



# Gracie and the Great Pearl

"One more shell," thought Gracie as she worked on the box in front of her. "I just need one more shell and I will be able to start my collection of beautiful things." Gracie was grateful that Angie Angelfish had made her some gooey plant glue so that she would be able to attach the shells easily. She had found the old wooden box in the sunken ship where her favorite plant grew and had begun to decorate it with shells she found among the coral of the Red Sea, where she lived. Gracie swam around in ever-widening circles until she found what she was looking for—a small, beautiful abalone shell wedged under a rock below her. Gracie tugged on the shell, but it would not move. She nudged it and splashed it and wiggled it, but still it would not move.

"Do you need some help, Gracie?"

Gracie whirled around to see her big friend Gus the Grouper right behind her. Ordinarily a little fish like Gracie would be afraid of a big fish like a grouper, but Gus was different. Gracie and her friends had gotten Gus out of a tight spot, and the two had been friends ever since.

Gracie said, "Oh, Gus, I could use your help. Could you get me this beautiful abalone shell for my box?"

"I think so," replied Gus, and he flicked his tail so hard that the resulting wave caused the little shell to break away from the rock, landing just in front of Gracie.

"Oh, thank you, Gus," said Gracie. She brought the shell over to her box and applied some plant glue so the shell stuck to the last open space on her box.

"What are you making, Gracie?" said Gus, in his slow, deep voice.

Gracie hadn't realized that Gus had followed her back to the ship, and she wasn't sure she wanted him to go with her on her search.

"I'm making a box to hold beautiful things that I find," said Gracie.

"Oooh! Can I go with you on your treasure hunt, Gracie? Please?" asked Gus.

"All right, Gus, as long as what we find goes into my box," said Gracie. She wanted to collect these beautiful things to decorate her fan coral home. She didn't want others to take the most beautiful ones for themselves.

The two friends began to swim around the sunken ship. Gracie spotted a shiny button. Gus found a tiny mirror. They continued to swim in and out of ancient portholes until Gracie saw another shell attached to the old ship's deck. Unlike the abalone, this shell did not have beautiful colors. It was bumpy and brownish and looked very old, but perhaps the creature inside would know where to find other beautiful things.

Gracie bubbled a greeting and asked the shell's name.

After some time, the shell replied with an ancient voice. "I am Grandmother Oyster. It is many years since any fish has asked my name. Why have you disturbed my rest, little fish?"

Gracie addressed the shell with great respect. "Oh, Grandmother Oyster, my friend Gus and I are sorry if we disturbed you, but we are looking for beautiful things. You must have seen many beautiful things as you rested in this place."

