

## Speck

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Once upon a time, there was a speck of sand. It was lying underneath a piece of paper that a young caterpillar was drawing on. Every time she ran over the tiny bump the speck made, her crayon made a darker mark, and a white spot was left next to it. She was getting very frustrated. She lifted the piece of paper and was about to blow the speck of sand away, when she heard a tiny voice:

“Wait! Please don’t blow me away. I’m not a speck of sand, I am a clam! I am the world’s tiniest clam, and I am so bored of being swept back and forth with the specks of sand. I’m so lonely, no one talks with me because they think I am a speck of sand, and the sand doesn’t talk. I was so lucky that I got stuck onto someone’s beach shoe, and then I rode in their car, and then I got stuck onto this piece of paper, and then when I woke up, you were giving me this nice backrub. I didn’t mean to get in your way, I just need your help because I was so lonely!”

The caterpillar looked at the tiny speck. She was sure she had heard a voice, but couldn’t see anything clamlike about the speck. “Um, mom?” she called out, still looking at the speck.

“Yes, dear?”

“Could you come here for a second, please?”

“Sure, honey, just a minute.” The caterpillar mommy came over, and the little girl explained what had happened. The mommy peered at the speck, and brought over a magnifying glass. Sure enough, they could just make out the shell and gooey, toffee-colored flesh in the middle.

“Little clam?” said the mother.

“Yes?” said the clam.

“I see that you are indeed a clam, but you are very, very small.”

“Yes. I am the world’s tiniest clam.”

“Well, then, how can we help you?”

“I’ve left the sand because I was so lonely. I think it would be awfully nice, since I am the world’s tiniest clam, to see the world’s biggest clam.” So the mommy and daughter caterpillar looked in the encyclopedia, and found that the world’s biggest clam lived on the bottom of the ocean, off of a reef in Australia. They made a few plans, packed a few things, and off they all went to Australia. They decided to call the tiny clam Speck, since she was just so small and had spent so much time in the sand. Speck rode in a box that had been used for an engagement ring – it was silky soft inside, and strong on the outside.

They hitched a ride in the wild hat of a tourist – it was supposed to be a garden full of flowers and insects, so they just pretended they were part of the scenery. When they got to Australia, they looked at a map and snuck onto a taxi that was headed to the beach. At the beach, they went to the edge of the water and found some razor clams sticking their head out of the sand in the low tide pools.

“Hello,” said the caterpillar to one of the razor clams. “We have a friend here who would like to meet the biggest clam in the world. Are you the biggest clam in the world?”

“Oh, no, not us!” said the razor clam. “You want the biggest clam? In the whole world?”

“Yes, we heard that he or she lived off this coast. Can you take us?”

“Oh, no, not me – she lives at the bottom of the ocean. You need to go with someone who can dive deep,” said the razor, disappearing back beneath the sand.

“Dear oh dear,” said the mother caterpillar. Then the daughter caterpillar pointed out some seals sleeping and sunning themselves on rocks that jutted out of the water not far away.

“Seals dive deeply, right?” asked the daughter.

“Yes, dear. Let’s go,” said the mother.

They approached the sleeping seals *quickly* for caterpillars, which was *slowly* for seals and *superfast* for the world’s tiniest clam. The seal said she would be happy to take the caterpillars and Speck to the world’s largest clam, so they made a tiny balloon of leaves to hold some air, held onto the seal’s neck, and down they dove. At first the light glowed around them and the surface of the water looked like a mirror way above, then it got darker and darker and colder and colder. As their eyes got used to the darkness, they saw beautiful colors on many fish, and lots of unusual shapes.

Finally, they arrived at the world’s biggest clam. She welcomed them, and said “What brings two caterpillars to see the me?”

Speck piped up, “I do!” The big clam peered closely at the box in which Speck sat.

“And who are you?” the world’s largest clam asked.

“I am the world’s tiniest clam,” said Speck. “And I’ve come a long way to meet you, because you are the world’s biggest clam.”

“Well, I’m more than that,” the big clam said, with dramatic pause, “I am your mother!”

“How could a clam as big as you be the mother of someone so tiny?” asked the caterpillar daughter.

“I supposed it might seem funny.... The way the world’s biggest clam has children, at first they are tiny, and are scattered through the ocean. They spread throughout the world, then they find their way back here to me. If they don’t come back here, they will stay tiny all their lives, but once they come back, they start growing, and will grow as big as me. I’ve been wondering what happened to you – you’ve been gone for a very long time. I didn’t think you were coming back.”

“I didn’t know I was supposed to come back, I just came because I was curious. And now I not only found a friend, but I also found my mother! And I’m going to grow to be a giant clam!”

Speck smiled, and lived happily ever after with her mother. And once she became a big clam, everyone laughed at the joke that a clam which was so big, was named “Speck” for a speck of sand.