*

*Octopus.*

'Hello there,' I whispered, 'Do you give hugs?'

He looked back at me, but didn't answer.

Wow, he was gorgeous. Each sucker a perfect circle, his tentacles moving like pencil strokes. I had to draw him, right now. I reached into my back pocket for my ever-ready mini-sketchbook, but he folded himself away as I peered into the tank.



I couldn't blame him. There was a baby crying somewhere; a constant, screeching wail. With the weird light show, the heat and that terrible kid-siren, this was the worst place on earth.

*I'm not like the others, octopus. I won't flash you with photos, or tap on the glass, or storm past hunting for Nemos.*

He edged behind his seaweed shield. Grey goosebumps studded his tentacles, his head-lump-thing swayed in the water and his eyes were still locked on mine.

*Come back out,* I willed.

Then in a sudden flurry, he was there. I burped out a giggle as I pressed myself closer. He spread the glass with his sucker-things, then coiled and spiralled sideways, a bright corally-red. Where were his eyes hid now? *There.* He stared right at me as he retreated, shifting to brown, to coal-black, then grey. Back in his hole.

He looked like he wanted to tell me something.